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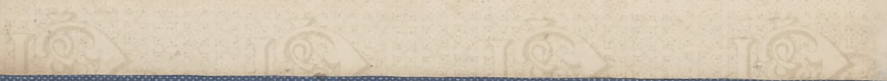
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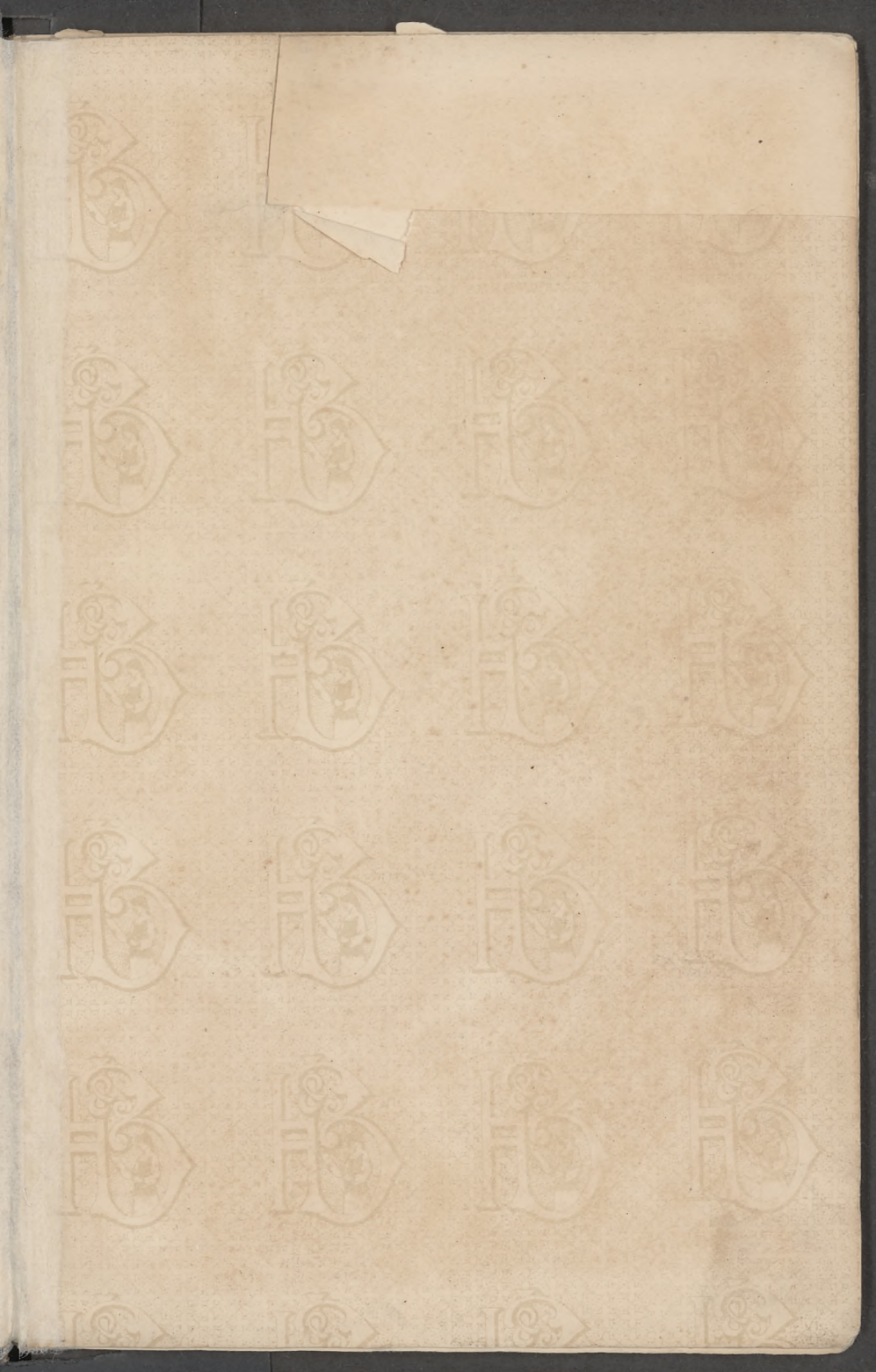


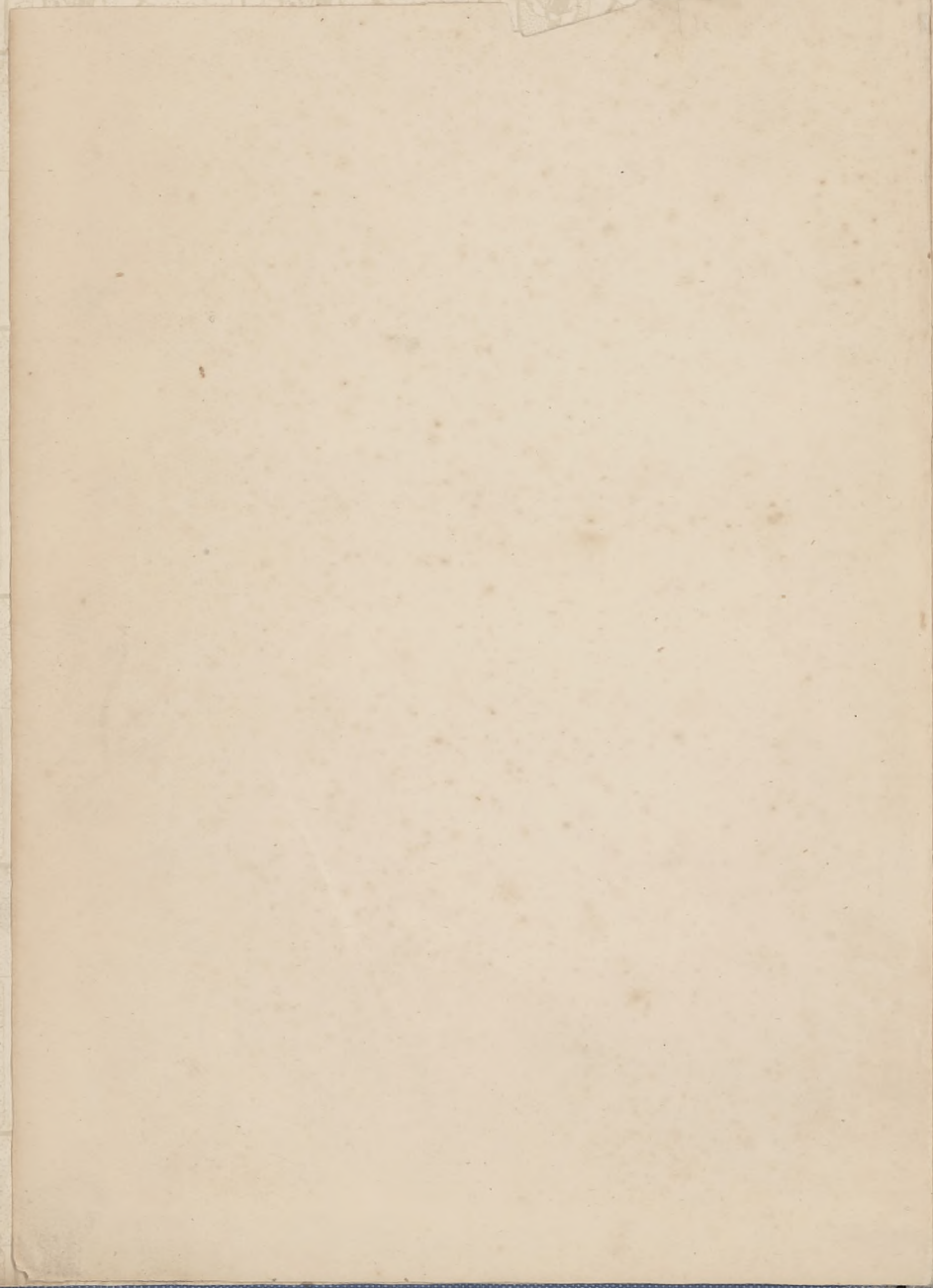
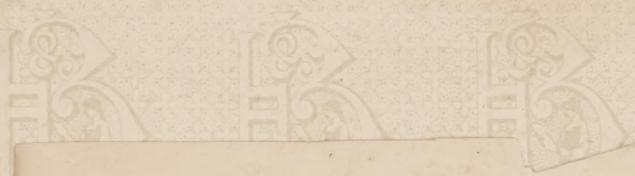
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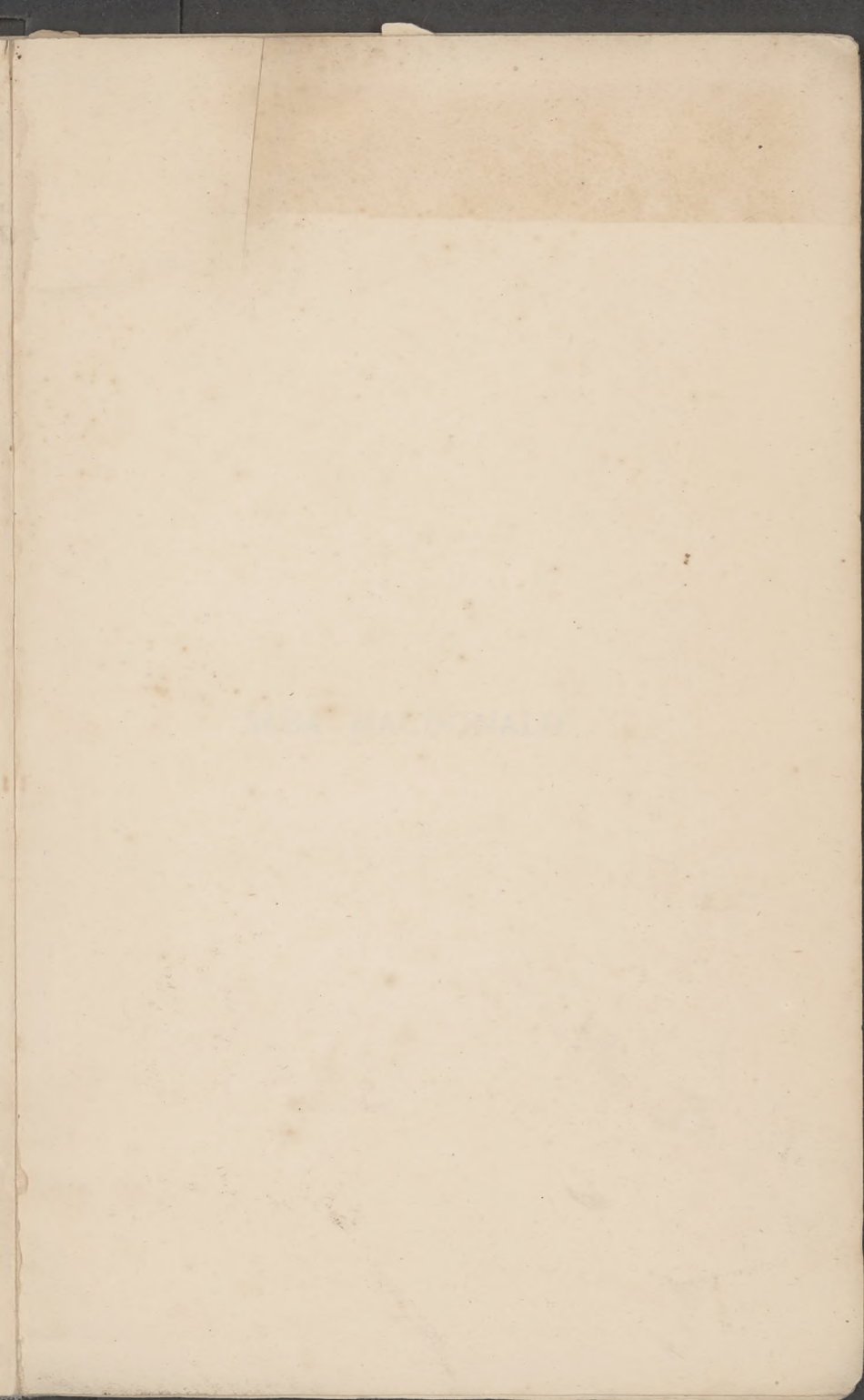
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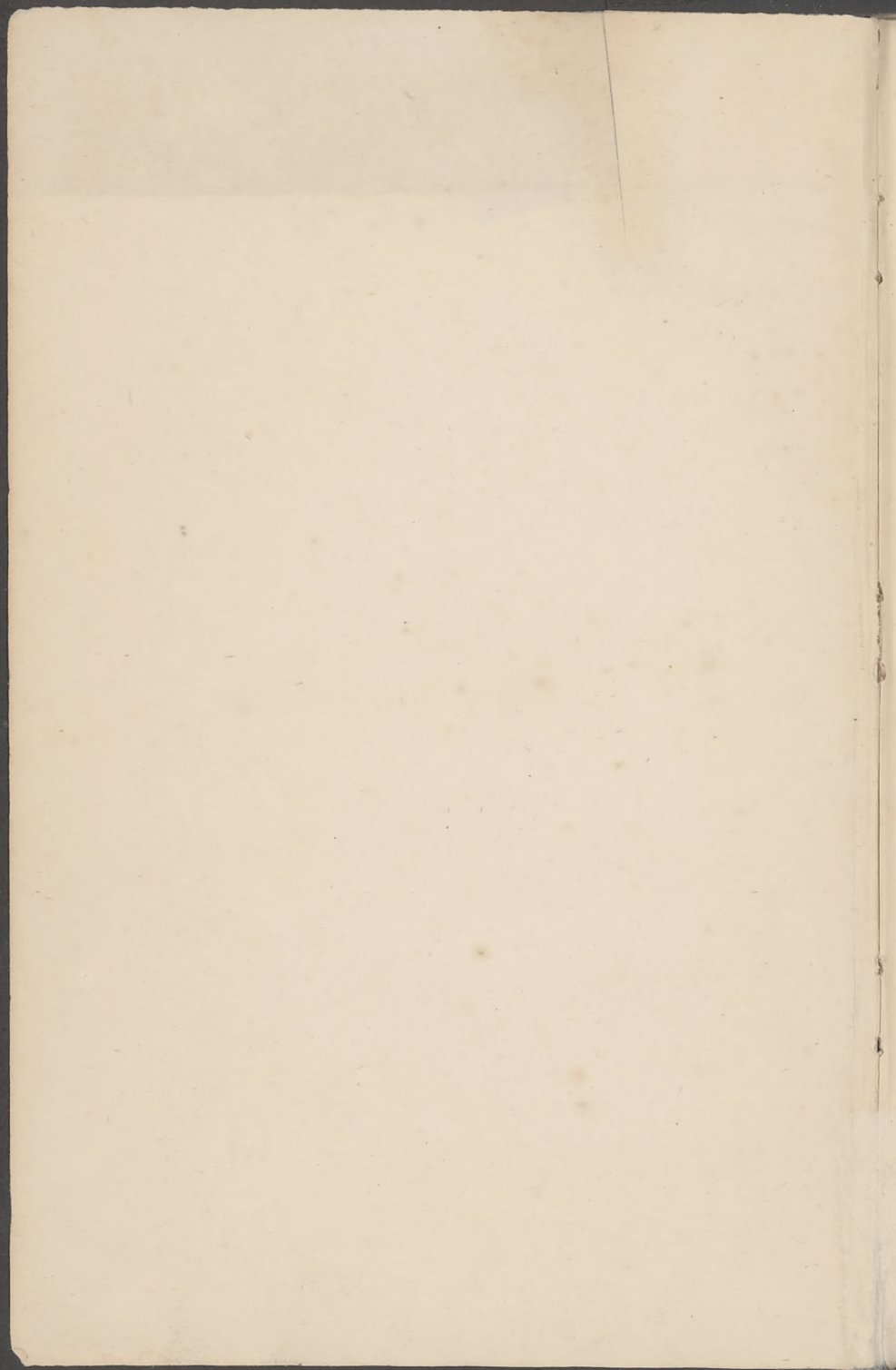
"RITA"











SABA MACDONALD

BY "RITA"

SABA MACDONALD

WHEAT AND BLACKETT, LONDON

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SÂBA MACDONALD

By "RITA"

AUTHOR OF

"The Masqueraders," "Peg the Rake," "Queer Lady Judas,"
"Souls," &c.

F. 17.



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OF

THE

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II



Dedication

TO

“THE EMANCIPATED WOMAN”

Who owes her present freedom of mind, morals, and
pastimes, to such repression and tyranny as
formed the discipline of youth in days
such as this book commemorates

1860

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BOOK I
WHAT THE CHILD SAW

BOOK I
WHAT THE CHILD SAW

SABA MACDONALD.

CHAPTER I.

THE habit of criticising one's elders does not tend to create an atmosphere of popularity for the youthful critic. Half a century ago it was an offence to be punished with all possible severity. Even thirty years pre-dated can boast a record of family jurisdiction on which modern youth would bestow an incredulous smile—so impossible is it in these enlightened days to believe that one actually obeyed one's parents, instead of arguing with or ignoring them. That frowns, rebukes, and chastisement were the necessary outcome of family life. The method known and practised as the one art of instilling a sense of duty and wholesome respect. Perhaps the reins were too tightly drawn, the bow too tautly strung; in any case, the cowed and disciplined children of a past generation have produced a race at once free and self-reliant—a race with whom awestruck parents can only meekly remonstrate, taking obedience as a chance result, and affection as a limited guarantee for self-sacrifice. Individualism has developed largely in the forcing house of freedom, and the phrase, "When I was young I would never have dared so to speak, or so to act," is a mere reproach of foggism not worth attention.

My own juvenile habit of criticising everyone with whom I came in contact was a habit of many retributions,

Mostly they took the shape of "just" punishment—stern rebuke, lonely hours of isolation, a spare and prison-like diet. How a child so suppressed, so coerced, and so strongly disciplined ever grew up with any sort of character is a mystery! I have never been able to fathom it, except by saying that the "old Adam" of which I heard so much was certainly a tougher subject than my forbears imagined.

He ruled me sufficiently well to evolve an individual self from out that crushed and humbled little mortal known to friends and family as Sâba Macdonald. The name in itself held some essence of family history distilled at my expense. The legend had been conveyed to me by a Scotch nurse, who followed the family misfortunes into colonial banishment. It was to the effect that the Laird and his wife greatly desired sons; but though two were born to them, both died in infancy. After a lapse of years I made my unwelcome appearance at an undesirable moment, and without regard to such conventions as give a just time and period for these important events. Not only was the month out of time and tune with what should have been my welcome, but the day was actually a Sunday. Sabbath it was called in the Auld House. Amidst much consternation, alarm and confusion, a pious aunt insisted on immediate baptism for fear that the small unimportant soul should see fit to depart in a fashion almost as unchristian as its advent. The choice of names being a matter of difficulty, the minister suggested "Sâba" as a happy compromise with events so unexpected. His blessing and a basin of water completed the ceremony, and the pious aunt was satisfied.

As I had nearly cost my mother her life; as, moreover, she had merely come on a visit to the Auld House previous to going up to London and staying with her own people for the expected event, I had but indifferent attention. Fortune, however, sent me a healthy foster-mother, and probably to Jean Macgregor do I owe my prolonged existence in a world for which I frankly confess no great admiration, and still less respect. Of further results I learnt only that my father was absent in Australia, and while I was still an infant of months, it was to that land I was conveyed by faithful Jean, in company with my ailing and suffering mother. My life in the colonies (as I always heard them called) was a strange mixture of freedom and

discipline, unruliness and boredom, hardships and joys, in themselves trivial, but to me all-important.

I believe we were poor, but for me poverty and riches held no meaning. Fruit and milk were food far superior to meat and rich dishes. A house—as long as it possessed a verandah and a garden (as most colonial houses do)—was no object of comparison or envy. Amusements I made for myself, and loneliness I never dreaded. It was destined to be my mental life, and, therefore, the physical side of me took quite kindly to its own self-absorbed importance. The small stone house, the great wide verandah, and the great wilderness of garden are the first setting of myself as an individual whose acquaintance I had to make, and whose history I had to work out. I can never recall those early years without a sense of looking-on and make-believe; without feeling that *I* as an existing factor of life was not the *I* who played the part of living. That small elf-like creature perched on bough, or hidden amidst brushwood and scrub, was a creature of the wilds; an uncivilised atom; a thing of storm and sunshine, strange nights and days. Puzzled theories of creation and the Creator's unjust laws whereby Death and havoc raged and ravaged the beautiful wild world. Tutoring her, and watching her, I was conscious of the other self, but which was real and which was fancy I could not say, so strangely were they twined in my mind, and so *real* were they then and now.

The part of spectator suited me very well, but as I grew older it was apt to involve me in much confusion and misapprehension. For I lost myself perpetually in dreams and imaginings that had nothing to do with my actual surroundings; still less with the special collect, or chapter, or portion of Catechism which had sent me off on some erratic speculation.

To ask "Why" was one of those childish misdemeanours which the grown-up had no resource but to punish. It entered into a category of faults designated as "curiosity," "impertinence," or unnatural behaviour. When the "Why" put itself into antagonism with cut-and-dry precepts and parrot cries of duty, obedience, and propriety, its results may be imagined. In my case they were felt. Imagination played too large a part in my inner life to escape penalty in the outer and visible signs of existence. So it was that I early learned to dread

Sunday and church, and Sunday reading, and Sunday tasks. So, too, it came about that what I feared to ask, I thought and speculated about to an extent bordering on absolute infidelity as a result. Modern parents and modern pastors, and masters, and teachers generally, are profiting now by the bitter experience of such struggling souls as once committed the enormity of questioning the Improbable, and discovering injustice in the Divine.

I have often wondered whether my father's rigid Presbyterianism, or my mother's English Evangelicism, were responsible for my own innate objection to the red-tape formality of Sunday worship and Sunday observance. They did their best, no doubt, according to their lights. But was I to blame if that best seemed and proved the very worst form of teaching my hungry soul desired, or my innate incredulity could accept? If this world were, indeed, bounded by the narrow prejudices of sacerdotal faiths and examples, poor humanity's belief in an endless and harmonious paradise would have but poor sustenance. Fortunately, there are many minds that can deliver themselves from the shackles of misrepresentation, and take a broad and charitable outlook of humanity's shortcomings as well as humanity's future.

I was not destined, however, to come into contact with such minds in the days of my youth, and the Catechism continued to vex and discourage me as much as the faulty rhythm and careless scanning of Dr. Watt's hymns. Terrible were the mental conflicts that raged within my unregenerate mind. Tormenting the endeavour to believe in that comprehensive word "inspiration." For then surely error or inconsistency should have no place in Biblical record. Yet what of St. Mark's account of the Resurrection, and that of St. Luke? Why did the one evangelist see *two* angels at the tomb, and the other—one? How could Jael—Heber's wife—combine the duties of hospitality and murder, yet be *commended* for so doing, when the fact of taking life was awarded capital punishment? Why was David so favoured and held up as example when he had performed the cruellest and most traitorous of actions that ever blackened manhood's records? How could any vessel ever built by men be large enough to contain two of every species of the animal world, and food sufficient for their sustenance and that of the imprisoned crew for forty days?

And so on, through endless perplexities, to question which was accounted a sin and made an opportunity for fresh tasks, bringing fresh bewilderment.

Oh, happy children of this new century, how much cause for gratitude you have, if you only knew it!

Time, the actual weeks and months of childhood, cannot be measured by mere passing of years. The soul's life has its own season of growth, its own period of spiritual awakening. Such divisions and periods are not evident to the outsider. Development is gradual, but sure. A thing totally apart from the material life and its needs and happenings. However smoothly or safely the years flow on, this undercurrent is flowing on beneath the surface, working out its own weal or woe.

Much of the external conditions of my childhood have faded into a background of forgetfulness, but the internal and spiritual warfare with all that seemed inexplicable left marks that Time has never been able to efface. First sorrows, first sense of injustice, first bewilderment at the confusion of right and wrong, truth and falsehood, honesty and deception, these I have never forgotten. Neither have I ever been able to adjust them to the hypocritical standard of the world's morality. Childish tears left scalding marks and memories behind them. The unanswered prayers that had built themselves a theory of "faith as a grain of mustard seed" laid a heavy burden upon such faith. The teaching of the Sermon on the Mount was daily and hourly contradicted by everyone and everything around. The Ten Commandments were as a nightmare, full of haunting obligations impossible to meet. I questioned my elders discreetly. "Had they *always* kept them—*every one*?"

Result—punishment for impertinence and forward behaviour.

So with matters of graver import. How could perfect sinlessness create sin? For was not one Creator the author and origin of all that existed? Could sin have evolved itself from an innocent fruit, and the serpent be an emblem of godliness and yet the incarnation of evil?

I watched a thunderstorm without the usual terror of childhood. To see the vast width of heaven become a sheet of flame was to indulge in a wild hope of seeing something *inside* of heaven—a passing glimpse of golden streets or angel forms, or some sure and certain sign that such a

place had existence outside the pages of the great puzzling Book—the Book that lay on the side-table of the sitting-room, and at whose illustrations I loved to peep on such occasions as permission was given.

As my mother had a wholesome terror of thunderstorms, she could not understand my fearlessness. But one terrific example of Nature's forces resulted in the fall of a huge gum-tree some dozen yards from our own verandah. The crash was so awful, the sight of that fallen hero-monarch so appalling, that a natural childish terror sent me shivering into the safety of the house. It also resulted in the issuing of a parental mandate forbidding future interest in such spectacles as tropical thunderstorms.

Brought up in this fashion, with no companions of my own age or sex, with but desultory efforts at education, with only Jean Macgregor for friend and ally, it is little wonder that my twelfth year found me old beyond mere age—self-contained, critical, grave as only childhood is grave when all sense of humour has been treated as criminal. Passionately fond of books, my reading had been restricted to such epics of wisdom as Hannah More and Elizabeth Wetherly had produced. "The Wide Wide World," "Queechy," and "Home Influence," were my sole introduction to realms of fiction. Candidly, I preferred Roman history, and heathen mythology, as expounded by Mangnall, and an old dog-eared edition of Lemprière, a relic of my mother's own school-days.

I also developed an early talent for music, and the said talent was—happily for me—encouraged by the help and teaching of a queer but kindly neighbour, herself a magnificent pianist, and a friend of my mother's, to whom the word "musical" was a passport of supreme importance.

In later years I was to learn how important a part this training was to play in my life. At that earlier period I rebelled greatly against the rules of enforced practice, the weary routine of scales, and the incessant demands of Messieurs Herz, Czerny, and Thalberg. I was ignorant then of the heaven-uplifted sphere into which such training could conduct one. Sydney Smith bounded the usual school-girl's horizon of performance, and Thalberg and Moscheles set the seal of excellence on patient merit.

Little Mrs. Birch had come out to New South Wales with a view to founding a musical college, but her health

broke down, and she was reduced to the servitude of daily lessons, and the martyrdom of training dull and indifferent pupils. I owe her so much that I am glad to be able to say I gave her less trouble than most of those girls—colonial hybrids, who cared little for any accomplishment that was not at once showy and easy of acquirement.

My life seemed to have run so long in one groove that the news of a change, radical and sudden, came to me as a sort of shock.

I remember a grave discussion, my father's anxious face, my mother's tearful one; the opinion of a queer old Scotch doctor who was present at the said discussion, and then the announcement that we were to go home—my mother and myself—home, of course, meaning England. No self-respecting colonial ever called it anything else in those days. Time may have altered or weakened the significance of that appellation. I only know, however, England was home to me, and that the possibility of going there sent thrills of ecstasy through my soul. I hardly dared believe in the reality of the prospect. Even packing-cases and trunks and the sight of new frocks and a small and glorified *crinoline* scarce convinced me that I was not dreaming one of my many impossible and unrealisable day-dreams.

But on this occasion imagination and reality touched hands. There came a day in my life when I looked back at the lovely harbour, the scattered islands, the huge bluff headlands guarding the New World so jealously from the intrusion of the Old. Looked back at these things, and wondered in my childish soul what life was to be in the old and unfamiliar land for which I was bound.

I had ample leisure for speculation. The voyage was long and tedious. My mother suffered terribly, and was rarely able to leave her cabin. Jean Macgregor was in constant attendance on her, and I was left pretty well to my own devices, or the chance attentions of kindly-disposed passengers. I was not an attractive child, being timid and old-fashioned and self-absorbed. I had no bright and winning ways; assuredly no beauty, or gaiety of spirit. That had been crushed out of me by perpetual repression and continuous rebuke.

The voyage, however, brought me into touch with new forms of life, new ideas, new characters. I summed them

up to my own fancy and set them playing parts in the imaginative pageant which all material life was ever performing for me.

One passenger specially impressed me at that time, and stood out amongst the crowd of figures. He was a young Pole, named Paul Tcherkoski, returning to his own country after a successful time at the goldfields. I never knew how much he had made, nor even thought of him in connection with "luck" and fortune. But several of the young lady passengers were particularly anxious for his better acquaintance, and looked anything but pleased with my monopoly of him, or his evident appreciation of my queer society. For he would talk to me hour by hour—talk that enthralled me; talk of books and art; of nature's wonders and life's strange vicissitudes. I learnt he believed in no divine Creator, nor in the world's one great Lexicon of spirituality. He became, therefore, an object of ten-fold interest, for I was full of the prosy priggishness inculcated by "Queechy" and I treated him as Fleda treated Mr. Carlton. But not with her success. Even when an unusually magnificent sunset or starlit night set me to admiring and wondering over the eternal "Why," he had an answer ready. And the answer took me back through such bewildering avenues of time and its slow but certain handiwork; of Nature and her unchangeable laws, that I could say nothing. Only listen and puzzle, and work myself into a fever of perplexity of which no angel or deity took any notice, in spite of frenzied prayers for a sign of hearing.

Oh! those prayers of childhood! Through what avenues of perplexity do they not wander if only, perchance, in the vast spaces some door of heaven may be open. Through what agonies of heart and soul do they not breathe entreaty for comfort! Is there One to hear, as we are assured there is, or are the Israelitish prophet's words less a mockery than they seemed to the priests of Baal? "Perchance He is on a journey, or away, or deaf, or sleeping." All we know is that the sign comes not. The trouble remains. And at such a time, amidst such mental torments, it was destined I should be the chosen associate of a cultured and kind-hearted infidel. The heart within me grew dead and cold. All the passionate fervent spirituality I had sought for and clung to, vanished into outer darkness.

Did nothing matter? Neither the universe, its peoples, its faiths or its idolatries?

Amidst a world of confusion what was one tiny speck; a mere unit amidst millions; a shred of insignificance awaiting the meaning of its own existence, questioning vainly of the future or the past?

To look back now on that time, on that voyage, on that momentous friendship is to smile with the incredulity of experience at the self-importance of immature reason. But though I smile, I have an inward consciousness that that sorrow was very real; that the seeds of doubt and difficulty sown in that childish mind brought many dark and poisonous weeds as harvest. For of all cruel things men do, none is crueller than to snatch the torch of faith from the hand of youth and trample it underfoot amidst mud and mire of incredulity, giving for its light the endless darkness of despair.

CHAPTER II.

THE voyage ended at last. Ended one grey, cold foggy morning in November that found me shivering and thinly clad on the deck of a great steamer, trying to make out the shores of England and assure myself I was glad to see them.

But I was not glad, and I knew it.

I had loved the warm, sunny land I had left behind with childhood's first adoration. It was so vast, so beautiful, so richly dowered with sun and light and splendour, so soft and kind in climate, despite occasional tornadoes of storm. And here I found nothing but darkness, and bitter cold and gloom. Besides, I was grief-stricken at the necessity of parting with my Polish friend. He was the first acquaintance outside my family circle who had really interested me and taken a fixed place in my mental consciousness. We stood side by side on the slippery deck, and gazed into the fog and were mutually miserable.

I remember being much impressed by the fact that he had made a special toilet for landing. He had an immaculate white shirt, a frock coat, and a glossy silk hat. He looked very handsome and distinguished, or I thought

he did. But his lips were blue with cold and his fierce moustache drooped limply in the moist, damp air. He held my hand and talked very kindly. He even offered to write to me. But I could give him no address save London. I had no idea to what part of that mysterious city I was bound. He endeavoured to make me remember his own destination at Warsaw. But the name was impossible, and neither of us possessed pencil or note-book, so it ended in a farewell that meant farewell.

I never saw him again, nor do I know what chanced to him in his own land.

The confusion of getting off the vessel and procuring our baggage was rendered worse by my mother's fussiness and impatience. The details did not concern me. I have a vague idea of an hotel, a luncheon of English beef-steak and potatoes, another drive through blurred and foggy streets to a huge railway station, and then hours of train travel, through which I dozed and shivered in weariness of body and soul until the word "London" fell upon my numbed senses. I woke to see lights flashing, porters rushing to and fro, and was shaken and slapped by Jean Macgregor into alertness and wakefulness again. My mother had provided no wraps or rugs for the journey, and I had never experienced cold so deadly or so horrible. My first opinion of England was considerably affected by my first experience of its abominable winter climate. To me, hitherto, winter had meant only clear sky and brilliant sunshine, cool crisp air, in itself an exhilaration and delight. I was wretched enough to cry, for which I received more slaps and rebuke, a child being supposed to have no feelings or susceptibilities, and assuredly no right to utter complaints of its surroundings, however distasteful.

A four-wheeled cab, a vehicle I had never seen before, took us, and some of our boxes, through endless miles of foggy, gas-lit streets. My mother was all excitement, and kept calling on Jean for sympathy as she recognised familiar landmarks. I heard of King's Cross, and Bloomsbury, and Marylebone, and Edgware Road, and then of Hyde Park, which represented merely a dense, shadowy blackness. After that the neighbourhood was unfamiliar, and the cab jolted and crawled along with commendable perseverance. My eyes closed. My head began to nod. I fell dead asleep against Jean Macgregor's shoulder,

and was only awakened by a sudden gleam of light, the sound of voices, and the fact that Jean was dragging me up a flight of stone steps and through an imposing doorway, held open by a neat maidservant whose smart cap and apron struck a fresh note of wonder and strangeness. I saw a large, well-lit hall; on the right was a handsomely-furnished dining-room. Here stood my mother, in the embrace of a stout, dark lady, and hovering near them was an elderly stout gentleman, with white hair, handsome features, and very bright blue eyes, at that moment brimming with tears.

These individuals represented grandmamma and grandpapa (as I was told to call them). They were kissing and fussing over my mother, and she was crying over them. No one took any notice of me. I simply stood there and looked on and wondered why grandpapa's nose was so hooked, and why grandmamma should wear such a large crinoline, and such a very rustling, crackling silk dress. Her cap was of blonde lace and pink ribbons, and her deep lace collar was fastened by a cameo brooch from which depended a massive gold chain. I was taking in these details when, from behind me, came another rustle of silk, a hurried rush of feet, and a new figure entered on the scene.

My mother had sunk into a chair. The new comer suddenly flung herself down on her knees before her and threw her arms about her waist. By this action her head fell somewhat back and the full light from the great bronze gaselier showed me her face. I thought she was the loveliest creature I had ever seen. Her brown, wonderful hair was swept up from her brow and then looped back in a mass of long thick curls which fell to her waist. I learnt afterwards that this fashion had been set by the French Empress. Her complexion was delicate and clear; her eyes brown and soft as a gazelle's. Her figure tall, slight, and exquisitely graceful.

She murmured my mother's name over and over again, and there was more kissing and embracing, and exclaiming at change in appearance and growth. This was my mother's youngest sister. The only unmarried one of the family. "The Flower of the Flock" my mother called her, in speaking to me afterwards of her beauty and grace and cleverness. From the first moment I saw her I became her slave. My enthusiasm for beauty, my wonder

at her brilliance, her grace, her indescribable charm of look and voice and manner, all tended to idealism. I had never seen or imagined anyone of my sex so lovely, and seemingly so perfect. I stood and gazed, rapt in a trance of admiration, quite forgetful of myself or any part I was destined to play in this reunion.

It was my aunt's voice that recalled my senses, and brought universal attention upon me. She rose from her kneeling attitude as suddenly as she had assumed it, and looked round.

"Where's the child?" she asked quickly. "Your little girl, Jane?"

Her brilliant brown eyes lighted on my small figure and sallow face, on my hideous colonial clothes and battered hat.

Heaven knows I must have looked a quaint, forlorn object set against the solid, handsome, money-spelling background of that Bayswater mansion! We often laughed over it together in later days, she and I. But at that moment she only gave me the sweetest of welcomes and led me up to grandmamma, saying:

"Jane's little girl. Your eldest grand-daughter, mamma! Isn't she a quaint, darling thing?"

Grandmamma kissed me affectionately, as did my grandfather, but it was Aunt Theo to whom I clung, and whose welcome alone concerned me. For I was soon forgotten again. There was so much to discuss, to wonder at, to condole with, and I was well used to the background.

I lost myself in wondering admiration at the great splendid room; the deep bay-windows, velvet curtained; the dark crimson walls and carpet; the massive mahogany sideboard and dining-table, the like of which I had never seen. Then the pictures and family portraits attracted my attention. Grandmamma, in early Victorian garb of brocaded silk, low-necked and long-sleeved, with small waist, and extensive skirt, with strange lappets of hair looped behind her ears, and much massive jewellery about her neck and wrists and bodice. And grandpapa, in true "Portrait of a Gentleman" style—stiff, satin-waistcoated, a stock up to his ears, ambrosial curls on his now semi-bald head, but displaying to posterity that bold, hawk-like nose, and those bright blue eyes with a pardonable pride in them as family assets.

Other portraits were there also. Great-grandfathers and their descendants; also an Indian Rajah, gorgeous in trappings of gold and silver, and blazing with jewels. This, I learnt later, was a presentation to my grandmother on her marriage. In fact, I was so interested in all I saw that I became quite oblivious of the scene around me. The warmth of the blazing fire was delicious; my numbed senses and limbs relaxed into dreamy somnolence. I wondered if we were to live in this abode of splendour, and if the silver plate on the massive sideboard was ever used, or only put there for show. I wondered why grandmamma was so stout and why her cheeks shook when she laughed; also whether grandpapa was growing impatient of the scene. He said "tut-tut" so many times, and walked about the room so restlessly.

Finally, a tray of refreshments was brought in, and my aunt took me up to the table and seated me, and waited on me. She gave me hot negus which was veritable nectar, and set my cheeks blazing and my eyes dancing. She insisted I should have all sorts of good things to eat and, in fact, so cheered and comforted me that in a moment of expansion I told her I loved her better than anyone I had ever known, and thought her the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. At this she laughed gaily, and patted my cheeks and said it was a pity I hadn't always such a lovely colour, and that I was a foolish child, and finally took me off to bed, telling my mother she would look after me.

The richly-carpeted staircase, the broad landings, the spacious fire-lit bedroom, were all fresh revelations to me. Jean Macgregor had unpacked the box containing all my mother and myself would require for the night. I found we were to share the same room. I had a small single bed in the corner near the fire, and my mother a large draped mahogany four-poster facing it. Here, again, dressing-table, wardrobe, marble-topped washstand, the great Chesterfield couch, the chintz ottomans, the damask furnishing of windows and bed, all impressed me. I had only been used to cane or deal furniture, to mosquito net, and bare floor. I had no experience of such luxury and grandeur as that of No. — Pembroke Square.

My aunt helped me to undress, exclaiming at the unsuitable thinness of my garments and declaring the first

thing to be done was to provide me with a proper winter outfit. Then she brought me a scarlet flannel dressing-jacket of her own and wrapped it round me while she brushed my hair. I was gratified by her exclamations of wonder as she unfastened the tight, hard plaits, and shook into freedom my dusky mane. Its length and thickness had only been a source of annoyance to me ; a weight that made my small head ache ; a vexation to my mother or Jean, who had endless trouble in dressing it. To hear it praised and admired, instead of abused and threatened, was a surprise.

"Mamma is always declaring she will have it cut off," I remarked.

Aunt Theo was horrified.

"It is a woman's crown of glory," she said.

"But not a child's," was my reply. "If you only knew what scoldings and punishments I have had for its untidiness."

"You small martyr," she said, and bent down and kissed me, laughing all the time at my solemn face. "Never mind, dear," she added. "You and I will be great friends, and I'll look after this wild mane of yours. I can sympathise with you, for papa is always grumbling at the way I dress my own hair. He says it is so untidy. I copied it from a picture I saw of the Empress Eugénie—the Empress of the French, you know ; she is said to be the loveliest woman in Europe, and sets the fashions."

"Crinolines ; I know. Mamma told me that. We had fashion-books from Sydney. A friend sent them to us. Don't you think hoops are very stupid things, and always in the way ?"

My pretty aunt looked down at her own rounded outline. She was wearing a brown corded silk, with a sort of Greek-patterned trimming running down one side. The sleeves were full at the top and tight at the wrists. My opinion was that she could have worn anything and looked lovely in it. Certainly the fashions of that period were trying in the extreme. How women, hooped and ballooned as they were, could move freely or look graceful was a wonder !

I chattered unrestrainedly to this new and delightful relative. I told her of my bush life ; of visits to Sydney ; of its wonderful harbour ; of the Domain and the beautiful Botanical Gardens ; of my lonely childhood ; my passion

for books; my Polish friend of the voyage. She listened to me with commendable patience.

"Do you mean to say you are only twelve?" she asked when the hair-brushing was completed, and only a loose long tail hung down my back.

"Yes," I said. "Twelve and a half. I shall soon be in my 'teens.'"

"You seem to know a great deal, and to have thought a great deal. You have never been to school, you say?"

"Never. I should hate it!"

"Why?" she asked. "You say you love books, and music, and——"

"But not *learning*," I interrupted. "I mean I like to learn the things I like, not dry, horrid stuff, like grammar and geography, and long division and fractions."

"Well, I suppose none of us like learning useful things, but they are essential," she said. "I had a very bad time of it at school myself, but I see now it was necessary to be grounded in useful knowledge in order to appreciate the more delightful kind that comes afterwards. About music, though; you say you are fond of it?"

"Oh! I love it. Not silly tuney things, but Beethoven and Schumann and Weber!"

"Gracious, child! you don't mean to say you know anything of classical music? What a godsend you'll be to papa—to your grandfather! He has lately taken up the violoncello. He used to play the flute beautifully. But he is simply music mad. Harty—that is your other aunt, who married a German merchant two years ago—Harty and I have had to play for *hours* at a time with him—accompaniments and duets, and that sort of thing. If you can only do that you will step into his good graces immediately. But how did you learn classical music in the bush?"

I told her of queer little Mrs. Birch; her enthusiasm and patience, and how much I owed to both.

"It is the very last thing I should have expected!" she answered me. "I must get you to play to me before I say anything to papa. And now, child, you must stop chattering and go to bed. Your mamma expected you to be asleep before she came up, and your eyes are as wide awake as—as stars."

She laughed softly and kissed them. "You are the quaintest little elf," she said; "and what a funny name

they have given you—Sâba. We must be great friends, you and I. I only hope they won't want to send you to school. It's not so long since I left. I'm only twenty-three. Your aunt Harty is two years older."

"Then she married when she was your age?"

"Yes. I missed her most dreadfully. It is very dull and quiet here. You see, papa only cares about music, and mamma hates going out except to card parties, so the time does hang heavily. I have a friend, though, a great, great friend, and we see each other nearly every day. She lives only two streets off. I must take you to see her."

"Is she as beautiful as you?" I asked.

Again she laughed. "I am not a beauty, child, though you seem to think so. But Sara is. She is very handsome; dark, tall, splendid; raven hair, and black eyes, and lovely colouring; and a figure——"

"That sounds like 'Aurora Floyd,'" I said. "I read it on the voyage. Mamma does not know——"

"Good gracious! I should hope not. A book like that isn't fit for a child of your years."

"I thought it lovely," I said. "I would give anything to read the other one, 'Lady Something's Secret.' I heard people speaking about it on the steamer. They said it was a new sort of novel; different from anything done before—sensational. There's a murder in it, isn't there?"

"Yes," she said. "And many other things that little girls have no business to know anything about. And now to bed. I must insist, or I shall get into disgrace. You ought to be tired after such a journey."

"I'm not tired now," I said, as I took a flying leap into the inviting little white bed.

She stopped me abruptly. "Do you know you have not said your prayers?"

I felt the blood rush in a torrent to my face. I hung my head.

"No, Aunt Theo. I—I don't pray now."

"Don't—*pray*?" she repeated. "Do you mean——"

"I mean I know prayers—lots, and collects, and chapters of the Bible; but lately I have heard that prayer is no use. It's only a *form*. No one really hears, or cares——"

"Child, what *are* you saying? Who has told you such dreadful things?"

I was silent. I could not bear to hear my friend blamed, to seem to accuse him.

"Does Janie—does your mamma know?" repeated my aunt.

I shook my head. "Not yet. She will be very angry. I daresay she'll *make* me say prayers, as I used to do. But it won't be any use."

"But this is very naughty—shocking. A child like you, only twelve years old, and with such ideas! Why, it's not Christian!"

"Do you believe everything in the Bible?" I questioned, defiantly. "That the world and *everything* in it was made in seven days? That the sun stood still so that hundreds of unfortunate people could be killed in a cruel battle? That God *Himself* hardened Pharaoh's heart and then punished him because it was hardened? That Mary of Nazareth had a husband, and yet her child was not her husband's son? That all the terrible, awful things done to God's people, in the name of religion, were sanctioned by Him? That priests and clergymen are *all* good and holy men? That anyone—anyone in the world—if he was struck on one cheek would offer the other and not be considered a coward? Oh! Aunt Theo, there are hundreds and hundreds of such things that are contradictory and puzzling! And I have thought so many of them out, that I made up my mind I'd say no more prayers and believe in no more sermons until I found a *real good* Christian who would answer all I want to ask, and could tell me all I want to know."

She had listened patiently to this tirade. When I finished speaking she made no reply. After standing a moment by the bedside, she turned and went over to the gas light and lowered it.

"I think you had better go to sleep, Sâba," she said slowly, stiffly, as if the words were forced from her.

A great chill and dread came over me. Had I offended, alienated her, even on this first night of meeting?

A husky sob broke from my throat. I held out entreating arms.

"Oh! Aunt Theo! *dear* Aunt Theo, please, please forgive me! I know I am a wicked child. I have always been told so. I can't help it. There's something inside of me makes me think and talk like this. I don't know why. Mamma says God gave me my soul, so He must



have made it half good and half bad, or how did I come to think about life and about Him as I do? And why do I hate the Catechism, and why do all sorts of queer questions pop into my head at church-time? And why do grown-up people always get angry when I ask them these questions? Even you are quite different now, and oh! what shall I do if you don't love me any more!"

Sobs choked me; tears rained down my cheeks. I buried my head in the pillow and gave way to a passion of grief. Such fits were not unusual with me, but spectators were, and in a moment there were three in the room—my mother, and grandmother, and Aunt Theo.

"Why, what's the matter? What's happened?" cried mamma sharply. Her voice was rarely anything but querulous when addressing me.

I stifled my sobs against the pillow and turned my back on the unexpected audience. I heard Aunt Theo murmuring explanations in which "tired," and "lonely," and "upset by the long journey," gave charitable explanation. Then she came softly to my side and kissed my wet averted cheek. "You poor little child," she softly said.

If I had loved her before, I *adored* her then—and thenceforward.

CHAPTER III.

I SLEPT soundly and well. I was awakened only by the entrance of a neat maid, who drew up the blinds and left a large can of hot water by the washstand. Again I reflected on manners and customs of English life as compared with colonial, and concluded that money must be a very delightful possession.

I rose and made my toilet rapidly. Mamma was sound asleep and I dared not waken her. My hair was my usual difficulty. How to give it a tidy or compact appearance was a daily puzzle I had never yet succeeded in mastering.

It was bitterly cold. I shivered all the time I was dressing. But the fog had gone, and a pale gleam of yellow tinged the cold grey sky. I thought I must have left the sun very far behind me, if that apologetic glimmer in any way represented his appearance.

When I was dressed I opened the door very softly and looked out. I remembered I had only come up one flight of stairs the previous night, so this room was evidently on the second floor. I had yet to learn by what curious reasoning London houses are apportioned into delusive "floors" or storeys.

A broad landing faced me; through an open door opposite I caught the welcome glow of firelight. I entered the room, and found it was a large and cheerful one, with a bay-window looking over an open space or square shut in by iron railings. Further investigation showed me that this open space was surrounded on four sides by large imposing-looking stone houses, each exactly like the other. The same double frontage, the same broad flight of steps; almost the same style of blinds and curtains in the bay-windows.

So this was London, I thought; or, at least, a part of it. I wondered how far we were from St. Paul's Cathedral, from the Tower, the British Museum, or Madam Tussaud's Waxworks. I had heard of them all, and felt a natural curiosity to pass judgment on places of such national importance. The rattle of cups and saucers made me look round. The maid was bringing in breakfast things—pretty china, a silver coffee-pot, plates of bread and butter, and rolls, a hissing urn. All this was novel. I had never tasted coffee, except on the steamer, and then I had disliked it so much that I had substituted tea or milk and water.

I addressed the maid with some timidity. She was a small prim person, with very glossy hair, and the neatest of print gowns and morning caps.

"Do we have breakfast here—in this room?" was my query.

"Yes, miss. This is the breakfast-room."

"There seem to be a great many rooms in this house," I continued.

She smiled condescendingly.

"I have lived in houses to which *this* is a mere villar," she observed.

"Oh!" I said. I was doubtful of what a "villar" meant, and afraid to betray ignorance by asking.

"Yes," she went on, as she arranged the places at the round snowy-damasked table. "I was with Lord and Lady Fitz-Arris as parlour-maid for six years. They

lived in Barkley Square, and kept two footmen and a butler."

"What a bother they must have been," I observed, as I warmed my blue chilled fingers at the fire.

She gave a short, contemptuous laugh. "It's plain to see, miss, as you haven't had much experience of high families and their establishments, bein' used to colonial ways, of course."

"They are very nice ways," I said, "and very sensible. They make you independent and able to do everything for yourself, instead of having to ask someone else to do it for you."

Her cold grey eyes took me in from top to toe, making me horribly conscious of unfastened buttons, shabby shoes, and untidy head. But she said no more, and left the room. I began to take a survey of it. The walls were painted a sort of greenish-grey colour. The mantel-piece was of white marble, over which was a massive mirror, gilt framed. The curtains were of some heavy green stuff, whose name, I learnt afterwards, was "rep." A walnut-wood table in the window bore a glass-shaded stand of wax fruits—impossible grapes, marbled peaches, one or two blushing nectarines. There was a bookcase; with glass doors; it was locked, or I should have examined its contents. A glass-backed chiffonier stood against the wall opposite the window. Here were more glass shades, wax flowers, and some quaint ivory figures and shells. The mantel-piece was decorated with two crimson glass "lustres" with drops, and two small vases that matched exactly in hideousness.

At this stage of investigation a bell rang loudly and clamorously. Ere it had ceased, grandmamma rustled into the room. She had a funny, waddling walk and shook herself from side to side as she moved. Her morning gown was of soft black merino. Over it she wore a silk apron. Her cap was of white lace and mauve ribbons. She had a little basket in her hand, containing keys.

I advanced and wished her "good morning." She kissed me affectionately, asking where mamma was. I told her I had left her asleep. Upon this she glanced at the clock. It was exactly nine, and on the stroke of the hour grandpapa entered.

He looked ruddy and fresh, but less prepossessing, I thought, by daylight. His glance fell on the table.

"The coffee not made! How's this, Eliza? It's nine o'clock."

He gave me a hurried salute and commenced fussing and grumbling, and pulling out his watch with a perfect avalanche of "Tut-tuts," as grandmamma excused or replied. "You know my rule—punctuality. Every moment wasted is a sin. I have never been a single second late for anything in my life, or from any cause. I expect those about me to follow my example. Where is Jane, and where's Theodora?"

Grandpapa never abbreviated names. What you were christened you had to be called, so he said, and consequently his wife and family had to suffer the penalty of hearing singularly hideous Christian names religiously pronounced as their right.

Eliza, Jane, Harriet, Theodora, designated respectively his four daughters. There was also a son, about whose fate I was doubtful. He was supposed to be a ne'er-do-weel, and had long since quarrelled with his martinet of a father and fled the country.

My grandmother unlocked the chiffonier, took out a canister, and proceeded to make the coffee. I found that both tea and coffee had to be made in my grandfather's presence, or he would not touch them. The servant now came in again with a tray of savoury-smelling dishes—eggs, toast, marmalade. Grandpapa immediately sat down and began to help himself.

I stood uncertain what to do. At last grandmamma bade me draw in a chair to the table and take an egg and some toast. I should have preferred bacon, which was a novelty, but no one offered me a choice. Grandmamma ordered some breakfast to be taken in to my mother and just then Aunt Theo entered. She kissed her parents, nodded and smiled at me, and then asked where mamma was. Grandmamma told her. Grandpapa pointed to the clock, and lectured her on the enormity of being five minutes late. She took no notice of his caustic remarks, but asked me how I had slept, and if I was less tired, and whether I liked coffee or milk best.

For this grandpapa had more "Tut-tuts." What business had a child of my age with any preferences or tastes? She should take what was given her. What was the world coming to? In his days a child had porridge,

and bread and scrape, and meat only twice a week, and drank milk and water, and was all the better for it. Look at himself!

I found grandpapa was always his own model of excellence or virtue in any discussion.

That first family meal was horrible. I felt crushed, bewildered, stupid. I could answer no questions creditably, and was obliged to listen to a long lecture on the way my hair was done. In grandpapa's days, it appeared, little girls looked neat and tidy. Their hair was glossy and smooth, and kept behind their ears, and showed a neat parting. He really did not know what the world was coming to! His blue eyes looked at me so fiercely and his hooked nose wore such a threatening aspect that I was on the verge of tears. Aunt Theo (whose wonderful curls were all rolled up in a net) patted my hand under the table and comforted me as well as she could. Grandmamma kept saying, "There, there, Barker, that will do."

From which I learnt that grandpapa's Christian name was singularly appropriate, and also used in unabbreviated form.

As I possessed a temperament quickly affected by my surroundings, it may well be supposed that my spirits fell to zero, and what with the cold, and the strangeness, and grandpapa's girding at me and my own inability to defend myself, my appetite vanished and the egg and coffee grew cold and the bread and butter was scarcely touched, all of which added to my list of misdemeanours.

Grandpapa was a veritable bully by nature. Anything helpless or dependent on him suffered no mercy at his hands. I saw Aunt Theo bite her lips and flush scarlet more than once as he grumbled and scolded, and generally made breakfast miserable. At last he rose, saying he had to go to the City on some business.

"Will you be back to dinner?" asked grandmamma.

"Back to dinner! Of course. When did you know me dine at a restaurant? I've no intention of being poisoned yet, if I can help it. And you can tell cook I don't like the way she does the potatoes. I want them in their jackets. That's the only wholesome way of eating them. I don't care what they look like. I study my health. And let her make a bread-and-butter pudding.

And remember, the cake is nearly done and to-night is my quartet night."

"Haven't you put it off?" enquired Aunt Theo.

"Put it off? Why should I put it off? It can't interfere with Jane. If I break my engagement with Herr Gottfried how can I expect him to keep his with me?"

He went away then and left an atmosphere of relief behind. Grandmamma took fresh coffee and toast, and Aunt Theo began to talk and laugh, and I found myself eating bread and butter with sudden appetite.

"What shall we do to-night?" asked Aunt Theo of her mother. "Are you going to invite anyone for cards?"

It appeared that on grandpapa's musical evenings grandmamma took the opportunity of asking two or three old cronies of her own to come in for whist. Aunt Theo, who detested cards and string quartets with equal heartiness, fared badly on these occasions unless she obtained permission to run across to her friend, Sara Tollemarche, or secured her company for the evening. Not always possible, for I learnt that this young lady hated classical music, and never got on well with grandpapa, who thought her bold, self-opinionated, and bad style.

"I shall only ask Mrs. Vandrupp," said grandmamma, at last. "That will make four, with Jane and yourself."

"Do you expect me to play *whist* all the evening?" demanded Aunt Theo, in horror. "You know I'm always trumping the king, and losing the odd trick, and can't play a satisfactory game. As for Jane—did you ever play cards in the colonies, Sâba dear?"

"I think mamma and papa played cribbage," I said.

"That's only for two people. Oh, Mamma, don't ask anybody! Just let us stay up here and chat. We haven't heard half of what Janie has to tell us."

"Don't get into the habit of calling her 'Janie,'" said grandmamma. "Your papa won't like it."

Aunt Theo's pretty mouth looked mutinous, but she said no more on the subject.

"Do you know what I'm going to do?" she exclaimed suddenly. "I shall take this child down to Westbourne Grove and get her a warm jacket, and a decent hat. She's far too thinly clad for this climate. I wonder Janie

didn't bring warmer clothing, knowing they would arrive in November."

"We have some warmer things in the other boxes," I said.

"But they were left at the station. You only brought a small trunk and portmanteau with you. Besides, they are sure to be horribly old-fashioned. Mamma, dear, you'll give me some money, won't you? My allowance is just exhausted, or may I take her to Lewis and Allenby's and have the things put to your account?"

"Oh no! The Grove will do well enough. And show her Whiteley's ribbon shop, as you are there. I'm sure she has never seen anything like it."

"Come along, child," said my aunt. "Oh! wait; first of all I must run in and see your mamma. Perhaps you'd like to go down to the housekeeper's room with grandmamma, and see the store-cupboard and the kitchen and the cook?"

"Oh! I should like that," said I eagerly. Whereupon grandmamma rang to have the breakfast things removed, and then, with her key basket in her hand, bade me follow her to those interesting regions known as "domestic offices."

On the way she showed me the drawing-room, which was on the other side of the hall; a long wide room; with a bay-window in front, and another of coloured glass at the back; it seemed a very magnificent apartment to me. The walls were light stone colour, picked out with gold; there were gilded mirrors and many small tables covered with ornaments; fluffy mats, glass shades, ivory and china figures. There were several gilt-backed chairs standing stiffly on a carpet of blue and grey Brussels. The settee and occasional chairs were upholstered in pale blue damask; at present they wore faded chintz coverings to protect them. There was a thick white rug before the fireplace, whose steel and brass appointments were under the hands of another domestic; the housemaid, grandmamma told me, Rachel by name, also prim and elderly, with neatly-banded hair and spotless print dress.

There was one article of furniture in the room, however, at which I gazed in rapture. It was a grand piano. A beautiful Broadwood, covered in green baize, but grandmamma opened the lid to show me the ivory keys.

"Oh! may I play on it?" was my eager enquiry.

"Play? Play on the Broadwood!" exclaimed grandmamma. "It is only used for the musical parties, and when we have professionals. Why, even your aunt is scarcely permitted to use it. And you—what can a child like you play? Scales, I suppose, or variations by Herz?"

"Oh no, grandmamma! I can play sonatas, and Weber's Variations—some of them—and Mendelssohn's Capriccioso, and lots of classical things."

She looked at me in astonishment. "Is that true? Where did you manage to learn? Well, just sit down and let me hear you. But don't use the pedals. Your grandpapa says it spoils a piano."

I sat down and ran eager fingers over the keys. Oh, the rich delight of hearing such lovely tones, of feeling the response to my touch! I began to play the Invitation to the Waltz. I could see by grandmamma's face that she knew little about music. But she certainly looked surprised.

Just as I reached the final repetition of the lovely rippling passages which dominate the waltz the door opened suddenly. A fierce voice broke in upon my ecstatic enjoyment.

There stood grandpapa, attired in hat and greatcoat. He came quickly across the room. I stopped abruptly and jumped up from the piano-stool, feeling suddenly guilty.

"You playing!" he exclaimed. "Eliza, don't you know I permit no one to touch this instrument without my permission."

"But she was so anxious to try, and she didn't use the pedals," said grandmamma. "And, really, Barker, for such a child, her execution—"

"Execution! Tut-tut! What do you know about execution! Finny rattle! That's not playing. What do you know, child?" he asked me suddenly.

I answered timidly that I had learnt some Beethoven sonatas; some of Schumann's *Kinderscenen*; Mendelssohn's *Lieder*; Weber's Polonaises and Variations.

He looked incredulous. "Well, well, I must hear you; but another time. I'm going out now. I suppose you've never heard stringed instruments, or pianoforte trios and quartets? Eh?"

"No ; never," I said.

"Hum ; well, you must come in to-night. It will be as good as a lesson. Eight o'clock. Not too late for you ? How old are you, by the way ?"

"Nearly thirteen, grandpapa."

"You look about ten. Well, see they put a decent frock on you, and come in. Do you hear ?"

"Yes, grandpapa. But I don't think——"

"Tut-tut-tut ! You mustn't say that. Bad grammar. There's no such expression as 'don't think.' You *are* thinking, or how could you speak. You can say you don't *like* a thing, or don't know a thing. You must never say you 'don't *think*' it. Remember that. Now, Eliza, shut up the piano. The fire needn't be lit till six o'clock. And don't forget the cake—and, oh, wait a moment——"

To my surprise he drew out a large white handkerchief and carefully wiped the keys. Then they were covered with a long wadded strip of silk and flannel ; the lid was closed, and the baize covering once more drawn over the precious instrument.

"There's a piano in the library," he said to me. "You are permitted to practise on that ; but, remember, you never touch this one without my permission. It cost one hundred and fifty guineas. It is only to be used by first-class players !"

Then he went away, and I meekly followed grandmamma across the hall and down stairs to the housekeeper's room.

It was a delightful experience to see store cupboards opened, to hear orders given, and watch the various items and ingredients for cakes and puddings and general use weighed and measured. The cook was a buxom, pleasant-faced Scotchwoman, and my heart warmed to the familiar accent.

Grandmamma's housekeeping methods struck me as delightful. Certainly they differed considerably from any previous experience.

Great stress was laid upon the cake. It appeared grandpapa would touch no bought ready-made confectionery. He dined at mid-day—two o'clock. They had tea at seven and nothing more, except a slice of cake or a biscuit and glass of wine at ten o'clock. He was most particular about his diet and he would have every-

thing of the best, however simple its nature. On this special day grandmamma was ordering a curry—a real Indian curry—as a treat for my mother. But grandpapa would not touch it, so he had a special *menu* made out for him, consisting of fried whiting, and a mutton-chop, and the special bread-and-butter pudding I had heard him order.

Grandmamma spent about half-an-hour over her directions and stores. The cook showed me the kitchen; a noble place, with the best and latest invention in stoves (or kitchen range, as it was called), chosen by grandpapa himself; the brightest of kettles and saucepans; a wonderful dresser, containing a whole dinner-service; and various other admirable and useful articles, the like of which I had never seen.

By the time this inspection was over it was also time for me to get ready for that walk with Aunt Theo.

I found my mother was up and dressed, and sitting in the breakfast-room. This was grandmamma's special sanctum, it appeared. After the breakfast was removed no one but herself used the room, unless she permitted. Here was her walnut-wood Davenport, with its numerous drawers, containing account-books, bills, and writing-paper of all sorts and colours. Here, on a small round table, stood her work-basket, with marvels in wool and crochet. Here she read the *Times*, and wrote her letters, and did fancy-work; and here, on the weekly musical evenings, she would bring two or three special cronies to play whist, or écarté, or bezique, or backgammon—all of which games she preferred to grandpapa's quartets and their amateur performers.

As my mother was still too fatigued to go out, they settled down for a good long morning together. I, meanwhile, attired myself in a cloth skirt, an alpaca jacket of colonial cut, and the hat which had suffered so much on my travels.

It said much for Aunt Theo's self-command that she did not laugh outright at her scarecrow of a companion. She did, however, order a cab, and I was hustled into it, and learnt we were bound for a place called "The Grove," where Bayswater did its shopping.

The district of Westbourne was a new and rapidly growing one, my aunt informed me. Edgware Road and Paddington had spread westwards and blossomed

into a thriving and semi-fashionable suburb which was largely peopled by wealthy Jews and retired military and Indian officials.

"When papa first came home from India we lived in Gloucester Gardens, nearer Paddington," she told me, "but directly Pembridge Square was built he bought the present house, and we came here. Centuries ago this was all forest land. They say a stream flowed through what is now Westbourne Grove; that's the reason of the name: Here the shops begin."

She pointed out various ones by name. Some hold the name to this day, though they have considerably bettered their appearance and their fortunes. At one we stopped the cab and dismissed it. I was ushered into a fashionable milliner's for the first time in my life. Hats were brought and tried on with varying success. I looked uglier in some shapes than others, but certainly the task of finding a shape that could be called becoming was one to tax the patience of even a milliner's assistant.

A fine hat showed up by contrast my hideous clothes and made me look several degrees worse. The simpler ones were either a wrong colour or a wrong shape; too large for my head or too trying for my features. But at last something suitable was found and fixed on with elastic, and the old shabby straw left behind, to be sent on later.

Then came the question of a jacket. My aunt was determined that the ugly dress must be hidden, and there was a good deal of difficulty in finding anything to fit me. But at last a long cloth paletot, as it was called, proved suitable, both in size and colour. The latter, a warm rich red that had the glow of scarlet, but not the hue. I was charmed with myself. The colour set off my sallow skin and dark hair and made a new creature of the wild bush scarecrow I had seen in grandmamma's wardrobe-glass. Aunt Theo was delighted. "Now," she said, "we have just time to go to Whiteley's. I must show you that, and we can walk home in time for dinner, but——"

She broke off suddenly. I saw her rush to the door and heard the word "Sara!"

I followed slowly and saw that she was holding the hand and talking eagerly to a tall, strikingly-handsome girl. Presently she remembered me and turned.

"Come here, Sâba," she said. "I must introduce you to my great friend, of whom I spoke. This is the little bush-girl, Sara. I am just going to show her Whiteley's shop."

CHAPTER IV.

WE all walked on, and finally paused before a window, absolutely dazzling by reason of rainbow-hued tints of ribbon and velvet. Every imaginable colour and width seemed there, and on the lengths and streamers and rolls were fixed tickets, stating the price.

I noted that the said price was always something "three-farthings."

Farthings were a new coinage to me. We had no use for them in the colonies.

"Isn't it a wonderful shop?" said Aunt Theo. "Nothing but ribbons and velvets. And he is the first shop-keeper who charges everything by farthings. It sounds so cheap, doesn't it? A penny three-farthings doesn't seem really so much as two pence; and eleven pence three-farthings never represents a shilling until you get your change. They say all the tradesmen in the Grove are wild about it. The shop is crammed from morning till night, and all the assistants are girls. Shall we go in? I'll buy you some streamers, child, though your grandfather is sure to remark them. He hates them. He has cut mine off more than once. I only wear them now when out of doors, or if I'm going to a party. Sara, darling, yours get longer every time I see you. They reach your feet now."

I looked enviously at the stylish young lady. She wore a round velvet hat with a scarlet feather, a black velvet jacket trimmed with ermine, and carried an ermine muff. Trails and loops and bows of narrow black-and-white velvet fell down her back and to the hem of her dark skirt which she held up in one hand, showing a glimpse of scarlet petticoat and neat elastic-side boots.

To me, at that time, Miss Sara Tollemarche seemed the epitome of fashion and grace. My pretty aunt was not half so striking a figure as her friend.

My memory of "Aurora Floyd" came back to me. Miss Tollemarche might have sat for her portrait. She

was of the true brunette type—raven hair, flashing black eyes (which she had a habit of rolling), brilliant colour in cheeks and lips, a magnificent figure.

She and my aunt attracted a great deal of attention, but they appeared unconscious of the fact, and gave up their time to a close inspection of the window and a discussion on new "streamers." Finally we entered. The shop consisted of one long counter, and behind it were rows of girls, and behind them were rows of shelves, and everywhere one looked were ribbons. Ribbons floating, billowing, streaming; ribbons of every hue and design; ribbons velvet-bordered, brocaded, striped; ribbons of silk and satin, or a happy combination of both. And the shop was crammed with eager purchasers. Old ladies buying bonnet ribbons and cap ribbons. Young ones eager over "lengths" and "remnants" for streamers or trimmings. Middle aged ladies pushing aside the young bargainers and snatching at rolls of dazzling beauty and brilliance with a view to "doing-up" shabby headgear economically.

It was an age of ribbon and ribbon trimming, and the owner of the shop had cleverly gauged public taste by his enterprise. The magic word "cheap" brought purchasers in thousands. The brilliant idea of farthings tempted every economical pocket. Even a servant maid could have streamers for a penny three-farthings a yard and hide them inside her jacket on her Sunday out until safe from her mistress's espionage.

For those were the good days when mistresses had some authority over their domestics.

The enterprising originator of cheap ribbons had evidently foreseen what a success the shop would be. I stood aside and gazed in wonder at the flushed, noisy, pushing crowd; at the busy girls; at the rapidity with which they rolled and unrolled the goods; served and made out bills; moved from customer to customer; knew exactly in which box or shelf the desired article was kept. I saw my aunt had secured attention, and was buying narrow ribbon-velvet with a white edge. I saw yards of it measured, and was unconscious that it was intended as a gift for myself. Her friend bought scarlet velvet and black velvet, mauve ribbon, and orange ribbon of various widths. The combination of colours was a joy to me. I had a passion for warm brilliant hues—a passion probably

born of that dear land of sun and summer glory I had so reluctantly left.

The purchases completed we left the shop, almost fighting an exit to the door amongst new and eager claimants for admission.

"Does everyone in the place buy ribbons here?" I asked my aunt.

She laughed. "Indeed, I think so. It's always like that, packed from morning till night. They say the man will make a fortune. He is going to take the next shop and throw it in with this and have dress materials as well as ribbons. The Grove tradespeople hate him, because everyone rushes here. Of course, the other shops sell ribbons, but they haven't such a variety, neither are they so cheap. What a quantity you got, Sara!"

"Some are for my step-mother," answered the handsome young lady. "She wants bonnet-strings and cap ribbons, and I like to have bright colours when I wear my Garibaldi. By the way, how does your white grenadine do?"

They strayed off into a dress discussion which was as Greek to me.

I wondered what a "Garibaldi" was. And what sort of materials "grenadine" and "tarlatane" represented.

We walked homewards, and Miss Sara's black eyes rolled my way very often. I heard my mother's name, and the musical evening was also discussed, and my aunt grumbled and her friend asked her to run round and spend the evening with her. But she shook her head and said something in French. Then they talked much together, until we reached the top of the Grove, where a street called Chepstow Villas branched off. It was there I learnt that Miss Tollemarche lived with her father, who was a retired colonel and nearly blind. She also possessed a step-mother, about whom she expressed herself freely, and with no evident affection.

My aunt seemed very fond of her friend, and very sympathetic. They clasped hands many times before they really parted. Finally, Miss Tollemarche took herself off, promising to come in soon and see "Janie." Then we hurried homewards—Aunt Theo and I.

"It is delicious to feel warm," I said, hugging my arms close in my new delightful coat. "But I hope mamma will like it," I added dubiously. "She has never dressed

me in bright colours. I think she fancies they're wicked. I've only had brown and drab and grey ever since I can remember."

"What did for the backwoods won't do for London," said my aunt. "You must look like other little girls. You'll soon be quite a grown-up young lady. Why, at fourteen I was in long dresses."

"Perhaps you were tall?" I said.

"Yes. That's true. I grew very rapidly after I was twelve. Perhaps you will do the same, child."

"I hope so. I should love to be tall—just as tall as you, Aunt Theo. Oh! that's the Square, isn't it?" I added.

"I see you have a memory for locality. Do you see that house round the corner, in the street turning from the Square—the one with a green door?"

"Yes," I said.

"The people who live there are great friends of ours. The Kirkmans. They have a little grandchild about your age. She will be a nice friend for you, Sâba. I must take you to see her. That street is called Pembroke Villas. It runs up into Notting Hill, and there, where our square ends (four houses up), commences the Gardens—Pembroke Gardens. It is at number two that your grandmamma's great friend, Mrs. Vandrupp, lives. They have known each other for a quarter of a century. She is a Cape-Dutch lady; a widow. You will see her to-night. She is coming to tea."

I did not express any interest in the Dutch lady. A friend of grandmamma's could not possibly concern my small unimportant welfare. I was more surprised at the fact that the parlourmaid Jane had changed from cotton gown to black dress and white apron. I wondered why. Her cap was very smart, and had a pink ribbon bow in it. I was rather pleased that the change in my own costume attracted her immediate attention. My aunt asked her if grandpapa was in, as it was nearly two o'clock. She was told that he had just gone up to his own room.

"We must hurry, child!" she exclaimed. "It's as much as our lives are worth to be a minute late for dinner, or, indeed, any meal in this house."

She ran up the stairs, and I followed. Her room was on the flight above that occupied by my mother and my grandparents.

As I turned into our bedroom to remove my hat I came

face to face with mamma. She gave an exclamation of astonishment at my smart clothes.

"Aren't they beautiful?" I cried. "Don't you like this lovely warm coat?"

"I don't like the colour," she said, acrimoniously. "And as for your hat—I should never have bought you such a thing!"

"You always buy me ugly clothes," I complained, as I looked in the glass to judge of my new appearance.

"At least, I know what's suitable for your age. A child should never be allowed to be vain. What does your hymn say:—

"When the poor sheep and silkworm wore
That very covering long before."

"Dr. Watts was a *man*," I observed, as I took off the new hat carefully. "What could he know about women's clothes? And perhaps he was poor, or selfish, and didn't want to give his wife and daughters money for dress."

"How dare you say such wicked things!" she returned angrily. "Dr. Watts was a pious, good man, and his poetry is beautiful; besides teaching us many holy and moral lessons."

"I never thought hymns were called poetry," said I.

The sudden clanging of the dinner-bell drowned further argument, and we hurried down stairs to the dining-room in the wake of grandmamma.

I was not aware what was the fashionable dinner hour of those days. But I soon learnt that grandpapa had a code of rules and a system of his own respecting meals, hours, and the general comportment of his household. He had spent forty years in India. Now that he was once more in his native land he had set up a standard of self-consequence which all who knew him, or were dependent on him, were expected to acknowledge.

His will was law, and from that law [none of his dependants were supposed to depart by so much as one jot or tittle. Something of this was expounded during that first dinner for the benefit of my mother, who, having been an absentee for so many years, might naturally have forgotten details so all-important. I listened to him and his exordium in awed silence.

It appeared that health, or, at all events, *his* health, was the first subject of importance in this self-centred

code. Therefore, his meals and hours were to be the standard of all domestic arrangements. Breakfast at nine, as I had learnt. Dinner at two. Tea at seven. After that a slice of cake, a biscuit, or a glass of wine constituted all his requirements. Naturally, therefore, the appetites of the rest of the household had to be based on those rules, or there was—trouble.

The midday dinner was a solid one. It consisted of soup, fish, joint, or poultry, pudding and dessert. Of these he partook heartily. Then the rest of the afternoon was given over to exercise, or calls. Tea was quite a meal in those days, consisting of scones, tea-cakes, muffins, toast, bread and butter, preserves, home-made brawn, or potted meats.

On this first day of varied experience I listened to the reasons for meals and diet and exercise with great interest. Hitherto I had taken food as a matter of course. Now I learnt that its choice, its preparation, its invigorating or dietetic properties were of the highest significance—at least, to grandpapa. According to his theory, every individual held life and health in his own hands. Care, temperance, diet, exercise, sleep, were all things to be apportioned and regulated by the said individual.

Only it seemed to me that grandpapa was just a little over anxious that the individuality should be all of one pattern, and that pattern his own. That his interest in humanity was limited to the extent it affected or interfered with, or opposed Mr. John Barker Heavysage, his views and judgments. But when he started off on this hobby, which I learned he did every time a new acquaintance was found, or a new personality intruded, there was no use arguing with him. I saw grandmamma and Aunt Theo exchange resigned looks and devote themselves to their own meal, but mamma and I listened with due appreciation and thereby mightily pleased the self-important egoist. We learnt much of his tastes and habits; much of what he liked and disliked; much of his social importance, his career of spotless integrity and his intention to make the best of his remaining years by due attention to health, exercise and hobbies. It seemed to me very funny to make such a fuss about oneself when one was old, and I felt sure grandpapa was seventy, or very near it. But then, I reflected, he had spent so much of his time in India, and, by his own showing, had worked so hard to amass

his present wealth, that perhaps it was not unreasonable he should at last want some enjoyment out of life.

His lecture and explanations lasted until dessert was set on the polished mahogany table. Then he poured himself out a glass of brown sherry, drank it off, and rose, saying he was going to smoke a cigar in his own room before going out. Passing me on his way to the door he asked whether I had practised that morning. I told him I had been out shopping with my aunt.

"Shopping!" He looked at us both as if expecting to see visible emblems of our expedition. "Tut-tut, you women! First thing you think of is spending money on clothes and silly finery. I hope you didn't go to that ridiculous shop—Whiteley's. I consider it is mainly responsible for this idiotic fashion of streamers. It makes me positively ashamed to see women going about the streets with yards of useless ribbon tied behind their necks and getting in everyone's way. The only thing to stop it will be for men to go about with scissors and cut them off. I shall do it, if I see you, Eliza, or you, Theodora, with them."

My aunt coloured. I saw that she wore a gold and enamelled locket round her neck, and that it was tied by one of the new velvets she had purchased that morning. Something four or five yards long, at all events. But grandpapa could not see what was floating down her back. Besides, the clock struck three at that moment. I believe that was the hour appointed for his smoke, so he hastened away and left a general sense of relief behind him.

"Do you find papa much changed?" asked grand-mamma of my mother, as she helped her to fruit.

"It is so many years since I saw him," she answered deprecatingly. "And that was in India," she added.

"So it was. Dear me, how the years drift on!"

Her face grew thoughtful. She looked at Aunt Theo and then at me, and finally at my mother.

"You have altered very much, Jane; I should hardly have known you," she told her.

They lapsed into reminiscences, from which I learnt that mamma had been a plump, rosy-cheeked maiden of seventeen when she left school and went out to Calcutta, there to secure what all young ladies of that period considered India was meant for—a husband, or position in one of the "Services."

Mamma might have married a baronet's son and been now Lady Robinson, but for some unexampled piece of flightiness on her part, of which grandmamma still kept record and date. However, she had made amends by accepting the "Laird" when ordered to do so by her despotic parents.

The said Laird represented my unfortunate father, now condemned to banishment, owing to the intricacies of a Scotch lawsuit connecting his estates with never-ending legal difficulties. These had been followed by the failure of a bank, in which he had invested his money. He was trying to recoup his fortunes in Australia, having sent my mother home for her health's sake. She was now "poor Jane," or poor "Janie," to her disappointed matrimonial factors. Her eldest sister, Eliza, was united to the Civil Service, and her younger, Harriet, to a wealthy German merchant, who had business houses in Berlin, and Frankfort, and London. At present, she was living in Frankfort, and was the mother of a small son. These family matters were of considerable interest to me. More especially my mother's history.

I had a habit of reconstructing my personal knowledge of people with the legends of their past. Very rarely did the two seem to fit. The present case was no exception. To think of mamma (so sallow, and thin, and sharp tempered) as a round-faced, rosy, plump damsel, the besought and desired of youthful baronets, was a task beyond my powers of imagination.

At last the sound of grandpapa's heavy footsteps startled the gossipers. Grandmamma rose almost guiltily, saying she had no idea it was so late. She hurried us out of the room, whereby we came face to face with the household autocrat, who was crossing the hall.

He told us we ought to go out for a brisk walk, and suggested I should return at dusk and practise till tea-time. However, no one took his advice. Mamma declared herself too tired and weak; grandmamma wanted to finish a remarkable piece of wool-work; Aunt Theo was going to run over to her beloved Sara. I, not being specially wanted by anybody, was sent to the library for that "practise" of which I had heard so much.

CHAPTER V.

THE library was a dark, gloomy room at the back of the dining-room. It contained a great many shelves of ponderous, heavy-looking volumes; a leather-covered table with many drawers; some stiff uncomfortable chairs, and a cottage piano of German name and manufacture. The dark-green curtains at the window added to the gloom, and a newly-lit fire spluttered cheerlessly in the grate.

I shivered as I looked about me. It was a most uninviting place, and apparently but little favoured by the household. The window looked on that dreariest of all dreary things—a London back garden in winter; a place of smoky shrubs and dismal, bare-branched trees and forlorn, chirping sparrows. I turned hastily away to examine the bookshelves. Volume after volume did I scan with melancholy eyes. No reading here, evidently, even for one to whom "books" spelt enchantment, by reason of their rarity. Volumes of "Household Medicine"; "Diet"; "The Family Physician"; "Law and Legal Administration"; "Advice to a Householder"; a uniform edition of Shakespeare; another edition of Macaulay; Pope, Cowper, and Milton; Emerson's "Essays"; Smiles' "Self-Help." Finally my eyes rested on a row of roan-bound volumes on the lowest shelf, and I gave a cry of delight.

Dickens—and illustrated!

There they were. All the dear familiar names I had heard of, but never been permitted to read. Now there was no one to say me nay, and I took them out, one after the other, with trembling hands. Which should I choose first?

"David Copperfield," "Bleak House," "Oliver Twist," "Nicholas Nickleby," "The Old Curiosity Shop," and "Dombey and Son."

My choice fell on the first named. The illustrations lent it a double charm. I plunged into it there and then,

but at the first page was pulled sharply up by the memory of *why* I was in this room; the fear that if the piano was not audible I should soon receive a message of enquiry. I opened the lid, and ran my fingers over the keys, wondering whether the sound was audible in the upper rooms.

Then I took comfort. I had long taught myself that to do *two* things at once was possible to a determined mind. It had been no infrequent habit of mine to read a book while my fingers mechanically traversed the whole range of major and minor scales. The present opportunity was too glorious a one for neglect. Without more ado I set "David" open on the music-desk and began C Major. I spent a most enjoyable hour. No one interrupted me, and I had already learnt the sound of the visitors' bell. Then I commenced on all the exercises I had committed to memory in days of Mrs. Birch, and much Herz, and Kalkbrenner and Czerny. Occasionally, I grew too absorbed in my book to remember my fingers, but that appeared to concern no one. I practised in this fashion till half-past five. The fire had by this time burnt up brightly, but it was too dark to read. I reluctantly replaced the volume and almost immediately heard the front door shut. My aunt entered the room and told the maid to light the gas.

"I want to hear you play, child," she said. "What a good little thing you must be to have practised so long! Grandmamma said you played a very pretty piece this morning. What was it?"

"Piece!" I echoed contemptuously. "I don't play any pieces, Aunt Theo. Not those 'Airs and variations,' and all the things with silly names like mamma used to play at school."

"And I also," she said, laughing. "Well, what *do* you play? Thalberg, Moschelles, Mendelssohn? I'm not a bit musical, you know. Your grandpapa scolds me dreadfully. But go on——"

I played her the first movement of the Moonlight Sonata. Then Mendelssohn's Rondo Capriccioso. When I looked round and saw her astonished face I almost laughed.

"But, my dear child, that's *wonderful!*" she exclaimed. "And your touch, and expression, and execution! You're a perfect little genius! Your grandfather will be delighted with you!"

"He didn't seem to think much of my playing this morning," I said.

She rose hurriedly and looked from me to the clock. "I was forgetting you have to dress, and so have I. There are some people coming to tea, and your grandpapa particularly wished you to go into the drawing-room afterwards to listen to the music."

"I know; he told me. But, aunty, I have no dress but this, and an old blue silk, all crumpled and creased by packing. You see, in Australia we never dressed grandly like you seem to do here. Mamma's best gown is only a violet poplin, and she has worn it for *years*."

"Well, we'll see what we can do. I'll get Jane to iron out your silk, and I've plenty of lace collars and tuckers, and I must do your hair for you. But we'll have to hurry, child. I have my own curls to arrange, and that takes nearly half an hour."

"Will you do your hair as it was last night?" I asked eagerly, as I followed her out of the room. "I thought it *lovely*. But all day you've had it rolled tight up in a net."

"Because papa hates those curls, and won't let me go out in the street with them. So I have to roll them up."

We had reached the first landing. I was about to turn into the bedroom.

"Oh no!" she called out. "Come up into my room."

"But my dress?"

"Oh! I forgot that. Where is it? Tell Jean Macgregor to get it out and have it ironed. It will save time."

I had a glorious hour in my aunt's bedroom, watching her toilet operations and turning over boxes of lace and ribbons as I sat by the fire.

It was wonderful to see her unroll those soft brown curls, and divide them, and brush them round a stick, and then loop them up into tiers, so that they fell in varying lengths from the crown of her head to her waist.

Then I was enlightened as to the meaning of "Garibaldi," which represented a glorified, filmy white bodice, transparent of neck and arms, and belted in at the waist over a black or coloured silk skirt. Aunt Theo's was black. She further adorned herself with a band and streamers of scarlet velvet.

"Papa doesn't say anything before other people," she

remarked. "And I generally contrive to keep my back out of his sight. If he had his way no woman would be allowed a train, or curls, or streamers. He has so annoyed poor Sara that she will scarcely ever come here. Luckily *you* are safe from censure as yet. But I bought this velvet for you. Have you courage to wear it?"

"Indeed, yes!" I exclaimed eagerly, as I kissed my thanks for the lovely satin-edged possession I had coveted at Whiteley's.

"Well, come and have your hair done. It wants twenty minutes of seven."

I hardly knew myself when her deft, clever fingers had arranged my unruly mop. It was brushed loosely and softly upwards from my face, instead of being *strained* off it as my mother and Jean considered desirable. Then she divided it into two plaits and tied them with scarlet ribbon. When the blue check silk appeared and was found creaseless, and made presentable by aid of lace "tuckers," I felt quite pleased with my toilet. Oh! those toilets and quaint dresses and modes of the sixties and seventies! How one laughs at them now! But then—and to me, certainly—they appeared as charming and desirable as the present day *mondaine* deems her waved hair, her elaborate flounced and tucked gowns, her wondrous toques and picture-hats and feather boas. Fashion is at least feminine in her variability, and if unbeautiful to some tastes, has always had the sense to make herself desired and followed in every epoch of her sovereignty.

It was striking seven when Aunt Theo and I entered the dining-room for tea.

Grandmamma was already there, and so was my mother, in her violet poplin. The visitor, Mrs. Vandrupp, was a tall, thin old lady, with a shrewd, good-humoured face and rows of white corkscrew curls on either side of it, surmounted by a lace cap. She wore rich black satin, and a great deal of jewellery of a showy and massive description.

When my mother's eyes fell on me she frowned. I knew the scarlet bows would upset her. It was a colour for which I had always longed, and, therefore, had always been denied; the enforced giving up of any natural or childish desire being part of my education.

I was presented to the old Dutch lady, who gave me a very kind welcome, and then began to trace family resemblances

in my features. My eyes were like grandmamma's, and my mouth and chin like my mother's; my nose was told off to poor Aunt Theo, and yet, taking me altogether, I was like no one in particular. Certainly, I did not favour grandpapa.

He entered almost on the words—a new sort of grandpapa, in stiff white shirt, black frock-coat, a black satin tie, shiny boots. He had a fresh rosy colour; his eyes looked bluer than ever; his mouth was all smiles. I wondered why he was so gay and jovial. Later experience was to show that he played many parts, and that “company” manners were things widely different from the every-day or family set. He kept them in different receptacles, so to say, all labelled and prepared and ready for use at a moment's notice.

To-night he assumed the jovial, confidential friend of old times. The talk during the tea was of India and things Indian. Also, largely of rupees and three per cents. Reminiscences came in, all of a glorified past; of state and power; of his importance in Calcutta; his intimacy at Government House; of many great and noted personages whose names had usually the prefix of “Sir,” or “Lady,” or “Lord.” He seemed to pronounce such titles with peculiar zest, rolling them round his palate like a choice morsel, and smiling with a suave urbanity that displayed his fine white teeth and set numerous little wrinkles round the corners of his eyes. My aunt took very little share in the conversation. I learnt she was the only one of the daughters who had not been in India. She had remained on at school until her parents returned and settled in England. Consequently, “*mem sahibs*,” and “*punkah wallahs*,” “bearers,” and “*derzies*,” the etiquette of “salaams,” the curious comestibles known as *pillau* and *kedgerie*, chillies and *mangoes*, prawn curry and brandy “pegs” possessed little interest as topics of conversation.

But as the unknown had always a charm for me, I drank in all these wonders greedily, setting the comforts and luxuries of Eastern life against its drawbacks, and wondering vaguely whether such glorified beings as Rajahs and Nawabs would ever come across my insignificant path.

It seemed wildly improbable. But as fancy has no limits, I pursued the theme through splendid regions of jungle and mountain, where elephants in gorgeous

trappings conveyed the rulers of the East amidst crowds of obedient slaves and worshipping attendants.

From such blissful visions I was called roughly to attention by grandpapa desiring me to come up to his room and help carry down the music needed for that evening.

He gave a general invitation to the others to come in and listen, but, like the wedding guests in the Bible, they all with one accord began to make excuse.

"You know you do not allow us to talk, sahib," said the old Dutch lady. "Fancy it! Four women and their tongues in their mouths for two whole hours. It is insupportable. No, we shall play a rubber of cards, and wish that you enjoy yourselves half so much."

"We shall hear you quite well, Barker," added grandmamma; "especially when the door is open."

"Ah, well, we play Haydn to-night—dear Papa Haydn," said grandpapa. "He is not quite so formidable as Beethoven. Ta-ta, Mrs. Vandrupp. I shall see you after the music?"

"Oh yes," she answered genially. "I do not care to go home before it is half-past ten. Much good pleasure to you."

She nodded and smiled, and I meekly followed grandpapa up the stairs to his own special "den."

I had not seen this room yet. He explained that it was a great privilege to be allowed to enter it. It was spacious and very comfortably furnished. Ranged round the walls were many strange cases, containing 'cellos, violas, violins, flutes and one or two guitars. The great square table in the centre of the room was littered with music and music paper, pens, ink, and paste and gum pots. I wondered if grandpapa was a composer. There was a comfortable couch, a very inviting-looking arm-chair by the fire, shelves of operas and classical music books. A large walnut-wood cabinet with glass doors contained sheet music enough to stock a shop. The whole room breathed of its owner's hobby. Wherever one looked there was something reminiscent of, or appertaining to, the art.

The walls were hung with portraits of famous composers. A book-case contained massive volumes of musical biography. Violin stands and 'cello stands, and another piano were here also. I wondered who used it? I took courage to ask if it was grandpapa.

"I play it? Oh no! That is for my accompanist when I have my lessons!"

"Lessons!" I echoed.

It seemed so astonishing to hear of music lessons at grandpapa's age.

"Of course," he said. "I have two masters. One is the great Professor Pezzi. He only gives me one hour every fortnight. The other teacher comes once a week. He is the brother of my first violin, who leads my quartettes. You'll see him presently—not the 'cellist, the violinist. The father plays second violin. My *viola* is Mr. Shapcott. He comes all the way from Hammersmith to take part every week. We have met regularly every Tuesday night for two years. The two Gottfrieds, father and son, are Germans, and professionals. At least, the old man has given up, but the sons are fairly well known in the musical world."

He was moving to and fro while he spoke, selecting music, and putting various brown-paper covered and numbered parts together. Then he went to one of the large cases and unlocked it and took out a violoncello. "There!" he exclaimed, as he displayed the instrument to my wondering eyes. "I suppose you've never seen anything like *that*, have you?"

"Never!" I agreed. "Is it very difficult to play? It looks so large."

"Difficult! I should say so."

He sat down and drew the instrument between his knees, and then commenced a scale passage. I did not think his *tone* was quite satisfactory. There was a good deal of squeaking and hesitation about the ascending notes, and a corresponding gruffness as to the lower. But he seemed to look at me for approbation, so I said it was wonderful.

"And can you play airs on it *alone*?" I went on. "As one plays the piano?"

"A solo, you mean? Oh yes! I know several. But a stringed instrument always requires pianoforte accompaniment. If you are quick at learning you might soon be able to play with me. Would you like that?"

"Oh! very much," I said eagerly. "I can read very well at sight," I added.

He surveyed me dubiously. "You seem rather, rather too self-satisfied. You have evidently no experience of

critical judgment. Wait till you hear the music to-night. That will open your eyes, young lady!"

He rose now and put aside the 'cello, and gave me certain of the "parts" and works to carry down. "They will be here in ten minutes," he said. "I have enforced my rule of *strict* punctuality upon them all. Usually they arrive just as the clock strikes eight."

He was quite correct. As the timepiece on the marble mantelshelf chimed "one" the visitors' bell rang. Then in quick succession came another "ting." I heard voices in the hall, and shuffling of feet, and greetings. The door was thrown open by Jane, the parlourmaid, and there entered first, a little old man, with white wavy hair and short beard; following him a very fair and tall youth, carrying a violin case. Behind them marched a stout, commonplace individual, evidently the gentleman from Hammersmith, who played the *viola*. Grandpapa shook hands with them all, and expressed gratification at their punctuality. I kept in the background. He appeared to have forgotten me.

I was looking with interest at the four music-stands and the four chairs. The room was brilliantly lit with large, handsome lamps. The grand piano was uncovered, the blue satin curtains were drawn over the tall windows.

In turning to get the parts I had laid down on the piano, my grandfather caught sight of me.

"Oh, come along! I had almost forgotten. This is my little grand-daughter, gentlemen—Miss MacDonald. Only just arrived from Australia. She says she is fond of music, so I promised she should play audience for us to-night. Go and sit in that chair by the fire, child, and keep *very* quiet. Herr Gottfried, have you your part? Haydn, Op. 101, to-night. Mr. Shapcott, here you are. Mr. Franz? Here."

The tall young man bowed and took the music. He was standing up, tuning his violin. I watched him curiously. He was strangely fair, of the true Teutonic blonde type. Pale, gold hair, worn rather long, fell about his neck; his eyes were blue and dreamy; his complexion girlishly fair and pink. The way he touched violin and bow made me think of them as sentient and beloved things. They were so to him.

After some shuffling of chairs and discussion as to "*tempo*," the quartet began:

Gaily they trotted off on an *allegro* of the true Haydn type. Tum—tum—tum; tum, tumity tum. Presently it seemed to me there was a little disagreement going on between the performers. Someone was dragging behind and shouting "one, two," while the bar was at "four." Then came a vigorous rapping on the music-desk, and they all stopped abruptly.

"Tut—tut—tut! What *are* you all doing!" exclaimed grandpapa, his face very red, and his voice very angry. "I've told you, Mr. Franz, that I will not rush and scamper through a movement."

"This is an *allegro*," observed the young leader, in a strong German accent.

"*Allegro!*" echoed grandpapa. "Of course it is; I know that. I've heard it at the Monday 'Pops.' But you are taking it *allegro vivace*. I can't get half my notes in. We'll begin again, and *count*, please."

It has been my lot to hear much music, as well as perform it, in the years that have come and gone since I first listened to a string quartet. But that night stands out in my memory above all others.

The patience of the two professional players; the hopeless muddle of the two amateurs; the stops, and breaks, and arguments; the fixed determination of grandpapa to make *allegro* a moderate *andante*, and *andante* an elaborated *largo*; his rudeness, his ignorance, and his absolute incompetence, were all things to marvel at. And, indeed, I marvelled greatly.

I marvelled how such a splendid musician as Franz Gottfried could waste his time over such a performance. I was ignorant then of the difficulties besetting the profession and its wretched remuneration. Once or twice I saw the young leader's eyes flash and heard something muttered in German, at which his father gave a warning glance. And then they would begin again, patiently enduring wrong notes, faulty *tempo*, impossible phrasing, all the persistent amateurish faults which grandpapa was too conceited to acknowledge or amend. That first quartet lasted an hour. Then the music was gathered up; the performers rose and stretched themselves, and the old white-haired German came over to where I sat by the fire.

"I hope the *kleine Fräulein* is not tired; it was a long time to listen. She must love the music very much to be so patient."

"I *do* love it," I answered eagerly. "And I have never heard instruments, stringed instruments, I mean—until to-night."

"Is that so?" he said, peering at me with mild spectacled eyes. "And you judge of the quartet by our so *schrecklich* performance of now. *Ach*, if you could hear as it should be!" He shrugged his shoulders and glanced at my grandfather fussing about the music-stands and arranging fresh parts. "But, then, you must hear it of elsewhere. Ask of the *Herr Grossvater* that he takes you to the St. James's Hall, where they play the quartet and the quintet, with the great Joachim to lead. Then you shall hear, *mein Fräulein*, what the stringed instruments can make. For here, for to-night"—again he smiled deprecatingly and shrugged—"it is but a play; a leetle fun for to make happy the good *Grossvater*. Only we say not so to him."

I laughed. I thought he was a dear old gentleman, with his snowy, wavy hair, his mild eyes, and his quaint phraseology.

He would have said more, but an imperative rap on the music-desk forced him to return to his place.

For the second quartet grandpapa had chosen something easier and evidently something with which he had a better acquaintance. It went fairly well, and suffered less interruptions. At its conclusion he expressed himself mightily pleased with *himself*. He appeared to think that his part was the only one worthy of attention. He descanted on music in general as one well acquainted with its merits and exactions. He emphasised the importance of *p*'s and *f*'s and double *ff*'s. He patronised his two professionals in a fashion at once overbearing and ill-bred. In fact, he showed himself to me in yet another rôle, and made me wonder afresh at his versatility.

I cannot remember at whose suggestion it was that I should take a part in the final piece of the evening. A short *Terzetto* of Hünter's, for piano, violin and 'cello. I felt horribly nervous, but grandpapa insisted that everything must have a beginning, and that as I had said I could play Mendelssohn and Beethoven, and read well at sight, I must stand by my guns. I had played duets often with Mrs. Birch and my mother, but to find myself at the leading instrument and see the attentive face of Herr Franz at his desk, and the upraised bow of grandpapa at *his*

was an ordeal to have shaken stronger nerves than mine. I never can remember how I pulled that trio through. It was all like a bewildering dream in which I seemed to be listening to someone else doing what I had felt powerless to do.

The lovely melody enraptured me. Difficulties vanished. With the strong, steady support of that first violin I felt my courage grow and deepen into content—the content that any good or beautiful music always gave me. When we ended—with a little rush and hurry, perhaps, owing to my excitement, with grandpapa scrambling over arpeggios and chords—the two listeners on the hearthrug burst into applause.

The dear old *Herr* rushed up to me and shook my hands, and congratulated me and grandpapa, and declared I was a genius, a prodigy, a wonder. “A mere child—and that trio read at sight; performed for the first time; it was *erstaunlich!*” (Whatever that might mean.)

Grandpapa seemed not ill-pleased at the sensation I had created. He appeared to look upon my talent as an inherited one, and talked of what “we” would do and learn, and practise together.

I was trembling greatly. I turned a scarlet face and entreating eyes to the first violin.

“Oh, please tell me, was it very bad? I mean, did I render it in any way as it should have been?”

“You played it charmingly, *mein Fräulein,*” he said. “Of course, it was a little uncertain; the *tempo* a little hurried sometimes, but for a reading at sight—wonderful, as my father has declared. You should play very well in time to come. You are, of course, very young as yet.”

“Not thirteen,” I said.

“So? Well, you have much time before you. I should advise——”

But the advice was lost to me. The clock suddenly chimed ten. Grandpapa shut up and collected the music, *wiped* the keys of the beautiful Broadwood, and peremptorily broke up the assembly.

I remember how we all went into the dining-room; how grandmamma and Mrs. Vandrupp and my mother and Aunt Theo sailed and rustled after us. How the grown-up members of the party partook of sandwiches, and glasses of port or sherry. How I shrank away to Aunt Theo's side, and was comforted with cake and sustained

by weak negus. How grandpapa talked and boasted of his share in the evening's performance. How Herr Gottfried and Mrs. Vandrupp tried to converse in an odd mixture of German and Dutch; how they all called me a "prodigy," and how, finally, I was carried off flushed, proud and excited, and put to bed by Aunt Theo, where I fell asleep and dreamed I was playing on the great Broadwood before a vast audience composed of Whiteley's young ladies attired in ribbons and streamers of all the colours of the rainbow, and that grandpapa was wielding a conductor's baton, and shouting, "*piano, pianissimo*; slower, slower," at the top of his voice.

So ended my first experience of an English musical evening.

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER one week under grandpapa's roof I grew accustomed to routine and the clockwork regularity of his existence. One day was very like another, and they were dull enough. It appeared that in studying methods of longevity he had found out that regularity of life and habit was part of the prescription.

The novelty of my mother's presence or my own was not suffered to interfere with a single rule of his ordinary life; the only difference being that I had to be the companion of his hours of practice and play accompaniments to the exercises and studies he arduously pursued. That, and my own practising, took up the best part of those dull November mornings.

There was some question of my education, but it was left undecided until after Christmas. Music, however, was rigidly enforced. After the first week I was surprised to hear I was to have pianoforte lessons from Herr Gottfried's son. He was as good a pianist as he was a violinist, and grandpapa took the idea into his head that he should teach me to play concerted music. So, once a week, every Monday morning, it was arranged that I should have this lesson in grandpapa's own room, and under his supervision.

I was expected to learn Beethoven's pianoforte trios, and the Litolff arrangement of the symphonies, so that I could take part in them as quartets or quintets. I

felt sure that my instructor did not approve of these orders. He would have liked me to give more time to technique; to such studies as Clementi's or Henschel's; to Bach, and the Preludes and Fugues. But grandpapa's will was paramount in this matter as in all others. I remember learning the "Pastoral Symphony" and playing it with the quartet the following Tuesday. I think it was not a very brilliant performance, but we got through it. During the first movement there was great discussion over the "parts." Grandpapa had made "cuts" and alterations to suit his own ideas. One or two 'cello passages were never heard, and investigation proved them to be marked as *rests*. It was then I learnt the meaning of all that music paper, paste, and gum. When he found a passage too difficult for his powers of execution he used to paste a slip of paper over it, and mark "rests," which he religiously counted. This brilliant idea seemed to amuse Herr Gottfried very much; his son, however, was greatly annoyed. The mutilated scores put on the music-desk represented to him nothing short of an affront. He was leader of the little band and knew the music from bar to bar, from start to finish. When my bass passages demanded the support of the 'cello and tenor, it seemed worse than childish to be told they were not in the score, and to see the palpable fraud by which grandpapa eluded his difficulties.

"If you think best to arrange your part to suit yourself, Mr. Heavysage," he said gravely, "you, of course, can do so; but do not tell me that the score is correct. I know it all. I know what should be played—*here*."

He tapped the invisible passages with his bow, and grandpapa grew very red and angry, and muttered something about a faulty copy. Herr Gottfried the elder tried to smooth matters over. Finally we all started again, and Herr Franz played the missing passages himself, while grandpapa counted "rests" in a laboriously conscientious fashion that I thought most annoying.

It seems very funny to look back now on those musical evenings. I remember keeping a sort of diary at the time in which they figured largely. I found that old book the other day, and went over its entries with some amusement, and yet with that sense of "remembering happier things" inseparable from records of the past.

The idea of a diary had been suggested by Aunt Theo, who kept one of her own. I found out that she also wrote poetry, a fact that set her upon a higher pedestal of importance. She would read me scraps and verses on occasions. I thought them lovely. I had no previous acquaintance with poetry, and it is to her I owe my first knowledge of Tennyson, Scott, Wordsworth, and Byron. They were gift-books, and stood on a shelf in her room. I was not permitted to read them for myself, but on occasions she would select a poem, or part of a poem, and recite it to me with due emphasis and meaning. I had obtained permission to read Dickens, and was making delighted acquaintance with Pegotty and little Em'ly; with David and Dora. No trouble or disagreeable incident in my life but what those enchanting writings could drive into the limbo of forgetfulness. To be a child and to love books as I loved them, and to face life through their teachings, was to enjoy a double existence; to combine the imaginative and the real, and feel that the joys of the one atoned for the petty worries, the weariness and the restrictions of the other.

It used to puzzle me to account for the fact that "grown-up people" were always good, always right, and could never make mistakes. That even if they did, or a child thought they did, it was disrespectful to point out the fact.

The first two or three weeks of my changed existence were occupied in getting my feelings and inclinations into new shape; in re-adjusting myself, so to speak, to certain things I did not like at all, and certain other things I was in danger of liking too much.

I have said that I was given to noticing and criticising all that went on around me. In those first weeks I lived in an atmosphere of strangeness, and felt very lonely. Aunt Theo could not give me very much of her time and with no one else did I feel at home. My mother's position towards me had always seemed an antagonistic one. Why, I could not imagine. In her father's house, and petted and fussed about as she was on account of her delicate health, she almost ignored me. My hours and days were relegated to a background of monotony—so many hours for practice, for reading, for needlework; a daily walk to the Grove or round the Square; no young society, and no one to whom I could talk freely, except Aunt

Theo, and she, it seemed to me, was often pre-occupied and melancholy, as if something weighed on her mind.

When I looked at her—so lovely, and so young, and yet bound and tied to the stake of such dull grey days as made up the weekly and monthly sum of her parents' existence, I felt more sorry for her than for myself. It seemed to me I was not destined to live here always. We were only on a visit. When mamma was stronger, or when the Laird came home, there would be a change, but poor aunty had told me that her life since she left school had run on in this same groove. It would run on in it until she died—or married.

One night I suddenly awoke from my first sleep, startled by the sound of voices—Aunt Theo's and my mother's. I lay still and listened. The room was only lit by the fire. They were sitting beside it, and talking eagerly and excitedly.

"I tell you I cannot bear it much longer; I cannot! I shall do something desperate."

It was Aunt Theo who spoke.

"Hush!" said my mother warningly, and then there was a moment's silence.

"It was just bearable when Harty was here," went on my aunt, "but now—well, you see for yourself. Everything done by rule and measure! One's actions fettered by absurd conventions. The dullness, the dreariness, the stagnation! To go to a theatre, or an opera, is a favour one has to go down on one's knees to obtain, and balls and dances the same. Mamma has done her share of chaperoning, and won't take me anywhere, except to those stupid card parties and everlasting teas! As for papa, his sole idea of enjoyment is to go to one of the Popular Concerts. I hate the things! Two mortal hours of classical music—ugh! I'm sick of the word. I pity that poor child, but she really seems to have a gift that way."

"Why don't you marry?" asked mamma. "There's that Doctor Danebury. Mamma was telling me about him. He is devoted to you, she says, and it would be a very good match."

"An army doctor! And to go out to India! No, thank you, Janie; I want something better than that. Besides—"

She broke off abruptly and stirred the fire. A bright

glow shot across the room. I turned quietly on my elbow and peered over the top of the sheet. Her back was towards me. She wore a dressing-gown of pale blue flannel. Her lovely hair was all unbound and hanging loose about her.

"Janie," she resumed abruptly, "surely you hate those dark-skinned semi-Europeans as much as I do. Why, Neal Danebury is almost a nigger! Then, look at old Mrs. Stanley-Chope and her brother, who live in Gloucester Gardens. Why, it's tar-brush pure and simple. The whole family—aunt, uncle, nephew and nieces. There's Eliza, too; she took it into her head to marry Sir Pratley Larkom, and he's almost *black*. Even mamma can't deny that. The horrid strain seems to come out on all sides. Did you ever hear anything about—about mamma?"

"No, never. Of course, one can't help seeing——"

My aunt gave a short laugh. "Seeing! I should think a blind man could see it. And we all show it—somewhere. Eliza, you—Harty and I; even that child."

"Well, well, *your* skin is fair enough, I'm sure."

"Except my neck. You must notice I always wear a band of ribbon or velvet, or a high tucker. I declare sometimes, when papa worries me about those streamers, I feel as if I must turn round and tell him straight out the reason."

She laughed harshly. "I wonder what he'd say? I wonder what he'd do if he knew that I'd heard *why* he married mamma—to whom he owes his rise in the world, and his present wealth? To hear him talk, you'd fancy it was all *his* doing; *his* merits, *his* industry! Well, there are people who could tell a different story and who know that the Rajah of Chatterpore had a daughter whose mother was a white woman, and a woman who disappeared suddenly from the magic circle of Government House."

"Oh! Theo, be careful! What are you saying. How did you learn all this?"

"Through Mary Jordan, that friend of Eliza's. She has all the scandal of Indian society of the past fifty years at her finger tips. She could throw some choice sidelights on civil and military officials if she chose."

"I wonder you believed what you heard of—us! It's scandalous!"

"It's perfectly true," said my aunt coolly. "There's no use in blinding oneself to obvious facts. We all bear our past ancestor's sins in our own persons, and 'he who runs may read.' So you needn't urge me to marry the doctor, my dear Janie, for I have some regard for posterity, even if my father forgot to show me the example."

"I don't wonder that mamma complains you are difficult to deal with," snapped my mother.

Again Aunt Theo laughed. "I believe I'm the only one of the family who has spoken out on occasion. You are all so cowed and frightened because papa bullies you. He lets me severely alone—now. We had our tussles at first, but I managed to hold my own. Sometimes I think——"

She paused.

"Well?" said my mother. I thought her voice more sarcastic than interested.

"I was going to say I think that certain people set us examples in what to avoid. Now, if ever I have a child, I shall bring it up in direct contradiction to the methods practised on myself. It shall know love and confidence; it shall have perfect freedom; it shall never learn deception through fear, nor suffer those nervous terrors and agonies of mind we have undergone—everyone of us."

"You had better practise your theories on Sâba," suggested my mother.

"I wish I could. But her character is already formed."

"Character!" scoffed mamma. "What will you say next?"

"I maintain that a child of four would show character, if only studied and guided, instead of being repressed. Most parents' idea of bringing up children is repression. You can't expect a plant to grow if you place a heavy stone upon it. How can a child's mind and nature develop when everything that is natural and original is stamped upon and crushed out?"

"Nonsense, Theo! You are talking of what you don't know. Gracious Heavens! if children were allowed their own way they would be perfectly unbearable. And it is all very well for you to fuss over Sâba, but she has a fiendish temper, and is as obstinate and self-willed as——"

"Her grandfather, perhaps," interposed Aunt Theo. "He is fond of tracing hereditary developments. You might instance Sâba as one."

"Well, I know she has been an awful trouble to me," said mamma. "If I had not kept a strong hand over her she would never have been as presentable as she is. And she is the coldest, most repellent child; I don't believe she cares for anything or anybody in the world. Certainly I have never seen her display affection for her father or myself."

"Oh! Janie, I am sure you are wrong. Don't you know that some natures *feel* so deeply they dare not show it. A word of coldness or discouragement is like a douche of cold water. Watch Sâba's face when she is interested, or touched. It is a study of the most passionate emotions. To me the child is like a sensitive plant. She feels everything so *deeply*. Music and poetry are to her the reality of beautiful things beautifully expressed, not mere passing emotions. But I forgot—you don't appreciate poetry."

"I think it's half nonsense and half lies!" said my mother. "A poet is an anomaly; he can't be a real man. He seems always living in the clouds; calling the right things by the wrong names, and talking the most idiotic nonsense about women that ever has been talked. Either that, or he is so improper he's not fit to read. Look at 'Don Juan!'"

"Byron wrote a great deal of poetry besides 'Don Juan,' though that poem is always held up for abuse as a salve to the conscience of its readers."

"You can't alter facts," said mamma stubbornly.

"No, my dear, but you can regard them from a point of view that alters their more disagreeable phases. Though Shelley was an atheist, and Byron a libertine, their work touches a higher standard than materiality. What a man *is* need not be the only criterion of what he does. The fact that George Eliot lives with a man who has left his own wife and family for her sake does not prevent 'Adam Bede' from being a fine book and teaching a high moral lesson. If her translation of Strauss overthrew her own religious convictions, at least she does not intrude atheism upon her readers."

"How do you know all this?" asked mamma.

"How! Because I keep my ears and eyes open, I

suppose. A good deal of it comes from old Colonel Tollemarche, who is a widely read and very clever man. Thackeray and Dickens were personal friends of his. Although his blindness keeps him apart from social life now, he loves to talk of old days, and old friends, and has a large correspondence with very celebrated people."

My mother began to yawn. I found myself smiling under the bed-clothes. I knew her opinion of books and literature generally. Her ideal writers were Miss Braddon, and the author of "The Wide-Wide World." Tennyson was a new name, and when I had spoken of the "Idylls of the King," she had asked, "what reign it represented?" I suppose Aunt Theo noted the yawn, for she took the hint and bade her good-night, and went softly up to her own room. But I lay awake for long, pondering over that discussion; wondering what was that bit of family history at which she had hinted; why my grandparents should own some "strain" not respectable or desirable; why she had spoken about my share in it; and who the "black doctor" could be who was so anxious to marry Aunt Theo.

Marry her! The thought turned me cold and sick. What should I do if she married; if she passed out of my life? If I had to stay on with these unpleasant people, and she was no longer at hand to comfort and to sympathise with me?

I suppose it was all very wrong, and very disrespectful, and very ungrateful. But I was used to being candid with myself in weighing incidents or events that counted as experience. I was not happy or in my natural element here. Aunt Theo was the one and only object to whom I clung with any sort of devotion, and whose existence compensated for my own. I could not bear to think of a separation. For once in my life I had let myself go; heart, soul, everything that meant *me*, and they all rushed in a flood of worshipping love to this beautiful, tender, gifted creature, who, like myself, seemed rooted in uncongenial soil. It would have been impossible for me to tell her how I loved her. My innate timidity and diffidence and the habit of repression built up a barrier against which speech had no power, and love no eloquence. But I knew what was in my heart, and sometimes I hoped she knew also, even when my stammering tongue refused to speak it.

I felt sorry I had overheard so much. I felt reluctant to confess it, and was therefore unable to seek information on any point of the family history hinted at. But next day I studied the family portraits with new interest, especially that of the Rajah of Chatterpore.

It was while I was examining his handsome features, his strange, deep oriental eyes, that seemed to hold so much, and to conceal so much, that grandpapa entered abruptly with some music in his hand.

"Sâba," he began—then stopped and looked at me, and from me to the portrait. A frown gathered on his brows.

"What are you doing there? Why aren't you practising?"

"I—was looking at the Rajah, grandpapa," I answered meekly. "He is so handsome, and I wondered if he was a friend of yours, or grandmamma's?"

"Tut-tut, what business is that of yours? Idle curiosity. Children shouldn't ask questions about what doesn't concern them. Get off that chair; you are scratching the leather with your shoes. You are old enough to know better."

I got down hurriedly from my perch. His blue eyes looked so angry that I wondered what I had said or done that could have vexed him so much. I was too frightened to say more.

"Go and practise," he went on suddenly. "I want you to try this trio. You'll have time before your lesson. Herr Franz is engaged next Tuesday at a concert. I always allow him to accept concert engagements, even though it puts me out very much. His father will take his place, however, and we shall play trios, or a piano-forte quartet. I've asked Mrs. Jellico to come in. She is a very good amateur pianist. But I want you to do this."

I took the music meekly from his hand, and went away into the library to practise it.

CHAPTER VII.

PERHAPS Aunt Theo had suggested to grandmamma that a little youthful society would not hurt me. I only know that on the afternoon of that day when I had taken it into my head to study the Rajah's portrait, she told me I was to come out with her and pay a visit to some friends in the villas.

"They have a little grandchild," she added, "about your age."

"Oh! I know. Aunt Theo told me. Ada Kirkmann is her name."

"Yes," said grandmamma. "I hope she will be at home. It has occurred to us that you and she might study together. I know she has a governess, because her grandparents do not approve of schools. If we could arrange for you to take up certain studies—French and English—but there, we shall see. Put your best clothes on. By the by, I have bought you a muff, as you say your hands are always cold. It is in my room. Come up with me and I'll give it to you."

I always loved to go into grandmamma's room. It was so large, so imposing. It had such a massive, wonderful wardrobe (they don't make such wardrobes now) of carved and polished mahogany, with a glass panel in the centre door, and two wings containing drawers. Grandmamma's stock of laces and linen, her caps and dresses and velvet mantles and wonderful bonnets were all contained in this vast receptacle. And all were arranged in their respective places in so neat and orderly a fashion that she could find anything she wanted, even in the dark.

I looked timidly at myself in the long glass. My reflection had come upon me as a surprise the first time I beheld it as a full-length presentment. Whenever I was permitted to enter the room I always glanced at that glass

to see if I showed any signs of growth or improvement. I was so small, and so dark, and looked so overweighted with hair, and so ballooned with my ridiculous "hoops," that the reflection was not one to foster vanity. On this occasion I stood so long lost in thought, that grandmamma called me sharply to order. "Don't be so vain, child!" she exclaimed. "And here is your muff. Come and kiss me for it. Isn't it pretty?"

It was very pretty—a small ermine muff, lined with white silk. But what pleased me most was the remembrance that Aunt Theo had one like it. Larger, of course, but the fur and lining were identical.

My thanks and kisses were very sincere. I was delighted with the present.

"But please, grandmamma," I added, "don't think I was looking in the glass because I am vain. It was only—only—because I can't help wondering if that's really—*me*?"

"You?" She laughed; the funny little fat laugh that always shook her cheeks. "Of course it's you. Who else should it be? What odd things you say."

"I mean, am I like that? The sort of inside 'I.' The 'I' that thinks and wonders about things, and has such a funny lonely feeling *here*."

I laid my cold small hands against my chest and looked at her. The laugh died off her lips. She glanced from me to the glass and back again.

"What sort of feeling, child? I have always thought your chest too narrow. I must give you cod-liver oil and plenty of milk."

I strangled a laugh in my throat. Cod-liver oil and milk for those inexplicable wonderings of mine! Those ceaseless endeavours to fit my two selves together. The outer one, who was only "Sába," the shy, sallow-faced, nervous child; and the inner one, who was so lonely and unhappy, and so puzzled as to the why and wherefore of things in general, and herself in particular.

"Perhaps I had better go and dress," I said, taking up the muff. "And thank you again, grandmamma. It was so very kind of you."

"Be ready in ten minutes," was all she said, and I ran quickly away to the next room to put on my new paletot and hat.

I felt eager and interested and less shy than usual.

The thought of meeting another girl of my own age held all the charm of the unknown, but by the time we reached the house, which was only round the first corner of the Square, I had resumed my normal manner and was conscious of misgivings. Perhaps she would not like me. Perhaps I should not like *her*, though that was less probable. I was eager for a friend and confidant; for something young, ignorant, faulty, with whom to compare notes on the misfortunes of childhood.

We were told that Mrs. Kirkmann was at home, and were conducted upstairs. It seemed very funny to me to go *up* to the drawing-room, instead of turning aside from the hall, as at grandmamma's, but I was still new to London houses and their economy of architecture. The drawing-room was long and narrow and furnished with proper early Victorian severity. A round table of walnut wood covered with books in handsome bindings; wool mats and vases; a stereoscope and set of views; a suite of blue rep, and curtains to match; bright steel grate and fender. From a comfortless couch covered with crochet antimacassars a sweet-looking old lady, with soft snowy hair, rose to greet us. She and grandmamma kissed each other affectionately. Then I was introduced, and the subject of Ada mooted. It appeared she was having a music lesson, but would be finished in a quarter of an hour; then should be summoned for introduction. Meanwhile I might like to look at pictures.

I was presented with one of the "gift books" from the centre table and seated myself with it a little in the background. After a few moments I lost interest in the simpering faces and highly-coloured views. I looked about me, and then at the pretty old lady by the fireplace. She and grandmamma were talking eagerly and in lowered voices.

"I assure you," Mrs. Kirkmann was saying, "the last *séance* was truly wonderful. We had Haynes here, and he was taken up right out of the circle and floated round the room. I can show you the mark on the ceiling that he made. We were sitting downstairs in the back dining-room. I so wished Mr. Heavysage could have been present. You know he has promised to come to one of our meetings?"

"Yes, I know," said grandmamma. "Ever since he saw the Davenport he has been full of the subject. But

I can't believe in it, you know. I'm sure there's trickery in the background, or else—well, we are tampering with powers best let alone. The Bible doesn't tell us to investigate such things."

"The Bible," echoed Mrs. Kirkmann. "Why, my dear friend, the Bible is full of spiritualism—apparitions, what the Germans call the *geistlich* side of life. Divination, second-sight, witches, magic—the Bible tells of all these things."

"Still," objected grandmamma, "it can't be right. I'm sure the dead are not permitted to return, or to communicate with us. Even if they were, why should it be in such a silly fashion—raps, knocks, cabinets?"

"The invisible side of nature cannot appeal to the visible without some external help. Spirits haven't the power to speak, so they use other modes of expression."

"You surely don't believe that it is—spirits?"

"Believe! I would stake my life on it. We hold our *séances* here, so we are perfectly certain there is no trickery or collusion. And I must tell you a very strange thing.—The power is coming to Ada."

"To Ada! Is it possible?"

"Yes," said the old lady, sinking her voice. "We were told it might be so, and strange to say it has happened. The spirit of my dear dead boy speaks through her. He has sent me a most comforting message."

This was all so much Greek to me. I could not imagine what they were talking about. "Spirits" and communications, and messages from the dead! How could such things be? And Ada, too, concerned in them. That made me all the more anxious to see her.

She came in at last. A small fair fairy-like creature, with large blue eyes and a wealth of pale gold hair tied back from her face by blue ribbons that matched her eyes.

Her grandmother looked round as she entered and held out her hand. The pretty child ran up to her and embraced her as I should never have had the courage to embrace my grandmother.

"Lessons over, dearie?" asked Mrs. Kirkmann. "Well, now go and talk to that young lady over there. She is Mrs. Heavysage's granddaughter, and has just come all the way from Australia. Fancy that!"

I had left my seat and laid my book on the table. The

little girl looked at me with wide astonished eyes. Then she crossed over to where I stood and we shook hands with due formality.

"Perhaps," she suggested, "you would like to come up to my room and we can talk? I have a lovely new doll. Grandmamma gave it me on my birthday. Do you like dolls?"

Like dolls! I felt inclined to say I had left such childish tastes far behind me, but reflected it might not sound polite, as we were about the same age. I therefore said I preferred books, but should be very glad to see her new treasure. So she held out her little hand and we went away.

When the door closed she chattered freely. She showed me her playroom, and her toys and books. She told me all she learnt and all she did, and displayed the doll with pardonable pride, for it was a wax beauty with auburn curls, and its eyes opened and shut, and all its clothes took off, and it had the loveliest little socks and blue kid shoes. She seemed so fond and so proud of it that I was drawn into her enthusiasm, and we became rapidly confidential. In fact, the child was so lovely and so winning and so perfectly natural that I was at once at home with her.

An hour at least must have passed before I was summoned again to the drawing-room and found grandmamma ready to leave. During that hour the subject of my sharing Ada's governess had been duly discussed and arranged. When she was informed of that interesting fact she became quite ecstatic. To meet every day; to have the same lessons, and the same teacher—what could be more delightful? I was equally pleased, though I was unable to skip and jump, and hug my grandmamma round the neck as Ada was permitted to do with hers.

It was only when we were once more home and ascending the stairs that I remembered that strange conversation. "Grandmamma," I said suddenly, "would you please tell me what is a *séance*?"

"A *séance*; did you hear what Mrs. Kirkmann was telling me?"

"I could not help it, grandmamma," I said apologetically.

"Well, a *séance* is nothing that you can understand or need know about. Run away and take off your out-door things and we'll play a game of backgammon before tea."

I asked no more. Besides, I reflected, if Ada was concerned in these mysteries she would tell me all I wanted to know, and that I was curious I could not deny. Certainly Mrs. Kirkmann had talked of spirits, and that they revisited Earth and gave "communications." It was very extraordinary and very puzzling. It opened a new door to the theological problems already perplexing me. If spirits could come back, then the dead people were not so far off. They must be *somewhere*; in some place where they had knowledge still of Earth and its lost ties and lonely mourners. If Ada knew, could she help me, I wondered? Help me to realise or believe in that profound mystery, an after existence?

She was only a child like myself; indeed, far more childish. Yet her grandmother had spoken of her as one possessed of mystical powers. One whom the "spirits" loved, and through whose mediumship another departed soul had found a channel for communication. It was certainly very wonderful, but I supposed I was not to speak about it. I had received no encouragement to do so, and went back to the usual evening routine. Backgammon, or draughts; needle-work, tea; then music with grandpapa till bedtime. To-night Aunt Theo was out, so I had not even the chance of telling her of my afternoon visit and its perplexing results. Mamma was not well and kept to her room, so I had tea alone with grandpapa and grandmamma. That is to say, I ate bread and butter and drank milk while they talked. I suppose it did not enter into their heads that I could understand their conversation.

Children's powers of comprehension were, in those days, limited by their elders' conviction that they possessed but a small amount of intelligence. At a given age they were expected to issue forth from this enveloping chrysalis of dumbness and unimportance, and to burst into the butterfly brilliance resulting from education and accomplishments. But there was no intermediate stage for either girl or boy between the stupid shy repression of immaturity, and the "finished" gracious self-possession of riper years.

On this special occasion grandmamma talked mysteriously of the Kirkmanns and their researches into spiritualism. She related the incidents of the last *séance*, and how the "medium" had been levanted ceilingwards from the circle and had left a mark on the

white plaster as proof that he had touched it. Grandpapa listened with but few interruptions. I was surprised at his evident interest, but I had yet to learn that his dread of the unalterable law of Death led him into strange channels for comfort.

"They were so sorry you could not come in on that evening, Barker," continued grandmamma. "But they have another on the thirtieth. Perhaps you would like to go then?"

"I'll see about it," he said thoughtfully. "You won't come with me, I suppose?"

"I? Oh no! I don't like uncanny things. Besides, I think it's wrong to pry into the secrets of the next world. We shall learn them soon enough, for we must all die."

Grandpapa coughed loudly, and changed the conversation.

On the evenings when there was no music he usually went up to his room and only reappeared at ten o'clock for the biscuit or cake and wine that formed his frugal supper. I often wondered what he did during those two hours. I was always sent to bed at nine, except on the Tuesday evenings which were supposed to be part of my musical education. When Aunt Theo was at home the time passed pleasantly enough. She taught me tatting and crochet and patch-work. Or I was permitted to sit in a corner with a volume of Dickens while she and grandmamma and mamma played whist with a dummy. But when she was absent, as on this occasion, I had to keep grandmamma company and it was laborious work.

Usually she told me stories of India, or of my aunts in their juvenile days. But her life in the East was her favourite topic. It seemed to have been a semi-royal existence, spent in gorgeous palaces with crowds of servants, with gold and silver plate to eat off, and jewels fit for a queen to wear. I heard about *ayahs* and their devotion; also something of the inner tragedies underlying all that glorious pageant of Eastern life. Of the hatred of the conquered for the conquerors; the awful wars and bloodshed; the bigoted rules of *caste*; the strange religions. Then of the country itself—that glorious land of city and mountain and plain; its temples, its strange gods, its native palaces, and gar-

dens ; of jungles where lions and tigers and elephants made sport for the white man, or levied tribute from the black ; of plague and scourge and crime.

I formed wonderful pictures in my own mind from these descriptions. The sandal-wood and inlaid boxes, the carved ivories, the quaintly hideous animals and ebony gods which filled the cabinets of this modern English house seemed strangely out of place at such times—as much out of place as the barbaric jewels and oriental trimmings which grandmamma and her Anglo-Indian friends wore with or upon their stiff British silks and satins.

Such things seemed to me craving for their proper setting. For those dusky Eastern women and stern noble-looking men ; for the transparent Indian draperies and gold-embroidered muslins and tissues that formed the fitting garments of that strange and persecuted race. When I could get grandmamma to talk of these things the time passed quickly enough. But she was not always willing to do so. However, on this night, as we sat by the fire working, she was unusually communicative. She told me how dreary and dismal England had seemed to her. How she hated the winter which inevitably brought bronchitis or rheumatism in its train. How small and poky even this great house seemed after her Eastern palaces, or roomy hill-bungalows. With some forgetfulness, or else ignorance of my putting “two and two together,” she wandered further back than usual. She told me of her childhood, spent in Eastern gardens and amongst Eastern women. Of slaves and attendants obedient to her every whim. Of gold-fringed palanquins that bore her to the cool high hills, or from some lovely marble city to another. She spoke of a father who had adored her, but she said nothing of her mother. I learnt, also, that she had been married at sixteen to my grandfather, who was then only twenty-three.

“Sixteen !” I echoed. It seemed absurdly young. In little more than three years it would be my own age, and surely it would take more than three years for a girl to prepare herself for so important a change in her destiny.

“Yes ; at sixteen,” continued grandmamma, dropping her knitting-needles and pushing back her gold-rimmed spectacles. “But I was tall and considered very beautiful,

and had a large fortune in my own right. I had only seen your grandfather once before we were married."

This gave me a fresh shock. Once! How could a girl possibly take a perfect stranger for her husband? The idea was revolting.

But grandmamma went on. "In those days one's parents arranged such matters. It was far better they should. A young girl has had no experience of life, or what it is. It is fit and proper she should be guided by the advice of her elders. In the East that is always done. So also in France, and amongst the Spanish and Italian races. It is only in England that the absurd idea of 'love matches' has been allowed to interfere with suitable arrangements for a girl's future. But there—you are too young, child, to discuss such matters. I was forgetting. Now roll up your work and go to bed. You have to begin lessons to-morrow, you know."

I rose obediently and endeavoured to wind up the yards of tatting I had tangled into hopeless confusion.

"Yes, grandmamma. What time?"

"You must be there at ten; and leave at twelve. Miss Sharpe takes Ada for a walk from twelve to one when the weather is fine. But that is your practising time, is it not?"

"Couldn't I practise from one to two, and then take another hour in the afternoon? And what about the lessons on Monday?"

"I thought of that. As your grandpapa considers them so essential you must go to Mrs. Kirkmann's later on Mondays. Eleven o'clock instead of ten. Miss Sharpe will arrange that. And I hope you will be a good child, and diligent and attentive. For this is a very exceptional opportunity. I could not have had a governess here, and your mother objects to a boarding-school for you, so this is a most lucky chance. And little Ada is so sweet and refined and ladylike that she will make an excellent companion. Altogether it relieves my mind of a great responsibility."

I longed to ask her why my own parents had no voice in the matter; how long I was to live under this roof and amongst these conditions. But, as usual, my courage failed me. I only wished her good-night and went off to bed.

I had been given a room to myself, for which I was duly

grateful. It was small, cold, and ugly, but at least it was unshared, and I was free from the eternal scoldings and fault-findings that had distinguished my mother's toilet methods. Besides, now and then Aunt Theo would peep in, and come to kiss me and tuck me up; things forbidden as long as my mother was in the same room. Also I could bear thither my beloved books, and secure precious and unsuspected times for reading them. A volume usually lay open on the dressing-table, its contents sandwiched mentally between the operations of washing and hair brushing. Or, if there was a gleam of light on those foggy winter mornings, a book afforded me a happy quarter of an hour between Jane's entry with my hot water and the actual getting up and process of dressing I had now accurately timed.

I suppose I should have been very grateful for the comforts of my new home, for the important facts that I was being clothed, fed, and educated at my grandparents' expense. But I was so perverse and unreasonable a creature that I used to lie awake night after night shivering and sick-hearted, and full of vain longings for the land I had left behind; for the freedom of the wild bush; the cheery greetings of the Laird; the chance visits of squatters or stockmen. Above all, for the golden glory of those other mornings when I had roamed free as air amidst the blossoming wilderness of fruit garden, and paddock, and poultry yard. Where the air was a joy to breathe, and life a thing to be glad of; where the "prunes, prisms, and pruderies" of English conventionalities were alike unknown and undesired.

CHAPTER VIII.

So my life fell into a groove, and my education commenced in earnest. I soon found that Ada knew very little more than I did, despite her advantages. In French alone had she distanced me. My only acquaintance with that language had been made with some chance help of my mother's, the said help largely dependent on her state of health or inclination.

Miss Sharpe was a gaunt, middle-aged lady, very plain of face, very strict, and apparently very learned. But

she was kind enough in her way and very considerate towards my "colonial deficiencies."

The first week of lessons was distinguished by unusually bad weather, so we could not take the hour's walk grand-mamma had spoken of. Miss Sharpe used to go home to dinner, and come back for an hour in the afternoon for Ada's music. As we could not go out, Ada and I were permitted to play or talk or amuse ourselves as we pleased during that hour; we became very friendly. I forget how long or short a time it was before I put that question to her which had so perplexed me. But I know that when I did put it, a great change came over her childish face, and she looked at me as if afraid.

"A *séance*," she repeated. "Who told you? Grand-mamma?"

I mentioned that eventful conversation, and how I had wondered about it. While I was speaking she glanced uneasily from side to side as if in search, or was it in fear, of something. Then suddenly she sat down and clasped her little hands tightly together and looked at me with a seriousness quite unchildlike.

"Oh, Sâba!" she said, "if you don't know, how can I tell you? Ever since I can remember there has always been a Voice with me. I don't know who speaks, or from where it comes, but to me it is quite distinct. Sometimes I hope—I *think* it is my mother's. She died when I was only a little baby, and as I said, since I can remember anything I remember hearing this voice. It tells me what to do, and it answers me if I ask a question, and that is why I know there are spirits near us in this world, and that they long to comfort and love us, just as if they were on earth also."

She paused. Her little face was white and solemn, and she seemed to be looking beyond me, at something I could not see.

"One day," she went on quietly, "it told me to go down stairs and join the circle. I did not know what was meant, but I went down. They were all sitting in the dark, but the room seemed light to me. I went in and sat down amongst them, and then suddenly I saw a beautiful white figure standing in a corner of the room. I said, 'Oh! there's mamma!' but no one else could see her. And then the voice began again, and I told them what it said. And after a time I felt very tired and fell asleep.

"When I woke up grandmamma was crying and kissing me, and telling me how wonderful I was. But it did not seem at all wonderful to me."

"And is that a *séance*?" I asked her.

"I suppose so. Grandmamma and grandpapa and some friends meet once a week for communications. You know grandmamma lost her only son; he died in India. I think he was fighting with some native tribe. But her grief was awful. Only spiritualism has consoled her. She told me that I gave her a message from this son. I know nothing about it. Nor have I been told to join the circle again."

"Weren't you frightened?"

She smiled. "Why should I be? It was quite simple; just like saying one's prayers, or the strange, lonely feeling that comes over me when I'm in church and hear the organ."

I, too, drew a chair up by the fire. This was getting interesting. Outside the rain pattered and the wind moaned. Here, in Ada's pretty warm room, all was comfort and brightness and peace. Miss Sharpe had gone home. No one would interrupt us. I prepared for one of my religious tussles with faith as pitted against facts.

"When you *pray*, Ada," I began, "do you really believe that up in heaven millions and millions *and* millions of miles away, God really hears you?"

Her eyes met mine, and she began to clasp and unclasp her hands nervously.

"How can I say? To me, Sâba, prayer is not like that at all. There's something I have to say and must say, and I just close my eyes and say it. Because, you know, God is *everywhere*—not only in heaven. And I always feel mamma is my guardian angel, and will take my prayers to Him, just as she will come for me when the time is appointed. I am not going to live very long—I have been told so—but that does not matter. The other side is so beautiful, and I shall be so much happier that I quite long for the messenger to arrive."

I stared at her in amazement. "Do you mean to say you *want* to die? That you're not—afraid?"

She smiled softly, that wise, serious little smile I was destined to know so well. "Why should I be afraid? It is no more than passing from one room to another.

Only while in *this* world we can't open the door, or even peep in at that next room."

"Does that—that Voice you spoke of—tell you anything about the other life—the new world?" I asked nervously.

She shook her head. "No; it is not permitted. Certain spirits are set apart to minister and to comfort people *here*, but they must not say what lies beyond. That is what I am told."

"And angels and spirits *do* really exist, you think, just as the Bible says?"

"Why, of *course* they do! How can anyone doubt it! If you talked to my grandmamma you would know what a beautiful hope it is, and how much easier it makes life *here*. But we don't cease to *live*, Sâba. That other world, that strange *next* world is only the gateway of change. From there we have still to go on, further and higher, but it is always a step at a time. My Voice tells me that but for her great love and longing she would not still be here, near enough to speak to me. But, you see, she passed away so young, and so unprepared, and all her thoughts were with *me*, her poor little helpless baby. She was permitted to guard and tend me, and she does it still. Nurse and grandmamma often told me that when I was a tiny infant, and they used to watch me sleeping, I would smile and hold out my arms. Nurse used to say, 'The angels are talking to her.' I suppose it was mamma I saw, and who was near me. I don't see her now, but I hear her."

"What was that figure, do you think, that you saw at the *séance*?"

"I hope it was mamma; but I do not know."

"And shall you go to any more of them?" I asked curiously.

"If I am told to, I shall. But grandmamma does not wish me to go too deeply into spiritualism. She thinks I am too young."

She smiled again. "I am not young—*really*, Sâba. I am hundreds of years old. Perhaps you are, also—your soul, I mean."

"My soul?" I repeated. "*Me*—the other *me*, you mean?"

"Of course. We are all double people. The one that *we* know and say nothing about, and the other one that is

fed and clothed and scolded and taught, and that is sometimes so troublesome to us. I can get quite away sometimes and be only that inner one. Can you ?”

“No-o,” I said doubtfully; “except in sleep, or when I am what mamma calls ‘day-dreaming.’ But that always means I’ve forgotten something I ought to have done and haven’t. And I get punished.”

“I am never punished,” said little Ada gaily. “No one has ever scolded, or slapped me, or set me hard tasks. Grandmamma said she wanted me to be as happy as it is possible for a child to be happy, and everyone has seemed to love me and be good to me. Perhaps they know I am not to be here for very long.”

I looked at her again; at her lovely little face, her delicate colouring, her fairy-like figure.

“But you look quite well,” I said. “Why shouldn’t you grow up as—as other children do ?”

“I suppose they don’t wish it,” she answered.

“*They ?*”

She nodded her golden head. “On the other side—those who want me. And this world is very wicked, and very sad. I do not want to grow up and know about its wickedness. I would rather go while I believe everyone is good, and pure, and loving, and that the church is really God’s house on earth, and that clergymen are really His servants and do their best to help the world to salvation.”

I sat looking at her dumbfounded. Was this the Ada Kirkmann who played with her doll, and read “Andersen’s Fairy Tales” in preference to “Bleak House” ? Who learnt out of the same “Mangnall’s Questions” as I did, and sewed and ciphered and practised just like any ordinary child ?

How could she know such things—talk of them as one familiarised and certain of their existence ? Dimly my own consciousness had touched on mysteries, on things spiritual and unseen. Then I had thrown them away into that gulf of darkness where incredible and unprovable things are apt to be thrown. There was no one to whom I could appeal. Even Aunt Theo had sternly repressed any effort to return to that religious discussion of our first evening. The Bible still lay by my bedside, but I never read it. I was taken to church, but the service wearied me to death, and the long, prosy sermon sent me to sleep.

But now suddenly the spiritual flame so nearly extinguished burnt up once more. Ada's words and Ada's faith were as balm to my sore heart and doubting spirit. Above all, the delightful, half-terrifying mystery surrounding such faith as hers appealed to me as some weird fairy tale or ghost story had often appealed. For my nature was largely imaginative. Faith demanded no other test than that it should be fanciful or poetical.

"Ada," I said, after a long silence, "do you think I might come to a *séance*? Would the Voice tell you, if you asked?"

"But why?" she said. "Is it because you are curious, or unhappy, or want a message from someone gone before whom you love?"

I pondered a moment. No, I had no such reasons to give. I was only deeply, deadly anxious to know something of spiritual things, something that would show God less a power of dread, and terror, and vengeance and injustice, than the Bible showed Him; something that would make life easier to live, and death easier to die.

I remained silent, my eyes on the fire. I heard the fierce beats of the rain against the window, the howl of the wind as it rose and fell in stormy gusts.

And then quite suddenly I heard Ada's voice speaking slowly and softly. Her eyes were closed; her face looked as I thought an angel's might look.

"It says you will be brought to hear the truth and see the light that shines for ever and ever."

She opened her eyes. "The Voice answered me," she said. "And now, don't you think we have talked enough? I'm so tired."

She raised her arms and dropped them suddenly; gave a sleepy little yawn, and nestled back in the low arm-chair in which she had been sitting.

To my surprise I saw she had fallen asleep.

* * * * *

I did not move. I sat on there, watching the child's placid face, and listening to her gentle breathing. The ashes fell softly on the hearth. Now and then a lump of coal burst into flame. The clock ticked loudly on the mantelshelf. I knew I ought to get up and go home. It was past my hour for returning already, and there was a long and difficult piece of music to study before my next

lesson. But though I kept telling myself these things and saying them over and over again, I made no movement towards putting them into action.

It might have been five or ten minutes before the door opened and someone looked in. I lifted my eyes with a sort of effort. I, too, felt strangely tired and strangely sleepy. Old Mrs. Kirkmann stood at the doorway. When she saw that Ada was sleeping she came softly across the room and stood beside her.

"How long has she been asleep?" she asked me.

I told her about a quarter of an hour.

"Have you ever known her sleep after lessons—before to-day?" she went on.

I shook my head. "No. Generally we play, or sew; but this morning we were talking, and she seemed suddenly to grow tired."

"Talking? What about?"

I hesitated a moment. Then I said, "It was about *séances* and spiritualism."

"Ah!" She drew a quick breath and looked searchingly at my face.

"What do you know about such things, my dear?" she asked.

"Nothing," I said bluntly. "I wish I did know—something."

"Those who desire to know the truth are soon guided into Truth's path," she answered. "The key is prayer and searching of the spirit. To the pure in heart the task is simple."

Her eyes rested on Ada. What love and tenderness they expressed! I felt my own grow suddenly dim. Had anyone ever looked at me like that while I slept? How was it that Ada seemed to breathe in and create an atmosphere of love about her while I was conscious only of indifference, tolerance, or dislike?

"She looks like an angel—what we imagine of angels," said Mrs. Kirkmann presently. "I have always regarded her as a gift from heaven, something left to console me for my own dear child's loss. She is just what her mother was—fair, gentle, sweet; never naughty or troublesome as other children are. Half spirit, half mortal, she seems to me; hovering between two worlds, uncertain which to choose."

She talked on and on, and I listened wonderingly. I

could not understand half of what she said, but it all tended towards that border-land of which Ada had hinted.

She spoke of the Way—thorny and narrow, and hard to find. She spoke of Light that guided, and ministry that soothed; of lessons sharp and difficult to learn and yet thrice blessed in the learning; of sorrow turned to joy; of patience and endurance; of a sterner meaning of existence than mere earthly birth; of many wise and strange and beautiful things. At last Ada awoke, and seeing her sprang to her arms and prattled of a lovely dream that had been hers, and from whose delights her "Voice" had sent her back to comfort her grandmother.

They seemed to understand each other perfectly, and their devotion was very touching, or seemed so to one who had neither received nor witnessed much human affection.

I lingered on, forgetful of time, of duties, of probable scoldings in store for me. Only when the clock struck one did I remember that I had lost an hour's practice, and that my excuse of "spiritual" conversation would not be likely to appeal to that stern martinet who was the present ruler of my actions.

I threw on my hat and waterproof and ran in. The door opened as I reached the steps, and a tall, fair, good-looking man came out. He seemed in haste, and he looked flushed and angry. He brushed by me and my lowered umbrella as if he saw nothing of either. I found grandpapa standing in the hall. He, too, looked red and disturbed, and as if some weighty matter had put myself and my concerns into a welcome background.

The parlour-maid took my dripping cloak and streaming umbrella down stairs, and I made a movement towards the library.

Grandpapa suddenly seemed aware of my existence. "Don't go in there," he said abruptly; "you can practise in my room."

I turned away and was ascending the stairs when the door opened and Aunt Theo came out. She was very pale, and I thought her eyes looked as if she had been crying.

She went quickly up to grandpapa. "Has he gone?" I heard her say. "You said you would send for me. Why did you not?"

"He didn't ask for you," said grandpapa. "Besides,

it would have been of no use. A preposterous business altogether."

He walked into the library, and she followed him and they shut the door. I wondered what had happened. Who was the visitor about whom Aunt Theo was concerned, and why was his business "preposterous"?

At the next landing, I came upon grandamma and my mother looking anxiously out of the morning-room door.

"Where is your grandpapa?" asked my grandmother sharply.

I said he had gone into the library with Aunt Theo. They looked at one another, and then they went back into the morning-room. I thought it was all very extraordinary, but I went on upstairs to grandpapa's own "den." I noted that his 'cello stood out of its case as if he had been playing on it. The bow was on the table, and beside it, on a little silver tray, was a card.

I took it up. I read:

"CAPTAIN ELMORE,
5th Dragoon Guards."

Was this a clue to the mystery? Evidently a visitor had called, and grandpapa had gone down to see him. Yet why should he have looked so angry, and why had Aunt Theo been crying in the library?

I put the card down and opened the piano and commenced on Clementi's "Gradus ad Parnassum." But the performance was purely mechanical. I knew nothing of what I was playing. I was only wondering what the good-looking young man had said or done to upset the whole household in this fashion; wishing I was old enough to secure Aunt Theo's confidence and perhaps help or comfort her.

But I was only a child to them all—something to be ignored, or controlled, or pushed aside as occasion demanded. Except for my music, I was not of the slightest grain of importance to anyone in the house, and yet of what great and serious moment they all were to me!

It seemed very strange that grandpapa did not come back to his room. Half an hour, three-quarters of an hour, and the clock was getting round to the all-important dinner-time, and still he did not make his appearance. Further wonder of wonders, on this day dinner was five

minutes late! And when at last the bell rang and I hastily descended, Aunt Theo was not at the table. Neither was her absence explained to me. Of course I did not dare ask anything about it while the meal went on. It was a dull, dismal dinner. Everyone seemed pre-occupied. When grandpapa spoke at all, it was only to find fault with the cooking, or grumble at the appearance of batter-pudding instead of apple-tart.

At last he rose, grumbling now at the weather, which was worse than ever. Walking in such rain and mire and gloom seemed an undesirable method of passing time.

He suddenly turned as he reached the door, and I saw he was once again aware of my existence.

"How long have you practised this morning?" he demanded.

I told him.

"Phooh! An hour—only an hour! You should take at least *three* a day now. You played very badly last Tuesday. We are going to do that same quartet again, so mind you study it."

"It is very difficult," I stammered. "Herr Franz says it is far beyond me. And I have the 'Stabat Mater' to learn also, grandpapa. You said I was to play that."

"So you are. We can do the 'Cujus Animam' together this afternoon. I make a solo of it. Come to me at——" he looked at his watch and then at the clock—"at four; you can practise for an hour in the library first."

"You do keep her at it, Barker," interposed grandmamma. "The poor child seems always practising."

"Of course. Why not? That is the only way to get on. And she has a great deal to learn yet; her technique is very faulty. I was thinking, Sâba, of taking you to the next Popular Concert. There you will hear how classical music should be played. But I shall only give you that treat if you get through the 'Stabat' to my satisfaction. Remember, next Tuesday; pianoforte and strings. The piano part is in the library. Bring it up with you at four o'clock."

I said I would do so, and then grandmamma gave me some French plums and a half-glass of ginger wine to warm me, as she said. The moment grandpapa had gone she and mamma plunged into mysteries as usual, calling someone Captain E., and someone else "Dora." I suppose they thought those appellations conveyed nothing to my

mind. Nor would they have done so, but for two facts. One was that visiting card with Captain Elmore engraved upon it; the other, that in some of the old childish books in Aunt Theo's room I had found one or two containing the inscription, "To darling 'Dora,'" or "dear 'Dora'" and she had told me it was a pet name given to her by her sisters as a child.

So I had materials for thought all to hand when I betook myself to the library. The handsome captain's visit had been in some way concerned with Aunt Theo. Did he want to marry her? I wondered. If so, would she tell me anything about it, or might I dare ask?

It was very hard to give my attention to the "Stabat Mater," though Rossini seemed easy work after Beethoven. But I consoled myself by thinking that I should surely see Aunt Theo at tea-time, or perhaps she would come to my room that night, as she often did, and then—

Well, whether I should have courage enough to ask the meaning of her tears, her absence, and to hint at the handsome visitor, remained to be seen.

CHAPTER IX.

THAT was a miserable afternoon and evening. Never had I so longed for bed, or felt the hours drag so interminably.

To begin with, the "Cujus Animam" as soloised by grandpapa was a cruel ordeal. He groaned and grunted; he dragged the time and played the most atrocious discords, and he bullied me for all his own faults. Again and again had I to go back; to repeat, to wait on him, to pick him up; to alter the time to suit his capacity of *moderato*, despite the fact that the composer's intention inclined to *allegretto maestoso*. As for his poor little solo bar of



worus fail me to describe it. My old blotted and scribbled diary gave a whole page to that attempt; and re-reading it brought back the very sound of that tortured 'cello; the sight of grandpapa's flushed, excited face, the curious "grunt" which accompanied any difficult passage. He was quite ignorant himself of this peculiarity, and no one had dared to remark upon it. But once or twice Herr Franz or Herr Gottfried exchanged glances in which mirth had struggled with good breeding.

On this special afternoon he signalled every effort at mastering that "solo" with renewed bursts of unmelodious grunts. I had much ado to keep from laughing; perhaps, however, my amusement prevented me from taking his fault-finding as seriously as he meant it, and thereby lessened the ordeal. But I knew enough of music to know that he was no musician, nor ever would be; that this hobby of his had been taken up with his usual belief that "to will was to do." However, it takes something more than "will" to make an artist. Even talent cannot do that. Assuredly grandpapa had no talent, only the dogged belief that he could play, and the pompous conviction that what would be impossible to a professional is quite allowable to an amateur.

He played that "Cujus Animam" over some half dozen times, and then suddenly rose, and to my surprise went over to a cabinet and brought out what looked like a *solitaire* board, only the balls were fixed, instead of being loose.

"No, don't get up," he called to me. "We'll go through it again, only I must do a little wrist training first."

"Wrist training!" I watched him with wonder. He began to rub first one wrist and then the other with this board of balls. Then he put it aside and commenced to shake his arms violently, allowing the wrists to hang loose.

Having made himself very hot and flushed over this "training" process, he once more resumed his seat, and the 'cello.

"All professionals do that," he told me. "It makes the wrists supple and the fingers flexible. Of course, they have other secrets, but they take good care not to let them out. I saw these things at a musical shop in Wardour Street, and the dealer assured me that they would save hours of practice, if used regularly. I was interrupted this morning; that's why I'm not quite up to the mark.

Now—once more. ‘Tum-tumty-tum’—mark the time well. Remember you are playing dotted notes.”

“Remember!” thought I. If only he had tried to recall that fact, the air might have shown some semblance of what the notes indicated. I had to grind my teeth and keep my eyes fixed on the page though I knew every bar by heart now.

But all things must end, and happily grandpapa at last grew tired, and told me I could go. I wanted no second bidding. Perhaps my alacrity displayed itself too frankly, for he suddenly called me back. “What will you be doing now till tea-time?” he asked.

I told him I usually worked or read, unless grandmamma wished me to play backgammon with her.

“Tut-tut-tut! Silly waste of time; and time is valuable—remember that. An hour wasted in a day can never be made up again. Where should I be now if I hadn’t made the best use of every moment as it came? And you are growing up fast. This is your golden opportunity of improvement. Never waste a single moment of the day.”

“I try not to, grandpapa,” said I meekly.

“Try—that’s not *doing* it. Take this book upon harmony and study it. It’s better than filling your mind with silly novels, or playing games. I wonder your grandmother hasn’t more sense.”

“I—I don’t think——”

“Tut-tut!” came stormingly from those commanding lips. “What have I told you about saying you ‘don’t think’? You *do* think; you *are* thinking. It is sheer ignorance to use such an expression. You never hear me use it, do you?”

I said I believed he was incapable of making such an error. “But what am I to say instead?” I ventured to enquire.

“Why, that ‘you think such and such a thing is *not* the case.’ Now what had you intended to say?”

“That grandmamma doesn’t play backgammon from want of sense, but because her eyes are not strong and work tires them, and the afternoons are long to her when she does not go out.”

“I never find them long, yet how often I’m prevented from going out. To-day, for example, look how perseveringly I have practised!”

I thought in my own mind that his practising was just

as much a waste of time as grandmamma's backgammon ; perhaps more so. For at least she played an excellent game and used her intelligence to do so, whereas the murdering of that unfortunate "Cujus Animam" was in no way a credit; neither did it signalise advance on the path of musical progress.

But I was anxious to end the lecture and get away, so I kept silent, and was at last dismissed with the book on harmony and counterpoint for companion.

Eagerly I ran downstairs. I looked in at the morning-room and found grandmamma and mamma sitting over the fire, talking earnestly. Still, there were no signs of Aunt Theo. I went in and took a chair by the table and laid my book down upon it. Grandmamma glanced up.

"Are you going to read, child?" she asked. "I want you to play a game with me."

"Grandpapa said I was to study this," I answered disconsolately, and showed her the book. She turned over page after page.

"What dry stuff for a child like you! And you've been at music all the afternoon?"

"Yes, grandmamma," I said, with a sigh.

"Well, surely that's enough for one day. Tell your grandpapa I said so. Get the backgammon board."

I put the offending volume carefully aside and did as she had desired. Grandmamma certainly lacked the sense of musical appreciation. The "sixth sense," as grandpapa called it.

She told me she had never been able to play or sing, and music bored her to death to listen to. Yet by some irony of fate her lord and master had chosen this art for pastime and consolation of his later years. More, he evinced an enthusiasm for it worthy of a professional artist.

It may not be amiss to say that I had discovered grandpapa drew a hard and fast line between music as a profession and music as a dilettante pursuit of the leisured, superior class, yclept amateur. When he played in concerted music before an audience he distinctly stated that the performance was not to be criticised. When his professional leader found any fault, or made any suggestion, he immediately took refuge on the ground that he 'as an amateur' could not be expected to play like Piatti, or Pezzi, or even the younger Gottfried, who gave him his weekly lesson.

Also, the worse he played the more he found fault with the other players. As for me, I had begun to dread those Tuesday evenings. I was so bullied and worried, so persistently blamed for anything that went wrong, that I grew nervous and made all sorts of blunders, in spite of my kind young teacher's endeavours to save me.

Then the strange methods by which grandpapa fitted in stringed parts to pianoforte solos made my share somewhat arduous, leaving alone the fact that they did not always agree. For instance, I had to play Weber's "Invitation to the Waltz," and Rossini's "Stabat Mater," and Beethoven's Symphonies, besides numerous overtures from full pianoforte scores, to a "string" accompaniment. He seemed very proud of the idea, and of his copying and arranging the various parts. He took all the credit to himself until I discovered they were given out to a young musician in Soho, who was paid a miserable sum for doing the work.

Altogether, before the first month of my life in Pembroke Square was over, I had learnt that this genial and conscientious old gentleman was to be respected less for his actions than his words. That his morality, his truthfulness, his charity, and his unselfishness were all so many labels on the outward man, but with no particle of that "inward and spiritual grace" of which the Catechism speaks.

Of course, I was an unimportant little nobody, and credited with neither eyes, nor distinguishing capacity; so I very often played spectator to the other side of those noble sentiments reserved for his friends and rich acquaintances. To the latter grandpapa was a totally different man from the domestic tyrant of the home life, or the boastful autocrat, who laid down the law on all and everything to that worshipful and respectful crowd who made up the sum of his own and grandmamma's visiting circle.

In speaking of these matters I am, of course, in touch with a later period and with different circumstances. Indeed, my difficulty lies in keeping my materials in hand instead of diverging, for the materials are endless, and the temptation to use too many of them is irresistible.

The people who came and went, who were alternately feasted, toadied, or snubbed, make quite a gallery of portraits. Some were grandmamma's friends, and some were my grandfather's. He had a visiting circle of his own

and so had she. In his were a worshipping crowd of sycophants who flattered him grossly; who were "so sorry" that dear Mrs. Heavysage did not appreciate his musical gifts. In hers were queer old "*burra mem-sahibs*," dried-looking Eastern fossils, whose sole conversation was of curries and chutneys, and the glorious gluttony and glorious days of Indian existence. These strange old ladies used to come and "spend the day," as it was called. That is to say, they would arrive shortly before two o'clock, carrying caps wrapped in whitey-brown paper and bringing woolwork, or knitting, or crochet. They would dine richly and plentifully, and then adjourn to the drawing-room. Here they would gossip and work, or play chess, or whist, or backgammon till four o'clock. If they were not going to stay to tea, they left sharp at four. If they were, the gossip and games lasted on till nearly seven. Afternoon tea was unknown in those days, and from three to seven o'clock visitors had to be entertained by grandmamma.

Grandpapa never altered a rule of his life or an item of his diet for anybody. If it happened to be a musical evening the old dowagers would be turned out of the room at half-past six, so that the music-stands might be arranged, the piano uncovered and opened, and the various music books, or parts, brought down in readiness for eight o'clock. For as grandpapa had to pay his two professionals, he timed their every minute in justice to his generosity. He was as honest as Shylock, and quite as arbitrary in his methods.

But I am lapsing into my bad habit of side issues, and they are carrying me away from this eventful day, distinguished by Ada Kirkmann's weird confidences and Aunt Theo's trouble.

She did not appear until tea-time. Then she entered the room, looking very pale, and with marks of weeping about her lovely eyes. I thought there was an ostentatious pretence of not seeing such signs; of treating her as usual; of keeping to general subjects. It also seemed a favourable opportunity for bullying me. It appeared that I lounged instead of sitting up; that my playing backgammon, instead of studying the book on harmony, was a serious offence; that the fact of that extra hour spent at the Kirkmanns' had been discovered. I ought to have come home; I ought to have practised. In fact, I seemed

to have got into everyone's black books for some reason. But I was so occupied with watching and pitying Aunt Theo that all these rebukes scarcely troubled me. It was easy to keep silence, it was also safe.

I had acknowledged my transgression and could put up with consequences. I seemed to myself to have been brought up on a diet of that description. And as with other diet, I had discovered that everything "wholesome" was unqualified nastiness. But since I could throw my mind into pleasanter matters, and still maintain a subdued and repentant exterior, I escaped from that sense of unbearable misery which had been used to oppress me.

I feel certain that no one at that tea-table, least of all Aunt Theo, had any suspicion my thoughts were with the event of the day ; with the handsome visitor ; with grandpapa's neglected "wrist exercises," and grandmamma's mysterious hints, and my mother's eager curiosity.

It is well that children do live a life apart from their elders, and adapt themselves to circumstance, however unpleasant. It would be a sorry world if the fault-finding and discipline had no other side to it.

As all things must come to an end, so at last came the finale to that dreary meal. I was told to take my book on harmony into the library and study it till bed-time. With down-bent head and angry eyes I left the room, resolved I would *not* obey that order.

The library was the happy hunting-ground of my literary explorations. I examined the book-shelves ; I dipped into "Bleak House" and "Nicholas Nickleby." I discovered that on the top shelf stood a row of Scott's novels, and also Fielding's and Smollett's. Fortunately, instinct, or the idea that they were dry, kept me from more than an outward study of the latter volumes. But had I been minded to dip into their moral histories, there was no one to say me nay.

Having learnt by this time that the sound of "scale" practise kept me in religious aloofness from other intrusion, I went to the piano and studied "Dotheboy's Hall," while majoring and minoring the keyboard. At half-past eight I left off and took the still unstudied "Harmony" upstairs with me. I had found an advocate in grandmamma and poured out my trouble to her. I said it was too hard to understand by myself. She quite agreed with me. I

suggested that perhaps grandpapa could explain some of my difficulties. But she said it was getting near my bedtime and I need not trouble about it.

Aunt Theo was sitting near the fire with some embroidery work in her hand. She turned towards me.

"Let me see the book," she said.

I brought it to her. I saw her lip curl. She shut it up and laughed scornfully. "The idea of expecting you to master *that*—unaided. Papa must think you are a prodigy, Sâba, even if he won't acknowledge it. You are quite right. Ask *him* to explain those rules."

"Did you ever learn harmony and counterpoint and theory?" I asked her.

"No, thank you, my dear. I am not fond enough of music for that. My soul has never soared to higher flights than Thalberg's 'Home, Sweet Home,' or Sydney Smith's 'Harp Éolienne.' Your Aunt Eliza is the only musical one of the family, except yourself."

"Aunt Eliza, who is in India?" I said.

"But who talks of coming home next year. She wants to place the children at school."

I was listening eagerly. Her voice was just as usual; her face still looked pale, but was composed and quiet. It seemed to me that whatever had distressed her that day was conquered, or pushed aside.

It was my own Aunt Theo again and I rejoiced at the knowledge.

Which only shows how blind we are to the real feelings of our beloved, for no soul can pierce the secrets of another, and it is easy to deceive those who *want* to be deceived.

Some two hours later my door was softly opened. I was in that semi-hazy condition bordering on sleep, yet alert to externals. I opened my eyes and saw Aunt Theo. With a sudden eager gesture I sat up and threw open my arms.

"Oh, aunty darling, do come in! I so want to speak to you."

She closed the door, and came in and sat down at the foot of the bed. "How is it you're not asleep, child?"

I was silent for a moment. Then I took courage. "Please, Aunt Theo, darling, are you unhappy?"

She turned her head quickly. "Why do you ask?"

Words stumbled over one another. I was so eager to explain; so fearful of being misunderstood. "And oh!

“aunty,” I concluded, “it makes me wretched to see you look as you looked to-day. I am used to being unhappy, and to feel that I am not wanted, and am of no use to anyone; but *you*—that’s so different.”

“Everyone is unhappy, Sâba, more or less,” she answered sadly. “You are too young to understand what—what has happened. It is a great disappointment to have thought that someone—you care about—is very brave and noble, and true-hearted, and then to find out he is nothing of the sort.”

“Yes,” I said, creeping further down the bed, and nestling up against her. “And are you quite *sure*, Aunt Theo, that the handsome young captain I saw to-day is not brave, or noble, or true?”

I felt her start. “Where did you see him, Sâba?”

I explained. “Of course it is no business of mine,” I added; “but, indeed, aunty dearest, I cannot help *feeling* that you are sad, and I love you so that I don’t want you to be unhappy. Is there nothing anyone can do to—make you happier?”

She held me close—a queer little bundle, half bed-clothes, half child. “Nothing,” she said drearily.

“If I were grown up,” I said, “I should find a way. I love you so much that to help you to be happy I would gladly die.”

She gave a sudden little husky sob. “Nonsense, child, that is exaggeration. And why should you love me so much? Why, a month ago you had not seen me.”

“I know. But that makes no difference. You seem in all my life now, the best and dearest part of it; and if you died, or I died, or you went away, it would still make no difference. I don’t know why. I cannot find the proper words to say it, but no one has ever seemed to me what you are, Aunt Theo. You are *you*, and you are *here* (I touched my heart with my clasped hands). And always you will be there, and if you need me, or I can ever serve you, you need only tell me, and I will do whatever you wish. I have made a vow about it; I never can go back from *that*. I am not good, and I told you once I did not say prayers, or like going to church, but I feel I would be good for you, and do what you told me, however hard, just because I love you. I don’t love anyone else in the world—in that way.”

“Not your father or mother, Sâba?”

I hung my head. "I cannot help it, aunty, dearest. It seems to me some people haven't the power to make you love them, and the more you try the harder it seems. And then someone comes into your life—that is how you came into mine—and your whole heart goes out to them, and it is a joy just to see them, or hear them, or even suffer for them. You don't know *why*. It just comes and it stays, and it makes you so happy that you can thank God for it."

"You strange child!" she said.

"I suppose I am. But I cannot help it. Ada loves her mother who is dead, and yet comes to her and speaks to her. But I—well, I am only frightened of mamma, and never quite happy or at ease when we are together. I never felt like that with you, Aunt Theo. I thought you the most beautiful and sweetest of anyone I had ever seen, and every day the feeling grows stronger. It makes all the difference when you are in the house or at the table. I don't mind anything then. But when you are away, or when you look unhappy, as you did to-day, my heart is only one big ache."

She was crying softly. I felt frightened. Had I been too bold; said too much; forgotten, as I was always forgetting, the dividing gulf between childhood and its elders?

I put my arms about her. I, Sâba, the cold-hearted, unemotional, self-restrained creature who never made outward display of affection. But there was no effort, nor any shame or fear in this; it was just natural, and I could no more help it than I could help my own tears.

She did not say much; she only held me, and kissed me softly and told me I was a dear, quaint child, and that she loved me quite as much as I loved her.

"And don't trouble about my being unhappy, Sâba," she went on, when we were both calmer. "Everyone has trouble of some sort or another. You feel your little griefs and sorrows, and I—I have mine, and that seems life. But they won't last. I try to believe that, and so must you. It is something to know we love each other so dearly; like having a little secret all to ourselves that no one else can share. And I am so glad you have told me this, dear, for I have never thought you the cold, unfeeling child that others call you. Perhaps, I understand you by memory of my own childhood. That, also,

was very lonely and unhappy, and all spent at school, but I had my sister Harty. You have had no one, poor child, no brother or sister."

"No," I said. "But I should not have minded that if only—only——"

"Only what?"

"Only anyone had seemed to care for me. But it has always been scoldings, fault-finding, discouragement, no matter how hard I tried to be good. So that is why I made up my mind I wouldn't try any more; wouldn't pray for a changed heart as I have prayed so often. I didn't ask God to make me. I didn't give myself the 'wicked heart' mamma says I have. I found myself here, and often have I wished to go away out of it all. It is only music that makes me forget or makes me happy, and now even that——"

Tears choked me. This was one of the rare natural moments of my life and the relief of being able to speak freely was inexpressible. But I struggled for composure. This was a funny way to comfort another person, I told myself, pouring out one's own selfish grievances. Yet in later days she told me that in hearing of my sorrows she almost forgot her own; that she left me less unhappy than I believed. For it seemed to her that a new duty had dropped into her life and a new interest. And she was in a mood then to be thankful for anything that would divert her thoughts from the bitter grief that had come to her that day. She did not tell me what it was, of course, but I felt it was connected with the handsome visitor of the morning. He had drawn us together all unknowingly, and gone on his way unconscious of the fact.

Before I fell asleep that eventful night I told myself I was glad of *that*; glad that he would not cross our path again. Aunt Theo had said so.

CHAPTER X.

It is all written down here in that blotted, faded diary, kept so religiously in those childish days. Page after page tells me of scenes, events, and people, all past and gone and dead now.

The years have taken heavy toll of those I knew. The face of the world is changed. The places are altered

or swept away. London now is not the London I traversed with Aunt Theo, and Bayswater and Kensington have become fashionable suburbs instead of quiet retreats. Whiteley's little ribbon shop is now a mighty emporium where every human need may be satisfied, and where the ubiquitous American realises his or her ideal of "stores" and bargain counters. The little quiet villas that formed the entrance of the Grove are gone, and shops stand in their place. Nothing of the old landmarks of thirty years ago seem left. Save that 'busses still run west and east and north and south, and our old friends the "growler" and the hansom still ply for hire. Only where there was one 'bus running then, there are now a score; and instead of one cabstand there are six; and motors hoot and hiss, and bicycles whizz by, and girls carry hockey sticks and tennis rackets instead of parasols or muffs, and no one wears a crinoline (for which the gods be thanked!) or a pork-pie hat; and curls are unseen and unknown, and streamers no longer fly blithely in the wind, or ornament a lady's back; neither are gloves of single button length, and boots flat of heel and elastic-sided. Great and sweeping are the changes in fashion, in manners, in sports and amusements, and as I read my childish descriptions and opinions I feel as if I had suddenly grown old, or was a victim of some "ancient history" nightmare.

After that night of confidence Aunt Theo took me a great deal about London and showed me its old as well as its new districts. We also read up the old records of Bayswater and found out that it was so named from a drinking place for cattle called "Byard's water-place." "A shallow bye-water where cattle may drink at the wayside."

Queen's Road, which connects Bayswater with the Uxbridge Road, used to bear the name of Westborn Green Lane. It really was a lane a century or so back, just as the "Royal Oak" was a rustic inn, in days when Paddington was but a village. What is now Bishop's Road was formerly the Bishop's Walk, from the fact that the Bishop of London held part of the estate of West-Bourne as a grant from Edward IV. Westbourne Place, or Park, was once Crown property and sold by Queen Mary to one Doctor Thomas Hues, a favourite physician of her own. In 1746 the architect, Isaac Ware, who built Chesterfield House, South Audley Street, bought this property. A

later and more interesting owner of the Place, or Park of Westbourne, was Samuel Pepys Cockerell (whose mother was the sister of the famous old diarist). It was he who enclosed part of Westbourne Grove to the north of Harrow Road. He was also an architect, like Isaac Ware, and built Hanover Chapel, in Regent Street—now no more.

There was also a Westbourne Farm, surrounded by fields close to this Westbourne Place. It became the abode of Mrs. Siddons in 1805, and was described as a "pretty double-fronted house with centre gables and partly overgrown with creepers." She lived there till 1817, and was visited by all the celebrities of the day. A contemporary writer speaks of a view of Paddington Canal as an added charm to the spot. Aunt Theo and I tried to imagine that view and the old creeper-covered house, just as we tried to reconstruct the old common and the "pure stream" flowing through our present-day Grove. We also visited Sarah Siddons' last resting-place in Paddington Churchyard, wondering a little why she had selected that dreary spot.

These pilgrimages seemed to distract Aunt Theo's thoughts, and to me they were only too delightful; partly by reason of London's novelty and interest, partly because of her companionship. Instead of a walk with Ada and Miss Sharpe, I would start off with her at twelve o'clock. Often we would take lunch at a confectioner's and thus gain more time. After Bayswater and Paddington we explored Kensington. I saw the ugly brick palace where the Queen was born; gazed at the gardens where she had walked and played. Strolled past Thackeray's house in Young Street, and made the circuit of quaint old Kensington Square, which he mentions in his books. I had not heard of him or "Vanity Fair," or "Pendennis," until I saw these places. Then there was Campden Hill and the famed Holland House, and the abode of the great Sir Isaac Newton. And Saint Mary Abbot's Church, and the narrow, dingy High Street, and Silver Street, half slum, half passage, that took us back to Notting Hill and our own locality once more.

December was well on by this time and I heard much talk of Christmas, and Christmas preparations. I found, also, that after the eighteenth of the month Miss Sharpe took a holiday and that there would be no more lessons until the second week in January.

It was shortly after school had "broken up" that Aunt Theo suggested a day of Christmas shopping and Christmas sights for Ada and me. We were to start at ten o'clock, take the 'bus to the Marble Arch, and walk down Oxford Street and Regent Street. We would have lunch in "town," as she called it, and not come back till late afternoon.

The prospect was hailed with joy by Ada and myself, and for a wonder no objections were raised. It being holiday time my music lessons were suspended also, and my practice less severe. I was quite wildly excited over this shopping expedition. I had not yet seen Oxford Street or Regent Street. The slow, unfrequent 'busses of those days made quite a journey of what is now scarcely a distance. However, the glories of this West End of London had been often described to me by grandmamma and my Aunt Theo. So I was prepared for magnificence.

The slow, jolting, two-horsed 'bus, duly set us down at the Marble Arch. Here the traffic and the crowds and general confusion astonished me after our quiet suburb. Crossing the street was nervous work among all the cabs and 'busses, the huge laden waggons, and vehicles of all descriptions going to and fro that great highway between Edgware Road and Holborn and the City. However, we got across and commenced our walk.

Certainly Oxford Street did not impress me, and when Aunt Theo pointed out Bond Street, as a very fashionable thoroughfare, I thought it both mean and narrow. At the Circus I was too alarmed at the dangers of crossing to take in the position of the four thoroughfares of which it formed the centre. She pointed out Jay's as the Queen's special shop, but as the windows displayed no royal garments, nor any special garniture, I supposed its real grandeur lay in the interior. To please me, more than that she really wanted them, Aunt Theo went in to buy gloves. So I had an opportunity of seeing what a fine and imposing shop it was, and what very elegantly-dressed young ladies moved to and fro, and condescended to wait on customers.

I wondered if the Queen came here to have her dresses tried on, and whether she had a special room and special attendants. It seemed to me there was a great deal of black everywhere. All the heavy silks and brocades were black, and all the attendants wore black gowns.

When I enquired the reason, Aunt Theo told me that since the death of the Prince Consort the Queen had never gone out of mourning, and people thought she never would. And therefore, this being a Court shop, followed the Royal fashion; no one of any social pretensions would dream of buying a black silk or satin gown anywhere else.

We saw Peter Robinson's and a wonderful milliner's where the hats and bonnets were amazingly brilliant and stylish. Then Aunt Theo took us into the Oxford Street Bazaar. We were enchanted with the toys and knick-knacks and lovely things on all the counters. We had some lunch and afterwards proceeded down Regent Street, "the finest street in London," Aunt Theo called it.

Here were shops such as I had never seen or imagined. Jewellers, silver-smiths, drapers, booksellers, glass and china; confectionery, fruit and flowers. Wondrous creations filled the drapers' and milliners' windows. Fashion reigned supreme here. I felt that my paletot and hat lacked the seal of distinction with which "West End" would have stamped them. The ladies who were walking or driving or shopping were all dressed in the height of the *mode*. Yet I thought Aunt Theo looked as lovely and distinguished as any of them. I remember she wore a dark brown silk; a black velvet jacket with ermine cuffs and tippet; and a bonnet with deep red roses at one side.

On special occasions, or at church, or for visits, all young ladies wore bonnets.

Nowadays even the grandmothers wear hats, and adopt as youthful a *coiffure* as their grand-daughters. But in the time of which I write women were content to look their age. Now their age is the one thing they *refuse* to look!

Aunt Theo pointed out Augener's music shop, where grandpapa usually bought his music, and Czerny's, and Scott Adie's, the famous Scotch warehouse, and the toy shop where Ada's doll had come from. Then she showed us the Stereoscopic Company's place, and a shop called Bonthron's, where they sold Vienna bread, and supplied grandpapa with it, as he considered it the only pure and wholesome bread to be found in London!

I saw St. James's Hall, where all the best concerts took place, and where grandpapa came every week to the Monday "Pops." Aunt Theo told me it was at this hall

that all the famous artists appeared who visited London. Grandpapa had not fulfilled his promise of taking me to hear a quartet. He said I had disobeyed him by not studying theory and this was his method of punishment.

As I read the announcement of the last concert before Christmas and the list of illustrious names I felt a keen thrill of disappointment. I should have loved to have heard music played as that famed "Four" would play it. And the words "Solo Violoncello—Signor Piatti" informed me that I might really hear what a 'cello could do in the hands of an artist.

I turned from the notice-board to Aunt Theo. As I looked at her face I forgot all about what I was going to say. She was white as death, and trembling violently. I caught her arm.

"Aunty, what is the matter? Are you ill?"

She said nothing. She did not seem to hear me. Her eyes were on a hansom rolling rapidly down towards Piccadilly Circus. Even as my own frightened glance followed hers I saw that the horse was abruptly checked. Someone jumped out; a man. He said something to the cabman and turned in our direction.

Aunt Theo seemed to recover her self-control. She took my hand and hurried me up the street. Ada followed close beside me. Aunt Theo's face was now as rosy as it had been pale. She walked very quickly, saying nothing. I heard quick following steps. I was not surprised when a voice spoke her name.

She turned her head, hesitated, then stopped. The pursuer was no other than the handsome stranger whose visit had had such an upsetting effect on the household a few weeks before.

He raised his hat, but did not offer to shake hands.

"Miss Theo!" he said eagerly, "I thought I could not be mistaken."

She made no reply. He glanced at Ada and then at me.

"Are you going this way?" he asked.

He indicated the upper end of the street.

"I am doing some shopping," said my aunt coldly. Her face was very white again and her eyes wore a look new to me. So proud and angered and indignant was her whole aspect that I thought the handsome young officer must have offended her very deeply.

"May I walk a few steps with you?" he asked humbly. "It may be my only opportunity of saying good-bye. I am leaving England."

"Soon?" she asked indifferently.

"Next week. I've exchanged. I'm going to Egypt."

He was walking beside her now. He had taken permission for granted.

"It is rather a sudden determination, isn't it?" she asked in the same cool quiet tones.

"Yes. But it's the only thing I can do. England has become hateful to me."

He looked at her as he said those words—a long, grave, sad look. She kept her own eyes straight before her, on the hurrying figures that passed or faced us.

"You don't ask—why," he said in a lowered tone. But I heard it. I seemed all one nerve of hearing, so keenly was I conscious of some tragic human passion close at hand.

"I suppose you have very excellent reasons," she answered, with an indifference that deceived him.

"Too excellent to trouble you with," he said coldly.

"Tell me, did your father give you my message?"

"Of course," she said.

"I—I bore a great deal from him that morning," he went on. "It seemed as if he would not or could not understand that I was anything but the mere fortune-hunter he chose to believe me. I asked permission to see you, but he refused. No beggar could have been more insulted, or turned from his door with greater humiliations. I thought I would write, but I feared you might not get the letter. Then I had this chance of exchanging with an old friend, invalidated home. I seized it. It means work and perhaps promotion, and in any case a new life away from—temptations."

"And debts and difficulties," she added.

"All army men have those tacked on to their shoulders," he said bitterly. "I am no worse than hundreds of others; only—unfortunately——"

His voice broke slightly. He looked at her with appealing eyes. "I suppose all this is nothing to you?"

How could she have smiled like that? How controlled her voice to tones so chill and indifferent?

"I hope you will find Egypt enjoyable," she said. "I believe the winter there is excellent. Now, will you

excuse my saying good-bye? This is our shop. I am giving my little niece a first taste of London shopping."

He looked at Ada and then at me.

"Are they both—nieces?"

"No. One is a little friend of Sâba's. This is Sâba."

She drew me forward. He bent down and held out his hand. Ada had made a sudden dash for Lewis and Allenby's window. We three stood there a moment and looked at each other.

"Sâba," he repeated. "What a quaint name."

He dropped my hand and then offered his own to Aunt Theo.

His face was very white now, and his eyes had a look that long haunted my memory. But Aunt Theo showed no signs of softening, or of sympathy. Proudly and coldly she held herself, and though she took her right hand out of her muff, it was done so languidly and indifferently that the young man seemed to resent its offer.

"Of course," he said hurriedly, "you don't care—why should you? A woman always thinks more of her own dignity than of a man's suffering."

I made a pretence of turning away to the brilliant shop window to which Ada's face seemed glued.

I did not hear what Aunt Theo replied. The Captain spoke again more earnestly and entreatingly. But it seemed as if she had resolutely determined not to listen or believe. Her eyes followed me; her face showed no sign of feeling. Still he went on speaking. I could catch the impetuous tones, if not the actual words. I caught her answer.

"It is all of no use. It is too late."

"Your father assured me you were going to marry someone else. Is that true?"

She started then, and looked more angry than I had ever seen her look. "No. It is not true. But that makes no difference."

"It does," he said eagerly. "At least you are free. You can't forbid me to think of you as that. And although I am only a half-ruined beggar now, things may mend. I told you I had a prospect of——"

"Please *don't*," she said, her voice very clear and cold. "Bargaining and appraising do not tend to heighten a woman's appreciation of marriage. The whole matter

has been settled. Why refer to it? Life is not easy for me any more than it is for you. We made a mistake once. That is all over. I wish you God-speed—and—good-bye."

In that crowded street, under the bright wintry sunlight, they stood just a moment longer; their hands clasped; their eyes meeting.

Then he lifted his hat and went back the way we had just traversed. Aunt Theo stood gazing at the plate-glass window. I saw her lips quiver. I saw that for a time she was blind and deaf and unconscious of where she stood, or what she did.

We waited patiently—Ada and I. Here was some sorrow of which we knew nothing. A hidden tragedy played on the stage of that inner life, to us all mystery and blind wonder.

I whispered to Ada to take no notice, and she nodded in silence. We stood there so long that I could have made out a catalogue of those silks and laces and wondrous fabrics; those beautiful furs and splendid mantles.

Other people pushed against us, stared, gazed, exclaimed, but Aunt Theo still stood with fixed, despairing eyes and quivering lips, and cheeks white as the ermine at her throat. When at last she seemed conscious of where she was and of us, she gave a violent start.

"It is getting late. We must go home," she said. "Stop, children—we will have a cab."

I did not dare to remind her that Lewis and Allenby's was one of the shops to which we had been promised a visit; that grandmamma had given her a list of various articles and materials to be purchased there. Without a word of comment or remonstrance we followed her into the cab. She gave the Pembridge Square address and we were soon jolting along side streets and unfamiliar thoroughfares leading to the Bayswater Road.

As we neared home Ada whispered an entreaty that I might go back to tea with her. Aunt Theo gave absent acquiescence and I was put down at Pembridge Villas instead of the Square. It was only four o'clock. Our day had been considerably curtailed. Yet I felt far too sorry for her to have breathed any regret for that fact.

I noted, however, that when we got out of the cab she paid and dismissed the man. Then, as we were

admitted to the Kirkmanns', she turned and walked quickly up Pembridge Crescent.

"So she was not going home," I thought. She must have changed her mind. In all probability she was bound for her friend—Sara Tollemarche. She had gone in the direction of her house. I felt a curious jealous hatred of that friend. She had Aunt Theo's confidence, her love; she could share her secrets and sympathise with her sorrows as I could never do. She was of an age to understand such things as concerned love and marriage and proposals. To me they were but book-stories. My imagination could not reach the "inevitable man" who seems to come into a girl's life for the notable reason of upsetting it—and her.

CHAPTER XI.

"I THINK it is a love affair," said Ada, hugging her knees and bending over the bright fire.

I stared at her. One never knew how to take Ada. She was a child one moment and an old woman in wisdom the next. We had had tea in her pretty playroom, and now were sitting in the firelit dusk, each in our little cushioned chair, talking over the events of that day.

"You see, Sâba," she went on in her quaint wise way, "that gentleman seemed very anxious to talk to her, and very sad about going away. But she seemed trying to put him off, to make him believe she did not care. All the same, she *did* care. I felt sure of that all the time I was pretending I did not see anything."

"What do you think you saw, Ada?" I asked her curiously.

"Oh! just the usual sweetheart signs," she answered. "You see, I have been a great deal with grown-up people, and—I know."

"What sort of signs?" I enquired.

"Generally they look at one another very often, and try to make excuses to get near the same chair, and hold each other's hands longer than is necessary for saying, 'How do you do?' or 'Good-bye.' And the girl blushes or gets very white; and the man, well—his eyes have a different *look* in them for her. And so it goes on and you hear they are engaged to be married. Then he gives her a ring,

and they are allowed to go about everywhere together, and people send her a lot of presents, and she has to buy quantities of new clothes. That is called a *trousseau*. When the clothes are all ready they get married, and then there is a big sort of day party, and a bride cake, and a great deal of fussing and crying. After that they go away together—the girl and the man. They are married, and people leave them to themselves. If you see them a few months after they seem quite different. They don't look into each other's eyes, or hold hands, or want to be alone without any third person. Neither do they seem happier for being married. Of course the girl pretends it is very grand to have a home of her own, and be her own house-keeper, and do just what she likes. But I often think she wishes herself back in the old home and in the old life. I know I shall never get married, and that makes me more interested in other people who want to be, or are. But I've only seen one really happy married couple. Silly ones—oh yes! But that's only pretending. By happy, I mean that they love each other so much that nothing makes any difference. Whether they are poor or rich, clever or stupid, wise or just ordinary, it is *there*—for them and about them. Death can't alter it, nor absence, nor misfortune. There is only one real love and one way of loving. Very few people know it, or have found it."

"How do you know all this, Ada?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I cannot say. It comes. It is told to me, or I dream it. Grandpapa and grandmamma love like that. They have never had a quarrel. They have never had a secret from each other, and my mamma loved my father so well that when he died it broke her heart. She could not live without him, not even for me. But I do not think your grand-parents are like that, Sâba. Not absolutely one in thought and feeling."

"Indeed they are not," said I.

"And your pretty aunt," she went on, "she is very unhappy, Sâba. I *feel* it when I am near her. There seems a dark cloud all around her. I think she might disperse it if she would, but she doesn't seem strong enough—alone. And *he*, the man we saw to-day, he is selfish and thinks too much of his own feelings, his own sorrows. So they are divided. That is how it came to me,"

"And you can't explain *why*?"

"No; there are so many strange things in life, things we just take as a matter of course, but cannot explain. We don't know why we sleep, or the *exact* moment we become unconscious of this life and the everyday things about us. We don't know *why* we wake suddenly from a dream, and can't go back to it, however hard we try. We don't know *why* we love some people and shrink away from others. We don't know why certain music sends the blood thrilling in our veins and lifts us up to heaven, and other kinds make us laugh, or weary us with dulness. If we only begin to *think* about things, there is mystery in them all, even the simplest. I have often asked grown-up people questions and they cannot answer them; they try to put me off by saying, 'Oh, nonsense, child, you mustn't talk about such things!' or, 'You'll know when you're older.' But they are older and they don't know."

"I have given up asking questions," I said hopelessly. "No one will tell me the *real* things, the deep things. And I'm generally punished for curiosity, or impertinence, because I want to understand. It's no use saying, 'things have always been so and so, and always will be.' I want to know *why*. I was dreadfully punished once because I asked mamma how evil could be in the world if God hadn't made it, for the Bible says He made everything. So He must have made the serpent wicked. And if that was so, poor Eve wasn't to blame, for evil is a far stronger power than good. Anyone can do wrong, or *think* wrong quite easily. But it is very hard to do right—don't you think so?"

"I think people make it hard for us," she said. "If only they loved us really, and had patience and explained, we should not ever be naughty. We would not want to deceive if we were trusted; nor tell a lie if we were not so afraid of being punished for the truth. Neither would we want our own way, and get into tempers if only we were shown how beautiful unselfishness is, and how foolish it seems to get into a rage, because, after all, it doesn't bring what we want any nearer. You see, Sâba, grandmamma brought me up, and that was how she did it; I used to feel ashamed of being naughty because it grieved and hurt her so much. And now it seems quite easy to obey, and to trust and to be truthful."

"You are lucky, Ada," I said bitterly. "Besides, it seems natural to you to be good."

"Oh no! indeed, it isn't. But it has been made so easy and pleasant for me. Then, you see, I have always the Voice—and mamma."

I looked thoughtfully at her. We had not spoken on these subjects since our first allusion to them. I had soon discovered that Ada was a creature of pure impulse. When a certain thing occurred to her she said it, or did it. When she was what her grandmamma called "normal," she was as childish and simple as any child of her age has a right to be. To-day, however, as we sat in the dusk, and talked more and more seriously, I felt more than ever impressed by her strange views of life and her knowledge of its inner mysteries. That she should have discovered Aunt Theo's love affair astonished me, and brought down some of my own conceit in my superior perspicuity. For Ada had never seen Captain Elmore before that afternoon, and had scarcely seemed to notice him or my aunt. Yet she had read their secret, despite all my interest and eagerness to know more. I never confessed to what I had heard, or what Aunt Theo had said. It seemed altogether too sacred and too personal for discussion.

Presently old Mrs. Kirkmann came up and joined us. She talked in her sweet, wise way of those sacred mysteries amongst which she lived, and which always seemed of so much more importance than ordinary material affairs. Yet she asked a great deal about our shopping and what I thought of London's West End glories. She also told me I must come to Ada's Christmas-tree party on Christmas Eve.

I had never been to a child's party, and I had no suitable frock, neither could I dance. But these objections seemed very insignificant to Mrs. Kirkmann. She said grandmamma would soon get a frock made for me, and that the children played games as well as danced. In fact, she would not hear of a "No," and had brought a written invitation for me to show my mother and grand-parents.

I began to quake. I asked myself if my conduct of late had been all that was desirable. Perhaps I should not have come in with Ada this special afternoon without permission. Sometimes Aunt Theo's authority was snubbed and set at naught. I had not thought of that at the time. The idea of a "party," a real Christmas party, was enchanting. I had heard of such events and seen pictures

of them. They seemed a sort of idealised fairy tale to me.

Would I be permitted to join this one, or would it be an occasion for denial, as discipline to my wayward nature ?

I think Mrs. Kirkmann read my silence and hesitation aright. "You are very lonely, dear, are you not ? And you don't look very happy. Of course you have been brought up more strictly than Ada. One cannot expect everybody to feel or think alike on such an important matter. But I wish you would try and take a brighter outlook ; not be in such bondage to your surroundings. The spirit is always free. Nothing can chain that. Try to live a certain portion of each day in a more spiritual atmosphere. Draw aloof, as it were, from the world, and think of nothing but beautiful and holy things. You can surround yourself with companionship that will keep you from loneliness, for there are many such companions waiting only to be admitted. They are, after all, only on the other side of the door—that door which we keep so rigidly closed and guarded, partly from fear, partly from ignorance. Ada knows of that door and so do I, and many, many others. I wish you could be brought to open it."

"Does it mean saying one's prayers ?" I asked abruptly, "because I can't do that."

Her mild eyes looked at me in surprise.

"Why not, Sâba ?" she asked.

I hung my head. It was hard to explain here and to her all that I had so glibly used to shock Aunt Theo. But I stammered out some of my doubts.

"How does one know—really ? Why is one part of the Bible said to be true and the other books not ? Who decided *what* was inspiration ? We have only Peter's word for the vision of the angel in prison, and yet it was Peter who lied, and denied his Master. Was it necessary for the Virgin Mary to have had a husband—yet for that husband not to be her child's father ? Why should the gate leading to destruction be so wide, and the one that led to heaven so narrow that few would be able to find it ? How could there be so many religions in the world and only *one* that was the right ? Would all the followers of all the others go to hell, because their choice had fallen on the wrong faith, or because a parent or a priest or a

teacher had brought them up to believe in it? How was it that the devil had so much more power in the world than God? That there were so many wicked people and so few good? Why were we told that God lived *alone* in heaven and yet that He had a son? Why could not Christ have had a spiritual mother as well as a spiritual Father? Why are the Commandments read every Sunday and broken every one of the six days following? Why have such wicked, cruel things been done in the name of religion and of God, and the Cross of Christ made an emblem of the most bigoted persecutions the world has ever known?

And so on and on, an endless stream of questions that flowed from my full heart to that other patient and comprehensive one.

She did not say I was wicked. She did not seem shocked as Aunt Theo had been shocked. She only bade me kneel quietly by myself in some quiet hour of day or night, and tell all this trouble to God. And one thing she said gave me great comfort, and yet it was so simple.

"The same Power that sent you into the world will take care of you while you remain in it, and after you leave it. This life is not all our existence. We have many others to know and to live, but we must be patient. Knowledge is not a thing of instinct. We close up our spiritual ears and shut our spiritual eyes and then we wonder that only one side of our nature hears, or sees, or understands. The less you think of this life," she went on, "the easier it will be to bear its sorrows and misfortunes. Life here is only our school-time, our preparation for a higher and nobler existence. All your questioning and perplexing only results in self-erected barriers—barriers that shut out the illuminating Light. I know of that Light, and so does Ada, and so do many other earth-bound souls. But to those who don't *wish* to know, and are groping in the darkness of material things we seem as visionaries and fools. We have gone one step beyond the ordinary boundary. To those who have not taken the step we cannot explain that there is one to take. If you had ever learnt anything of astronomy you would know that this earth, so wonderful to us, is but a small speck in all the myriad systems circling round it. It is a planet thrown into space, just as thousands of others have been thrown. The eye of man, with all the aids of science, has

not been able to pierce a tenth part of the heavens. So, also, the mind of man cannot, in its finite condition, realise the why and wherefore of creation or of man. That there is a Power behind the universe, all mankind must acknowledge. Of its nature, its meaning and its designs, human intelligence is profoundly ignorant. Yet we have teachers and messengers did we but choose to believe them ; to lend a willing ear to their guiding voices, instead of making this world and its vanities and follies the be-all of our existence."

" Then," I said suddenly, " we none of us understand life, because we fear death."

" Exactly. Our senses are so thickly veiled that this world and its concerns seem all that we call life. Christianity was a lesson the world needed, but that lesson has been so misinterpreted by man that its best and wisest truths have never reached us. Christ died the death of mortality to show mankind how simple a thing was death in comparison to the joys of immortality. But from that day to this it has been made an emblem of terror and woe. We profess to believe that the tired or sorrowing spirit has gone to some blessed place of rest, and yet we insult the very messenger who has issued the summons. No one fears death so much as religious people—I mean, of course, *professing* religious people. No class is so hard upon frailty, or temptation, or error. The Christian of to-day denies his Master as often and as vilely as Peter did. Yet, like Peter, he expects posterity to make him a saint, and accept through him the keys of salvation."

" Are you a Christian ? " I asked her simply.

She smiled. " If faith and love can make me so, I am," she answered ; " but I go to no special church, follow no special form of worship. I have been taught and told many things that I dare not repeat to the outside circle. I am happy and content because I have learnt the meaning of life and death. The one is Endeavour, the other, Release. Prayer is to me a communion of spirit with spirit, the outpouring of gratitude for all the mercies I have received. I ask nothing. That perpetual system of requests always seems to me the veriest proof of man's vanity and greed. The mind that framed the Litany was a mind of exalted selfishness. Nothing has been left unasked, or undesired. Gratitude for what is already ours finds no place in it. In like manner special prayers

and intercessions seem to me an affront. The desire of the ant for the removal of the mountain. Fixed laws and immutable laws cannot be changed at man's desire. His own sins have far-reaching consequences, and yet he asks that they should be averted. If you cut your finger, it bleeds ; if you fall into a furnace, you are burnt. Yet men and women sin deliberately, wickedly, knowingly, and expect to go unscathed."

I was silent. Her sweet, wise words had comforted me greatly. I resolved to question less of the incomprehensible, and try to open communion with the spiritual. Ada did, and she did. Perhaps I, too, might find an invisible comforter, some guardian power who would breathe the sweet counsel and make life less hard, and time less weary.

I went away that night with her last words ringing in my ears :

"Withdraw, and wait, and pray."

CHAPTER XII.

I LEFT the Kirkmanns' subdued and very thoughtful. A sense of the irrevocable was with me. I had frankly confessed my sins and in a measure eased my heart of a heavy burden. Still I was a long way from being satisfied. My questions were still unanswered. My doubts were only put away into temporary confinement. I had a dread of their springing out upon me again, the stronger for enforced seclusion. How I envied Ada her placid peace and content with life and the future. It seemed to me as if a wide gulf separated us ; that we were friends and confidantes only up to a certain point. Beyond that I could not follow her, and she could not understand me. As I rang for admission at grandpapa's door the memory of that experience I had just passed through came over me with a sense of the old bewilderment at being my commonplace self again. The re-adjustment of shaken faculties was not easy or immediate.

I remember Jane, the prim maid, asking me where my aunt was, and that it was quite a minute or more before I could recollect. Then I went slowly upstairs to remove my out-door clothes, and in doing so noticed that I held

in my hand Mrs. Kirkmann's letter to mamma. I turned aside to her room and knocked at the door. Her voice demanded who was there; hearing my reply she told me to come in.

I found her sitting before the looking-glass. Grandmamma's maid, Rachel, was doing her hair and arranging a wreath of artificial roses. She wore a loose wrapper, and lying on the bed was a wonderful Garibaldi bodice trimmed with blue ribbons, and a black silk skirt.

I stared at the unexpected sight.

"I am going to the Opera," she explained. "A friend of your grandpapa's has sent him a box. He and I and your grandmamma and aunt will go. We have to leave here at a quarter past seven. Tea will be a quarter of an hour earlier than usual. Where is your aunt? She hasn't much time to dress."

Her face was flushed and excited. I had not seen her look so well for a long time.

"Aunt Theo left me at Mrs. Kirkmann's. I had tea there," I said. "I think she went on to see Miss Tollemarche."

"Isn't she at home yet? You know how punctual your grandpapa is. He won't wait a moment. If she doesn't come soon we shall have to go without her. The box holds four, too!"

I knew nothing about theatres or "boxes." It seemed a funny name for seats. I remained silent, looking on at mamma's adornment, envying her finery a little, for party clothes always appealed to me. The silk dress was new, and rustled furiously. It was a present from grandmamma. The bodice was adjusted and drawn down and belted in just as I had seen Aunt Theo arrange hers. But the crowning glory of the toilet, to my wondering eyes, was an "opera cloak," as the maid called it—a brilliant scarlet *burnous* with a deep embroidered border of white silk flowers.

I was not quite satisfied as to the effect of the blue ribbons, the pink wreath on mamma's hair, and the brilliant scarlet of the cloak. But, of course, I did not say so. I was not supposed to have any opinions on dress, or the matter of selection.

I murmured admiration of the splendour of her appearance and the style of her hair dressing. Just then grandmamma came in, rustling in black *moiré antique*,

with lace stomacher, and a cap with pink roses and marabou feathers. She also carried a *burnous* over her arm. It was white, and of the same shape as mamma's, and embroidered with a similar border of embossed silk. She also wore a cameo brooch and earrings, a massive gold chain and a great many bracelets. She examined mamma critically and said some funny sounding Hindustani words. When she heard of Aunt Theo's absence she seemed much annoyed.

"She wouldn't have time to dress even if she came in now. She takes half an hour over her hair alone, for the evening, and it is just upon half-past six."

Her eyes fell on me. "Why not take Sâba?" she asked.

I felt my face flame. "Oh, *please*, grandmamma, might I come? I should love it beyond all things."

"I don't see why the child shouldn't come," went on grandmamma. "There is room for four, and, besides, Theo has seen 'Trovatore' already. I wonder if your grandpapa would mind?"

"But she hasn't a dress," interposed my mother. "I couldn't have her with us looking such a fright!"

"My blue silk," I faltered.

"And there's Miss Theo's little white cape that I altered for her. It would just do for Miss Sâba," suggested the maid. "I could get her ready in half an hour if you wish, ma'am."

"Let her come, Janie," urged grandmamma. "I will talk papa over."

Mamma gave very grudging permission. It was making me of too much consequence. But all the same, Rachel took consent for granted, and removed my hat and coat and did my hair. She tied it with scarlet velvet and slipped on the blue silk which stood for "best frock." Then she fetched the little white cape she had spoken of. It was of thick silky material with fringed edges and tassels and covered me from top to toe, but she pinned it and arranged it so that it merely touched the hem of my dress. I felt charmed with myself. There was a difficulty about gloves. I possessed none that were white, and my hands were too small for borrowed ones, either from grandmamma's or Aunt Theo's stock.

"You must keep your hands under your cloak," said grandmamma. "And as we shall be in a box no one will

see them. Now, come along and let us have tea. You see it would have been useless to wait for Theo."

Down we went into the dining-room and there entered grandpapa, in evening dress also. Swallow-tail coat, white tie, white gloves in his hand. Very pink and white and fresh he looked. I think he was not quite pleased with my contribution to the party. He eyed me critically and found the usual fault with my hair. Why wasn't it in a net instead of hanging about my shoulders, and why must I wear that ridiculous cloak? Finally, his thoughts were disturbed by Aunt Theo's appearance, and that of tea.

She looked very pale and tired. She said she would not have cared to go and was quite pleased I should take her place. Indeed, I saw relief in her face at the thought of an evening to herself.

I was trembling with excitement. I could eat nothing; even my weak tea seemed to choke me. I kept imagining something would happen to put off the actual happening of so great an event. That grandpapa would forbid it, or grandmamma change her mind. But at last the order was given to fetch a cab, and the maid brought shawls for us to cover up our heads, and grandpapa put on his Inverness cape and grumbled as usual at grandmamma's train, and tore some of the gathers out of mamma's new silk by treading on it. Then Aunt Theo kissed me tenderly and bade me enjoy myself as much as I could, and—we were off.

It seemed a long drive through the lighted streets and past the glittering shops all displaying their Christmas goods. The cab jolted so and the streets were so noisy that there was little conversation. I still felt that sense of wonder as to how all this had happened. I should not have been surprised to wake and find it all a dream. It was certainly a different method of spending the evening from that which I had proposed to myself. A quiet meditation over old Mrs. Kirkmann's advice. Here I was, thrilling with excitement, full of eager anticipation of some worldly pleasure. Everything serious and troublesome swept away into some remote corner of my mind.

An opera—singers, actors, and actresses; what would it all be like?

Small *blasé* children of this generation, who can date

theatrical knowledge with their second or third birthday, can form no conception of what this *first* experience was to me.

I had a bad habit of throwing away big feelings on even trivial incidents. But this was an occasion in my life. A red letter day. I could feel my cheeks glowing hotly and my heart seemed to beat in quite an abnormal fashion. But that excitement was nothing to what I felt when we were actually *in* the Opera House. I believe it was Her Majesty's, in the Haymarket. I know there were crowds passing in, and we went up a grand staircase, brilliantly lit, and then down passages and up other stairs and at last reached a little door, which an attendant opened. This was our "box." It seemed very high up, for when grandmamma told me to come to the front and look down at the "house," it was like looking down into a well. The orchestra seemed very far away. All around and about were other boxes, rows of them, and rows of seats right up to the ceiling. The ladies seemed beautifully dressed, and covered with jewels. But I wondered why they all threw off their opera-cloaks instead of keeping them round bare shoulders and arms in a public place. This was my first experience of "evening dress" and its permissible nudity. In later years I learnt that modesty has long been ousted by feminine vanity.

The orchestra was tuning up, so I was not permitted to stand and look about for very long. Grandmamma and mamma sat in the front of the box and grandpapa and I behind them. He faced the stage; I had only a side view of it. Presently a little fat man came forward and mounted to a high chair and gave two or three sharp taps on his music-desk with a stick.

This, grandpapa told me, was the conductor who led the orchestra and gave the *tempo* to the singers. Then came a sort of hush, quickly followed by a torrent of sound. The overture to "Trovatore" had commenced.

I had no conception of what an opera was like. I brought a perfectly unbiassed mind to bear upon it. I did not know what to expect, and my acquaintance with operatic excerpts as music consisted of the usual Verdi "selections," varied by Rossini's "Barbière" and "Gazza Ladra" arranged as duets.

The "Trovatore" music was no novelty; but it was

pleasant to hear the familiar airs rendered by a full band. They sounded less "tuney" and more important.

Then came the sublime moment. The curtain went up; the stage was thronged with figures. Voices burst into a riotous chorus. The opera had begun.

My first astonishment over, I sat very quiet, taking it all in as I took in everything new and unfamiliar. I was conscious of most vivid *disappointment*. Then of the absurdity of the performance. The company were all Italians. To me they seemed like so many mad people. They shouted and screamed; they came down to the footlights and shook their fists and made furious gestures supposed to represent rage, vengeance, love, rivalry—all the gamut of stage emotions. Now and then a splendidly-dressed personage would emerge and have the stage to himself or herself, and sing a solo, at the end of which the audience applauded loudly, and the singer would bow and smile and step forward and step backward and lay a hand on a heart, and *act* appreciation. I felt inclined to laugh. But when I looked at grand-mamma's attentive opera-glasses, and heard mamma murmur "Beautiful!" "Charming!" "What a treat to hear such music again!" I felt there must be something wrong with my "sixth sense" as far as operatic music was concerned.

When the first act was over grandpapa and my mother discussed different singers, and I heard names such as Jenny Lind, Lablache, Grisi, Mario, Patti. At that time they conveyed nothing to me. The "star" of this particular night was a lady with a very high and piercing soprano, and I date my hatred of the soprano voice from what she made me endure, especially where trills were concerned. The "Anvil" chorus and the "*Ah, che la morte*" stand out in my memory as alone redeeming the performance from unintelligibility. By that time I was yawning and weary, and making up my mind that I would never willingly witness this special opera again.

I have kept my word. First impressions have a great deal to do with after enthusiasms. I have seen other operas since that night. I have also learnt that to the English mind opera means listening to an expensive singer, either male or female, and the opportunity of showing off diamonds.

As an entirety, as a consistent intelligible stage picture

or drama, or comedy, opera had no meaning until Richard Wagner appeared on the scene, and with his giant force broke up preconceived ideas and traditions; wedded drama to noble music, and made his singers *act* instead of merely gesticulate and shout. But thirty years ago "Tannhäuser" had not been heard out of Germany and the "Niebelung Trilogy" still slumbered in the brain of music's great chieftain.

People went season after season to "Lucia" and "Traviata" and "Somnambula," and the "Trovatore." The "Huguenots" was played very seldom, and "Le Prophète," that worthy forerunner of Gounod's and Wagner's masterpieces, also knew but a limited number of productions. Probably these works taxed the acting powers of the singers more severely than the light florid Italian school. Beethoven, Meyerbeer, Glück, were all giants in their way. They exacted the full penalty of art. Arias, trills, roulades, were but ornamentation. These composers went deeper, and suffered for it, as all the best and noblest artists do suffer. It is the penalty of being wiser and greater than one's fellows.

It was while listening to the sad strains of "*Ah, che la morte,*" that my thoughts wandered back to that afternoon and to Mrs. Kirkmann's last words, "*Withdraw, Wait and Pray.*"

That plaintive air, the cry for the "quiet grave" touched my wandering fancies; soothed my impatience.

I could not see the stage nor did I wish to do so. The house was dark and quiet. Only the music sounded on, and the two voices wailed their joint misery. And suddenly something spoke to my heart; I felt tears well up and fill my eyes. Then a deep peace seemed to flow on and about me, like a quiet stream. Behind those voices I heard, as it were, another voice—strangely sweet and half divine it seemed. My eyes closed. I tasted for once perfect happiness and *rest*. On flowed the stream; the two melodies were as one and yet I could discern them and separate them. Life and Death; Here and Hereafter; Present and Future; so throbbed the mystery of that strange duet. Harmonies divine and unreachable were in it; great secrets of untranslatable sound. If only I could have fathomed the meaning of that moment! Could have had faith sufficient to trust to a whispered guidance. But there came a change. Silence. Then a storm of

clapping and the bathos of an attempted "encore." I heard grandpapa's voice saying it was very late and we need not wait for the end.

There was a pushing back of chairs, a wrapping up in shawls and rustling of silks; then the box door opened and we were once more reading the prose of everyday life.

“What did you think of it, child?” asked grandmamma, when we were at last settled in a cab and jolting homewards.

For a moment a wild idea of saying what I *had* thought came over me, but I deemed it prudent to be less than frank. “It was wonderful,” I said. And I said it with sufficient meaning to satisfy my elders that I had been duly impressed.

We found a cold supper laid for us in the dining-room when we reached home. The parlour-maid said Miss Theo had gone to bed.

Grandmamma and mamma declared themselves ravenous and attacked chicken and tongue with unanimous fervour. I was permitted to share the feast, despite grandpapa's declarations that supper was unwholesome, that we would all have nightmare, and that we ought to follow his Spartan example and content ourselves with home-made cake and a glass of water. I noted that he took sandwiches and port wine on this occasion.

I was sent off to bed as soon as I had finished a slice of chicken and tongue, and some jelly. It was as I was wishing them all good-night that I remembered Mrs. Kirkmann's invitation, and also that her letter had been left somewhere in my mother's room.

I expected a scolding for such carelessness, nor was my expectation unverified. Neither would my mother say if I might accept the invitation. Naturally the question of dress was immediately mooted, upon which grandpapa raised a storm of “Tut-tuts,” and gave a lecture on women's extravagance and vanity; combining his remarks with indirect allusions to the wasting of gas, and the more objectionable consequences of late hours. I escaped gladly from it all.

What an existence! I thought. What narrow-mindedness! What a determination to create discomfort and annoyance when all might have been peace and content! How different was this household from that of the

Kirkmanns'. Yet all its inmates were baptized and regenerate Christians. Intelligent beings, favoured by fortune and circumstance. Church-goers; readers of the Word of God; proclaiming with every day the doctrines of Charity and Goodwill, yet perpetually falsifying by actions the meanings of their words.

Strange life! Strange world! Strange blindness of humanity to its best instincts and its own defects! All this self-wrought misery to ourselves and our fellows; to the little lives God gives us to bring up, and teach of Him; to the graver responsibilities of duty; to the real meaning of existence as preparation, not as finality.

Often and often have I gone back in thought and in torture of memory to those early days of which I write. Often and often have I wondered why, with all to make life pleasant, blessed, and peaceful, these people wilfully troubled the clear pool, and then blamed others that the waters were muddy and undrinkable. Did I judge them wrongly? I was young and ignorant, and my own nature was a strangely self-tormenting one. So much I know now. But what I set down in detail is no whit exaggerated. The world was made a place of purgatory and penance to me, and yet those who made it so were only actuated by a sense of "doing their duty."

Poor Duty! How many sins too grievous to be borne are laid to thy charge, and shall be laid to it until the scroll of earth's years is rolled up, reckoned, and judged!

CHAPTER XIII.

It was to Aunt Theo I owed the grudging permission, at last obtained, to accept the Kirkmanns' invitation. It was Aunt Theo who bought yards of "grenadine," to me as "white samite, mystic, wonderful," and by help of Rachel cut and sewed and manufactured a frock such as my wildest dreams had never conjured up; a full, tucked, airy skirt; a bodice in which lace and ribbon were cunningly interwoven; a sash of scarlet ribbon, broad and flowing. Aunt Theo it was who lent me a treasured pair of white silk stockings, relic of school parties. Aunt Theo who dressed me and did my hair, and assured me I was not quite the ugly duckling I had believed myself.

I hugged her enthusiastically. "If only you were coming, too!" said I.

She smiled. "What should I do at a child's party? I am getting old, dear. I haven't the spirit for romps and amusements now."

"Old? You!" I scoffed, for it seemed to me she could never be that—never anything but the beautiful, graceful, wonderful creature who had so fascinated my childish eyes from the first moment of our acquaintance.

She changed the conversation by saying I must come and show myself to the others before starting. The party was from five to nine o'clock. Grandpapa had gone out, but grandmamma and my mother and Mrs. Vandrupp were all in the morning-room working at Christmas presents—embroidery and wool mats, bead pincushions, and screens and footstool covers. I was aware of their astonishment when they saw me, and very annoyed when Mrs. Vandrupp pinched my cheeks and declared Aunt Theo must have used some of her "paint" on them. Cold water and excitement had supplied that unwonted carmine for me. I scarcely knew myself with such glowing roses and bright eyes.

"Take great care of your frock," said grandmamma; "you will have to wear it to-morrow, you know. We shall be quite a large party. You will meet some new relations."

I felt curious. More relations! How many I seemed to possess! Would these be of the same order as were grandmamma and grandpapa?

"I wish you had chosen any other colour but scarlet, Theo," observed my mother disparagingly. "I dislike it so much. It is so *loud*, and also so unbecoming for children."

"Unbecoming—to Sába!" Aunt Theo looked at her and then at me, and laughed. "Why, my dear Janie, it is just her colour. All dark people should wear brilliant hues—scarlet, orange, salmon-pink, chestnut browns, creams, yellow; never mauves, or blues, or greys. She looks a gipsy, I grant, but she can't help her oriental type."

"But I am Scotch," said I, imprudently.

There was a moment of cold silence. Then grandmamma suggested I should be wrapped up in shawls as the night was cold, and that Jane should go round to the

Kirkmanns' with me, and call for me at nine o'clock. "And mind you don't keep her waiting," she concluded, "for to-morrow she will have a great deal to do."

I promised obedience, and having given and received a frosty kiss, slipped gladly from the room. Aunt Theo saw that I was warmly wrapped up and had india-rubber shoes slipped over my new white ones. Then Jane took my hand and hurried me round the corner to my first party. Two or three cabs were driving off. Small figures were hurrying in and being relieved of wraps. The dining-room door was open and showed a long table laden with all sorts of dainties for tea. Presently I was being kissed and admired by Ada and her grandparents, and found myself placed near Mrs. Kirkmann, who presided over the urn. I looked down the table at the strange faces—prim little girls with hair elaborately crimped, or tied up in "door knocker" fashion; pink frocks, and blue frocks, and white frocks; small uncomfortable-looking boys with large collars and short jackets, and an air of martyrdom brought about by the proximity of girls, and the consciousness of Sunday clothes.

But after tea and buns, and cakes and bread and butter and jam had been liberally dispensed, tongues began to unloose and faces lost their frigidity.

An adjournment was then made to the drawing-room. There stood the Christmas tree in all its glory—the Christmas tree whose acquaintance I had only made through "Andersen's Fairy Tales."

The children shouted and clapped their hands and danced about, but their ecstasy reached a climax when old Mr. Kirkmann, in the garb of Santa Claus appeared, and began to unload the tree of its treasures and hand them round the circle. With every gift there came a joke or jesting remark from the kindly old giver, and the merry voices, the laughter, the dancing feet, the bright excited faces made up a pretty picture—one that illustrates my first English Christmas with its pleasantest memory.

After the tree was stripped we played games—"musical chairs," "blind man's buff" and "forfeits." Then Miss Sharpe (who was there also) went to the piano and began to play a polka, and soon all the little boys were jumping about, each with a little girl who held his hands, and tried to keep step with him, and there was much hopping, and bumping, and getting into each other's way, and tripping

each other up. Dance followed dance; the noise was deafening. I did not join in the amusement, but sat near the piano, and watched them with a new sense of what childhood might be. Ada moved amidst them like a fairy. She was all in white, and looked lovely, and seemed the gayest of all there. Yet I thought to myself she is the same Ada who knows so much of that other side of life; who has no fear of going away from this pleasant world, made so loving and so pleasant for her; who talks to me in that wise, strange way of hers when we sit alone in the firelit dusk. I was losing myself in thoughts of her and her strange two-sided existence when Mrs. Kirkmann's voice sounded in my ear.

"Såba," she said, "I am going to ask you to do something. You say you don't care to dance, and they are all very hot and excited now. I want them to rest and get cool before they go home. Will you play something for us? Your grandmamma has told me how wonderfully you play. I am very anxious to hear you."

I rose from my chair. It never occurred to me to make excuses or pretences. Besides, there seemed nothing in what she wanted. I could recollect music almost as easily as I could read it. I sat down to the piano, only wondering what sort of music they would like. A good many faces turned my way as I began to strike chords in an absent fashion; girls' faces, not boys'. *They* were occupied in jostling each other and administering sly kicks and nudges, or bursting into unexpected fits of laughter over some private jokes of their own. After a moment or two I commenced Weber's "Invitation to the Waltz." When I had ended Mrs. Kirkmann came up to me with tears in her eyes.

"My child," she said tenderly, "you are, indeed, blessed with a wonderful gift. I had no idea you could play like *that*—and with no notes."

"I seldom require notes when I have once learnt a piece of music," I said. "I was very well taught," I added. "The lady who taught me played most beautifully. I often wish I could hear some one here, some professional pianist, so as to compare with her."

"Your grandpapa will find you a great acquisition," said Miss Sharpe. "I hear he is very enthusiastic about music and engages professionals every week for quartet practise."

"Yes," said I. "Sometimes I have to play with them."

"Do you have lessons now?" enquired Mrs. Kirkmann.

I told her I did, and of my teacher, and of the many hours' practice daily desired by grandpapa. But by this time the young gentlemen and ladies of the party were growing restless and clamouring for another game, so we left music alone, and for once in my life I had a thorough good romp, forgetful of my new frock and its filmy treacheries. It suffered considerably, for I had quite forgotten that it was to do duty at the grown-up Christmas party next day. In fact, I was running here and there and laughing and shouting quite uproariously, when with a sudden shock I beheld standing in the doorway—grandpapa!

His hat was in his hand; he wore the now familiar Inverness cape. His eyes fixed me with stony amazement, and seemed to hold a threat of reprisals. My boy partner in the romp had caught hold of my sash and was twisting it around himself and around me as I stood petrified there. Then kind Mrs. Kirkmann hurried up and welcomed grandpapa with Christmas greetings, and told him how I had enjoyed myself and how I had astonished them all with my playing. Meanwhile Ada rescued me from my boisterous playmate and tied my sash and whispered not to look so scared. That grandpapa had only come in to see them, as it was Christmas Eve, according to custom. But my pleasure was all over. I felt conscious only of my crumpled frock, my tumbled hair, my general appearance of "hoyden," instead of "young lady."

The prim, shy Sába Macdonald of Pembroke Square was certainly a contrast to the noisy romp revealed to grandpapa's shocked eyes. Doubtless I should hear enough of that hoyden, I thought. Nor was I mistaken. Grandpapa stayed but a few moments chatting with the Kirkmanns while I was being wrapped up for the short walk home. Then he came down into the hall and asked if I was ready. My heart sank at the tone of his voice; it meant I was in disgrace. Old Mr. Kirkmann begged him to come into the dining-room and have a glass of wine, but he refused.

"You know my rule," he said, "never anything between

meals. That is the way to keep health—regularity, my dear sir, and temperance. Every man's health is in his own hands. I am never ill; I never need a doctor, and why? Because I eat only what is plain and wholesome. I observe strict punctuality in all the actions and duties of life. Suppers I never touch. They are unwholesome and prevent sleep. And now good-night. My granddaughter should be in bed by this time. Quite against rules that she should be up after nine o'clock."

"But at Christmas time you surely make an exception?" said Mr. Kirkmann.

"Certainly not; a rule is a rule. It is made once for all—at least, by me. Now come along, child; what are you waiting for?"

I was, of course, waiting for him. I gave my hand to Mr. Kirkmann, who kissed me warmly, and said again that my music was wonderful, quite a gift. Then he opened the door for grandpapa. "Don't forget about the fifth," he said, as they shook hands. "And bring Mrs. Heavysage and your daughter, if they would like to come. I think it will be a particularly interesting evening."

Grandpapa said he would ask them. "But my wife doesn't take much interest in these matters," he added. "However, I shall certainly be here. I am anxious to meet Mr. Hallam."

"He is wonderful," said Ada's grandfather in a low, serious voice. "But then he lives a life apart, one given up entirely to spiritual and esoteric matters."

Grandpapa nodded, and hurried off, I following him along the slippery pavement with some difficulty.

He did not address a word to me until we were in the hall and I was unwinding my shawls and wraps. Then he said slowly, "Go into the dining-room, and wait there until I come in."

I obeyed in silence, my nerves all a-flutter as was usual when anyone spoke angrily to me. I found Mrs. Vandrupp still there. She was sipping port wine negus, preparatory to facing the frosty night air. Grandmamma and my mother had each their usual cake and wine on the table. They all turned to look as I entered.

"Your frock!" exclaimed grandmamma.

"What *have* you been doing, Sâba?" echoed mamma.

"Oh! naughty leetle gel!" said Mrs. Vandrupp. "Her pret-ty, pret-ty frock, it is quite spoilt."

"I was only playing games," I said. "But the boys were very rough."

"It is very well to blame the other children," said mamma. "But I know what a tomboy you are, and how utterly you forget proper behaviour when you are left to yourself. However, since this is the state you come home in, *this* is the last Christmas party you shall go to. Remember that."

On the words entered grandpapa. I hung my head and began to tremble. I was in for it now. Certainly my behaviour as described at the unfortunate moment of his entry left nothing to the imagination.

"I was shocked and disgusted," he concluded. "My grandchild was the noisiest, rudest, worst-behaved of any child there! If you had seen her," he turned to mamma, "her face like a blowsy flower-girl's, her hair all rough and wild, her dress crumpled and torn, and she herself *wrestling*—yes, positively *wrestling*—with a great lout of a boy, who was shouting at the top of his voice! Other little girls were sitting on chairs and behaving decently and as young ladies should behave; but Sâba——!"

He made a gesture expressive of the poverty of words to describe my enormities, and turned to the table and poured himself out a glass of wine.

For a moment or two I seemed to be listening to a chorus of reproach and sarcasm. It was too much for my powers of self-restraint. Coming after the enjoyment and freedom of that delicious evening, it was doubly hard. No one seemed to pity my ignominy, nor excuse a little outbreak into natural childish enjoyment. At last it was too much to bear. My heart seemed to swell up; tears rushed to my eyes. I burst into a fit of wild sobbing and rushed out of the room. Flinging myself on my own bed I gave way to unrestrained grief. Was I never to have a pleasure without its being spoilt by injustice? Could I never present myself free from misrepresentation to those "set in authority over me"?

Presently Aunt Theo's voice was in my ears, her hand on my buried head.

"Sâba, child, whatever is the matter? Why are you crying like this?"

I tried to control myself and explain. I tried to tell her that I was for once blameless under severe displeasure of those dreaded "elders."

She soothed and comforted me in her usual tender, understanding fashion. Consoled me for the tumbled frock by an assurance that grenadine "ironed out beautifully," and that the sash was only in need of the same treatment to be as good as ever. That to cry over a scolding was childish work for a maiden in her "teens." That my own sense of *not* deserving rebuke should help me to put up with it. That it was best to forget it all and undress and go to bed.

"Besides," she added, "to-morrow will be Christmas Day—your first English Christmas. No one will have the heart to scold you or bring up this evening's little trouble. Come, wipe your eyes, and let me take off this finery. I am sorry your first party should have been spoilt by its conclusion."

I rose and stood up, and let her unfasten the hooks and eyes which it had been such a joy to fasten. It was some little time before I could regain my self-control. But at last the sobs ceased to shake me, and the tears to well up in my hot, indignant eyes. Still, I could not forget how my first really *great* pleasure had been spoiled for me. Now, in after years, when I look back on that party, I must look back also on unjust rebukes and harsh misjudgment.

"Never mind; it can't last always." Aunt Theo had said that, and it had comforted me. It couldn't last always. Perhaps only a few years at most, and then I could live my own life. I should be free from tyranny and thralldom. I had been starved of love, of every simple, natural, childish joy. I was like a cripple in irons, who yet knows that his limbs are strong and free if only he might use them. I seemed to have no set place in anyone's affection as Ada had. No one wanted me and no one would miss me.

Oh, the dreary, narrow little life! How its memory hurts me even now! For nothing can make amends for the wrongs of childhood. Nothing can restore the simple, innocent joys it craved, and craved in vain. The dull misery of my early years confronts me through every page of its records. Shows me the lonely child writing these records—writing and writing, and sometimes asking God to let her have one happy day. Only one, that held no cold looks, no scoldings, no thwarted plans. She had had thirteen years of such things. Was it any wonder she was tired?

* * * * *

When I was undressed and quiet again I threw my arms about Aunt Theo and held her tight. "Oh! I love you! You are the only one who is good and kind, and *understands!* Oh! what shall I ever do if you go away from me?"

She said nothing, only kissed me softly, and stroked the thick hair back from my forehead. Then I crept into bed, and laid my hot and aching head upon the pillow. Aunt Theo took the candlestick and went away. As she stood a moment in the doorway, I heard my mother's voice; she was coming up the stairs.

"Don't go in," pleaded Aunt Theo, "the poor child is tired out. She has cried herself to sleep."

"*Cried*—what a baby! Has she told you about her behaviour? I am quite ashamed of her, and her grand-papa is so annoyed. Really, I have had nothing but worry about that child. I'm often sorry I brought her home."

"She hasn't done anything so dreadful," said Aunt Theo. "A Christmas romp—what of it? Have you quite forgotten what it is to be young, Janie?"

"She was rude and boisterous, and her dress is quite spoilt."

"I gave her the dress," said my aunt quietly. "And even if it was spoilt (which it isn't), I would not have let that fact spoil her first party for her. Childhood is brief enough, and the years that come after are none too sweet. We might surely let Sâba have her little hour of happiness."

She closed the door and I heard no more. But I slipped out of bed and knelt on the cold floor and once again I found I could pray. It was for Aunt Theo I prayed. That God would be good to her and make her happy, and reward her for all her kindness to me.

I could *do* nothing, only love her and commend her to the care of One who, I was told, was Love itself. But that I could pray once more showed me that the foundations of my disbelief were not so sure as I had fancied, and I fell asleep comforted and at peace.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHRISTMAS morning! My first English Christmas. I woke to a glint of cold sunshine as Jane drew up the blind and clattered the hot-water can. She wished me "a merry Christmas," and I rubbed my sleepy eyes and said "thank you," but quite forgot to return the wish.

Christmas hitherto had meant scorching heat, brazen skies, the thermometer at ninety degrees in the shade. To-day I shivered even under my warm blankets. I wished I had not to get up and dress; and above all plait my rebellious locks into a becoming tidiness before facing the breakfast-table.

Then the remembrance that I was in disgrace rushed back to me. I lay there blinking at that sunshine, wondering if it was very cold, wishing I had not to go to church, as Aunt Theo had said I must. Wondering, also, if I should hear any more of that party and my conduct.

Christmas as a festive season, a time of hospitality, gaiety and enjoyment had no meaning for me. It held neither delusions nor memories as yet.

Fireside joys, such as Dickens had written of, Yule-logs, Christmas trees, Christmas fare, were things with which I had no acquaintance. But grandmamma had said there was to be a party of relations and friends, and that we were all to dine at six o'clock instead of two. I wondered why grandpapa had relaxed his rule, but I wondered still more how I was to pass the long hours of a day that began with church, and wound up with a late dinner of turkey and plum-pudding to be partaken of in the company of strangers!

At last I made up my mind to get up or I should fall into fresh disgrace by not being ready for breakfast. I was nearly dressed when the door opened and Rachel, the maid, looked in. She carried a frock over her arm—a new frock of tartan plaid; a wonderful frock trimmed

with rows and rows of deep black velvet, with a lace "tucker" at the throat.

"A present from your grandmamma, miss, and you're to put it on for breakfast," said Rachel.

I tried to look grateful but I felt convinced that a tartan of red and yellow and green mixture would not suit me. However, I submitted to "trying on," and to being pulled and twisted, and hooked-and-eyed. I was so cold that I only longed to get down to the fire. I shook myself impatiently out of Rachel's hands.

"Oh, that will do!" I exclaimed. "Nothing will make me look any better."

"Hadn't you best put on one of your 'olland huprons, miss," she suggested. "I think that colour's a bit trying; leastwise, to one who hasn't a good complexion."

"Who could have a good complexion in such bitter cold?" I answered, shivering and rubbing my blue trembling fingers together. "Is it always like this in winter?"

"Like *this!*" She smiled. "Wait till you see the h'icles on the windows, and the water all frozen in your jug. Then you *may* talk of cold, miss."

I put on the holland apron, which had a bib and straps over the shoulders and partly hid the bilious colouring of the frock. Then I ran off to knock at Aunt Theo's door. My first Christmas kiss should certainly be hers.

A fresh surprise awaited me. She drew me into her room and showed me *her* present—a lovely box of fine white handkerchiefs, worked with my initials in her own beautiful embroidery.

Then, for the first time, I remembered I had no gifts for anyone. I had not thought of such a thing. In Australia no one took any special notice of Christmas, at least, not where I had lived. Besides, I never had any money here, and no one had hinted at my preparing personal souvenirs of any sort. I told all this to Aunt Theo, but she only laughed and said it didn't matter. Children were not expected to give presents to their elders. Then she criticised my new frock, and I felt sure she shared my opinion as to its becomingness.

"I expect mamma chose it," I said.

"But be sure and thank your grandmamma!" she exclaimed hastily. "And don't forget to wish them all a 'happy Christmas.'"

"Grandpapa too?" I asked.

"Of course. It is the custom here. I hope they will all have forgotten about last night. The presents will distract them, perhaps."

"Oh, may I see——"

But the inexorable bell answered that request and she hastily snatched up some parcels and hurried down stairs, I at her heels.

There they were. Grandpapa standing on the hearth-rug, back to the fire, coat-tails outspread, effectually screening the blaze from anyone else; grandmamma at the coffee-making; my mother with a shawl about her shoulders, looking as sallow and blue as myself.

I went first to grandmamma and gave her greeting, and thanked her for the frock. Then I turned to the household autocrat. He surveyed me sternly. "You have not yet asked my forgiveness, or expressed contrition for your behaviour last night," he said.

I stammered out that I was very sorry, and hoped he would overlook the occurrence, upon which he gave me a frosty peck, and then put his hand into his waistcoat pocket and produced half-a-crown.

"I had intended to give you half-a-sovereign," he observed, "but I feel you deserve some punishment for your very improper conduct; also for the disrespectful manner in which you left the room last night. Had this not been Christmas Day, I should certainly have ordered you to stay in your room all day, and have nothing but bread and water. However, as it is the season of peace and goodwill, I am prepared to look over your fault on this occasion. Only let it not occur again."

I had colour enough now. My very ears were scarlet. I longed to throw the half-crown away. It seemed to burn my palm as I held it. However, I slipped it into my pocket and took my accustomed place at the table. Fortunately, no one took any more notice of me. There were presents to be looked at, and letters to read (Christmas cards were unknown then), and the thrice-blessed Indian mail had come in and Aunt Eliza's affairs came under discussion. I and my misdemeanours were apparently forgotten.

It was nearly ten o'clock before we left the breakfast-table. Grandpapa announced that he would be ready for church at a quarter to eleven, and took himself off

to his own room, where he dispensed Christmas gifts to the servants to the tune of a sovereign each. Evidently they had not committed misdemeanours, or come under his royal displeasure.

We gathered round the fire. Grandmamma had no housekeeping duties that morning; they had been arranged the previous day. But she and Aunt Theo produced certain gifts which I heard were to be the ultimate possession of a certain "Margaret and Maria," and the "old General." I wondered if these were the new relatives of whom I had heard. But I kept my curiosity to myself. I was only too thankful to linger in a warm corner, unnoticed and unspoken to.

Suddenly there was an argument between grandmamma and my mother. The latter declared she would not go to church. It was too cold and she did not feel well enough.

"Your papa will be very annoyed," said grandmamma. "He expects everyone to attend morning service on Christmas Day."

"I cannot help it. I should never be able to sit out the service," answered my mother.

I wondered what was her mysterious ailment. She had been able to face the cold night air in thin garments, and to sit out a long opera only a few nights before. Yet to put on warm clothing and attend Divine Service was too great a tax on her strength.

I suppose I ought not to have had such thoughts, but I have apologised already for my bad habit of criticising my elders, and wondering at various inconsistencies in the matter of what they did themselves and what they expected others to do.

Mamma gained her point, of course. Exactly at the quarter to eleven we all assembled. Grandmamma in rustling *moiré*, velvet cape, a sable boa and muff, and a wonderful new bonnet; Aunt Theo in her favourite brown silk and black velvet jacket and ermine; Sâba Macdonald in her new "plaid" frock, and the jacket and hat described aforetime—the effect enhanced now by an ermine muff and tippet.

The said Sâba Macdonald was particularly meek and unobtrusive. She shrank modestly behind the voluminous skirts of her elders. She was perfectly content to be overlooked, if not forgotten. Perhaps she chuckled inwardly over certain excuses made for the invalid mother,

being a heartless little wretch, and possibly envious of the delights of a quiet morning over a book and a blazing fire—things preferable to church and the long service to her unregenerate soul! Also she was nursing a secret project in her heart; a dire delightful piece of revenge that should have all the appearance of virtue.

At last we were off and out in the cold frosty sunlight; in the slippery, frozen streets. The Square looked bare and desolate; a place of frozen grass plots and gravelled walks and leafless trees. A few shrubs relieved its grim formality, and from a holly-tree bright with berries came a robin's merry chirp. I trotted along by Aunt Theo's side, my hands in my muff, my breath forming little clouds on the frosty air. "Is winter always like this?" I asked her. She assured me this weather was mild and seasonable in comparison with what English winters could be.

People were hurrying along. Bells were ringing. It was certainly Sunday morning over again, though this was a Thursday sandwiched between two Sundays. (A week of Sundays, I said to myself.) Cheery greetings were given as friends recognised or met each other. Everyone looked, or tried to look, as if they were happy and in good spirits and enjoying the return of the festive season.

The church for which we were bound was called St. Simon's. I had already attended service there on every Sunday morning since I had arrived in England. It was a dark church with galleries all round and a large stained-glass window at the back of the communion table. ("Altar" was not in general use as yet.) There were generally two officiating clergymen—the vicar and a curate. The vicar was a young, clean-shaven man, with dark hair brushed well off his brows and worn rather long, a supercilious expression and an affected manner. The curate was elderly and mild of aspect, with a rich, full-toned voice. I stared at the decorations of the church; the wreaths and garlands of holly, the flowers and evergreens. I had never seen anything like it before, nor did I know its reason.

acc. We filed into grandpapa's pew; first grandmamma, then my aunt, then myself, then my grandfather. I spent more time in criticising the decorations and the number of new bonnets than in listening to the service. Have I not frankly stated that these were my unregenerate days?

But towards sermon time I was conscious of a general thrill of excitement, not only in our pew but in the church generally. Looks were exchanged; voices whispered. Heads were raised, and eyes were gazing all in one direction. Grandpapa coughed loudly as he always did when he disapproved of anything. Aunt Theo whispered to grandmamma. I caught the words, "*He has forgotten to change his surplice!*"

Then I discovered the secret of all this commotion. The Rev. Arthur Rattley had always, up to this special occasion, preached in the orthodox black gown. This morning he marched direct from the Communion Table to the pulpit in the white surplice of "Morning Prayers."

It was a startling innovation. No one was prepared for it. I heard that some of the congregation put it down to forgetfulness (Mr. Rattley had acquired a reputation for eccentricity). Some, more enlightened as to the growing advance of a new order of ritual, spoke of "the thin edge of the wedge." In any case, the unorthodox proceeding disturbed everyone, more or less. Grandpapa was one of those whom it disturbed "more." He grew red; he puffed; he grunted as if he was tormenting his long-suffering 'cello; he shook his head; he averted his eyes. He was, I felt sure, composing remonstrance and objection, and considering the advisability of changing his place of worship!

At the conclusion of the sermon the reverend gentleman announced that there would be a collection for church expenses. At that period collections were not the tax upon *every* service that they have since become. Only special occasions called for them, and open plates were handed round. Grandmamma had told me there would be a collection this morning as it was Christmas Day, and that information was the origin of my contemplated revenge for the unjust treatment of the previous night. The hymn was in full swing, the plates were coming round. I heard money rattling gaily. Suddenly grandpapa bent down to me. "Tell your aunt and grandmamma they are to give nothing," he said in a semi-audible whisper. "I will not countenance Popery!"

There was no need for me to repeat that message. Aunt Theo's scarlet face and grandmamma's perplexed one showed that they had heard it. Worst of all, the clergy-

man's own wife occupied the seat in front of us, and she turned round and gave grandpapa a most indignant look.

The plate came round. It began at grandmamma's end of the pew ; she passed it to Aunt Theo, who dropped in a shilling defiantly. Then it came to me. I took that half-crown grandpapa had given me from my muff, and laid it deliberately, and with some ostentation, on the pile of gold and silver and copper. Grandpapa's eyes were on me. Grandpapa saw the coin, and saw I had put it in the plate. His lips grew livid. His face almost terrified me ; black wrath gathered like a thunder cloud on his brow. I kept my gaze on my muff and tried to convince myself I was not frightened. Then came the long prayer for the Church Militant (oh ! wise title for a Christian institution !), the final blessing, the loud crashing chords of the "Hallelujah Chorus," and we were filing out of the building—an excited, perturbed, indignant mass of intelligent human beings to whom the fact that a priest of God had preached in a white instead of a black gown meant that their immortal souls were imperilled !

Grandpapa and grandmamma were seized upon at the church door by mutual friends. Aunt Theo caught sight of Sara Tollemarche and stopped her. I was detained by Ada, whose grandparents sometimes attended St. Simon's. Groups stood about. Such expressions as "High Church practices," "Rome and its tricks," "Puseyites," "Tractarians," "Popery," were on every lip. I wondered why there was such need for anger and excitement.

I heard Sara Tollemarche say, "They are going to have a surpliced choir and intone the service. Great changes will be made with the New Year. The vicar's wife was calling on papa yesterday and she told him about it."

"And shall you give up your sittings ?" enquired my aunt.

"Oh no ! Not unless things get very bad. I really like a choral service. I have been to Mary Magdalene's, and St. Margaret's. The music is beautiful, and though one doesn't understand half that's said or done it really doesn't matter. It will be rather amusing to see how far Mr. Rattleby will go. I hear All Saints' is quite Romanist. Incense, and candles on the altar, and early

Communion. Only they don't call it *that*. It's the Holy Eucharist in High Church phraseology."

Then grandpapa came up to us and "stormed" at the new innovation. He would write to the Vicar; he would give up his seats at once. I had never seen him in such a rage about anything. Miss Tollemarcho drew him on by saying this was a mere nothing, only a beginning; that all the clergy were adopting the surplice and the choir, and some had processions and banners and incense, and candles on the altar. It was only what they called a "decorative ritual"; the black gown and the mixed choir were very old-fashioned.

Of course these remarks enraged grandpapa all the more. He seemed to think that every change meant Popery and the Scarlet Woman. Thirty years ago people were apt to speak their minds, and Protestantism had still a meaning. All the way home, and all luncheon time, the same topic was discussed. If grandpapa rode a hobby to death, he rode a grievance to burial and resurrection!

In vain grandmamma besought him to change the subject. In vain Aunt Theo pointed out that as God was "no respecter of persons" it surely didn't matter if a clergyman preached in a black gown or a white. For her part she thought there was as much affectation in changing the garment for one part of the service as in retaining it for another. Then *she* caught it—she and her friend, who was half-way to Rome already, according to grandpapa. He was so upset he could scarcely eat, although he had ordered fried whiting and a mutton-chop expressly for his own lunch. He did not intend dining at six o'clock. Why should he make any change in his rules, and perhaps injure his own precious health by a deviation from regular hours?

The said deviation, I afterwards learnt, was in deference to the "old General," who always dined at seven, and considered a midday meal only fit for the nursery, or women. After he had exhausted his eloquence on Aunt Theo and her daring friend, he unfortunately remembered me. I caught his eye. He glared for a moment and then demanded how "I had dared disobey him in church by giving anything to the collection."

I had prepared myself for that question. I faltered out that he had not forbidden *me* to put anything in the plate; only grandmamma and Aunt Theo. As this

was perfectly true he had to content himself with a general onslaught on matters theological.

Then grandmamma's patience became exhausted. "Oh, do be quiet, Barker!" she exclaimed. "You have quite spoilt our appetites. After all, what does it matter? If you don't approve of Mr. Rattley you can go to another church. I am sure there are plenty of Protestant ones still in the neighbourhood!"

This remark had the effect of silencing him and he ate the eternal apple tart in comparative silence—a small one specially made for himself. Grandpapa had apple tart almost every day in the winter; and cherry tart every day in the summer. When these fruits were not in season, poor grandmamma had a bad time of it!

But, happily, all things must come to an end, and so at last the miserable meal was over and he took himself off to his own room. Being Christmas Day, I was not required to practise, though I had received a hint that grandpapa might want some music in the evening. I felt "Cujus Animam" weighing down my mind with anticipations the reverse of pleasant.

I seized upon Aunt Theo after luncheon and we shut ourselves up in her room with poetry books. And the day that Dickens had painted so falsely for me dragged its weary hours along. At five o'clock Aunt Theo told me to bring in my frock and sash to her room, and dress there while she was doing her hair. She wore it in those beautiful curls I envied. She showed me a very elaborate gown she was to wear. It was white silk, with many "pinked out" flounces, a pointed bodice and wide sleeves trimmed with lace. It was also open at the neck, and she wore broad black velvet in her favourite streamers, and a large bunch of artificial geraniums at one side of the bodice.

The toilet sounds quaint I make no doubt, but young and pretty women can defy fashion and its manifold follies. Aunt Theo did.

My grenadine frock had fulfilled its promise of "ironing out as well as ever," and Aunt Theo insisted that my hair should not be *strained* off my face. She waved it with curling tongs and the effect sent me into raptures. Then she tied it back in a loose mass and let it hang down to my waist.

"Grandpapa won't like it," I said.

"I'm sure of that; but he won't say anything before all the people."

"Who are coming, Aunt Theo?" I asked anxiously.

"Old General Parbury and his daughters. They are our cousins and your second cousins. Mrs. Vandrupp, and Dr. Danebury, and his sister—the eldest. He has four."

"Dr. Danebury," I said thoughtfully. The name recalled so much. That overheard conversation, the fact that he was a suitor for her hand, and one favoured by grandpapa.

"You've not seen him yet," she went on, rather hurriedly. "He is a very old friend."

I made no reply. I was fastening my kid shoes and my face was hidden. She hurriedly took up a fan and a lace handkerchief.

"Come, hurry, Sâba, we must go down. It only wants five minutes of six."

I shook out my skirts. "They can't say my frock is spoilt—now. And oh, Aunt Theo, *do* you think grandpapa will have forgotten about the white surplice and Mr. Rattley?"

"Heaven knows!" she said.

CHAPTER XV.

I THINK I shall always blame Dickens in my heart for having raised false expectations respecting an English Christmas. For having insisted that it was a jovial, happy, hospitable season; that people were gay and merry, and inclined to be generous and forgiving. That all wrongs and grievances were put at least out of sight, if not out of mind. That members of families re-assembled with love and goodwill in their hearts, and that smiles and jests and laughter were on every lip. That young and old fraternised and drew closer together, and, in fact, that sociability and happiness and mirth were to be found at most firesides, and around every festive board.

Mr. Dickens had never met grandpapa, that was evident; neither had he ever witnessed quite such an odd Christmas party as that assembled at Pembridge Square. Memory

paints them for me fresh as yesterday. I meet them all once more on a plane of thought, and look at them with something of the wonder one bestows on a gallery of old portraits, trying to reconcile the stiff figures and simpering faces to life and its necessities.

Foremost in my group are Margaret and Maria—two tall, thin, elderly spinsters; with pale brown hair parted and rolled over pads; with long “droppers,” and chains and lockets; with rustling silk skirts worn over very large crinolines. Silk of a pinky-grey colour, and trimmed with vandyked ruchings of pink ribbon. Margaret, the elder by a year, had a pleasant, good-looking face, somewhat spoiled by a perpetual simper. Maria was very plain and delicate-looking. Her wide forehead and high cheek-bones were so thin that one thought more of anatomical structure than of flesh and blood. She had a nervous, shy manner, and seemed little more than an echo of her more robust sister. Their father, the General, was a very tall old man, with scanty hair, a high white neckcloth, and weak, rather prominent eyes. The neckcloth and the eyes were more noticeable than anything else; even his old-fashioned blue cloth dress-coat with brass buttons.

To these three strange personages I was taken up and introduced as “Jane’s little girl, from Australia.”

The old General shook me by the hand and said he hoped I was a good little girl. Cousin Margaret gave a little scream and “gushed.” I found later that she was given to gush.

“Oh! what a quaint little creature! And just look at her hair, Maria. Did you ever see such hair? It can’t all be her own. Little girls don’t want all that hair.”

She began to pull it, a proceeding which I did not approve. Moreover, I was in terror of attracting grand-papa’s attention, and perhaps being ordered to go upstairs and “plait it up.” But fortunately he was engrossed with the old General, and was paying no attention to us. Besides, the other guests were arriving on one another’s heels, like the calamities of Job. Mrs. Vandrupp, very magnificent in grey satin and point lace, and a diamond brooch; Dr. Danebury and Miss Danebury, two extraordinarily dark people, with fuzzy black hair that no pomade could smooth into English sleekness. Sara Tollemarche, very handsome and distinguished looking, with scarlet flowers

in her raven hair, and a dress of deep maize silk; she quite extinguished the Miss Parburys, who looked more faded and *passée* than ever beside this radiant vision.

The door had scarcely closed upon their respective announcements before grandpapa drew out his watch and began to fidget.

"Five minutes past six, Eliza. This is not punctuality. You know my rules. Why isn't dinner ready?"

He gave the bell a loud pull, which startled the Christmas greetings and introductions, and made everyone look at him. He stood on the hearthrug, watch in hand, as if counting every precious second of delay.

Grandmamma looked seriously annoyed, and there was a dead, uncomfortable pause. I took the opportunity of studying Dr. Danebury, who had made his way over to Aunt Theo, and was looking at her in a way that I had never seen any man look at any woman. There was something savage, and repressed, and brutal about him, I thought. His eyes were black like his hair, and had an intense deep glow like that in the heart of a fire. Aunt Theo was sitting on an ottoman beside Sara Tollemarche. He stood upright, with his hands clasped behind his back, and that look of strained intensity upon his face.

My lovely aunt was whispering to her friend, apparently unconscious of his proximity. Then suddenly the door was thrown open. The parlour-maid announced dinner. Grandpapa offered his arm to Mrs. Vandrupp, grandmamma took that of the old General, Dr. Danebury was told off to cousin Margaret, and the rest of us filed in singly, or together, as we pleased.

The dinner-table looked very magnificent. In the centre was a large silver *épergne* filled with flowers; silver dishes with fruit stood around it; the best cut-glass and the best silver made a brave show on the snowy damask cloth.

A silver tureen stood before grandmamma and she dispensed fragrant soup—mock turtle, I believe. I know it was new to me, both as regards name and flavour.

Jane and Rachel both waited in honour of the occasion, and looked more prim and smart than ever in new caps and aprons with scarlet ribbons.

Soup was succeeded by fish, which grandpapa carved. All dishes were put on the table, not dispensed from the side. The *à la Russe* style of dining was an innovation not to be countenanced by such a stickler

for "old fashions" as was Mr. Barker Heavysage. But it happened that he was a very bad carver, and not only spoilt the look of what fell to his unskilful hands, but contrived to do a fair amount of damage to the tablecloth. The poor cod was mauled and messed about in a fashion to render it unpalatable. The turkey was treated even worse. No one seemed to have a decent slice, and he was so long over the carving that the portion dispensed was half cold before it arrived at its destination. Fortunately the sauces and vegetables were kept hot, as the servants had had a long experience of their master's methods.

Poor grandmamma's face was a study in misery as she sat at her end of the table, watching her lord and master, and trying to give attention to the old General at the same time. As he was somewhat deaf and she sat upon that defective side, the conversation seemed to flag considerably. In fact, I should not have described it as a genial party. Certainly not a Dickensian one. And I am sure everyone could have eaten more turkey had it not been that grandpapa showed such relief when they were all served. Also, he announced that he had dined at *his* usual hour. Late dinners were unwholesome, and he was determined not to break one of his "golden rules of health" for anyone, or any occasion.

"What's that your husband says?" enquired the old General of grandmamma. "Had his dinner? Bless my soul! Fancy anyone not absolutely in the nursery dining at two o'clock! What would he have done in the army, eh? Ask him that?"

But grandmamma wisely refrained, and let the ancient warrior discourse of his days of "active service," and the ever-glorious theme of India, that bright jewel of conquest and of martyred lives.

Champagne now went round the table and tongues began to wag more freely. I, in my quiet corner on the other side of grandmamma, listened and looked, and wondered at it all. Noted grandpapa's forced politeness and Mrs. Vandrupp's cheery reminiscences, and cousin Margaret's giggling remarks to mamma, and cousin Maria's feeble attempts to second them. Noted, also, the dark Eastern face of the young doctor, and the curious fashion in which his sister had dressed her hair; Sara Tollemarche's witticisms, and Aunt Theo's anxious eyes.

So the merry meal went on till the Christmas pudding appeared—a massive, rich-hued structure, ablaze with burning brandy, and decked with glowing holly. This grandmamma dispensed herself with a deftness and celerity that shamed grandpapa's previous efforts. Of course, he did not partake of any. He only made it the occasion of a few more pleasant remarks, heralding a story of Dr. Abernethy, who had been consulted by a dyspeptic patient. "What do you eat?" the great man had asked. The patient described his diet, which, for the occasion, illustrated our own late festive fare. Then the doctor ordered in a bucket, and emptied samples of the five-course-meal into it, with suitable adjuncts of various wines and spirits. This pleasant mixture he handed to his patient with the remark that though suitable to the stomach of a denizen of the pig-stye, it was not calculated to benefit the digestion of an ordinary human being.

By the time this appropriate anecdote was concluded the table was being cleared for dessert. At this juncture grandpapa did unbend so far as to partake of a glass of port and some almonds and raisins. He also proposed a toast—"Absent friends." We all touched glasses and drank it—I in ginger wine, the only beverage permitted me. I much preferred water, but had been told "children must take what is given them."

It was only half-past seven when dinner was over and grandmamma gave the signal to leave the table. We filed out once more; I in the rear of the many flowing skirts and wide crinolines.

Once in the drawing-room, conversation became general. My two new cousins seized upon me, and put me through an examination as to my history and accomplishments. I rather liked Margaret, and should have liked her better but for that irritating habit of giggling. I can understand people laughing at anything funny, but not at every sentence they or the person they are talking to chance to utter. Hearing I was fond of music they wanted me to play. I blushed scarlet and begged them not to ask me. In truth, I was living in dread of grandpapa's reappearance and a suggestion of "duets."

Then they pulled my hair again, and asked how I had managed to grow such a crop? Whether I was going to school? If I liked London, and whether I would come and spend a day with them at Rutland Gate, where they

lived? I said I should like to do that very much. Then cousin Margaret whispered to me to tell her if it was true Aunt Theo was engaged to be married. This gave me such a shock that I could only stare blankly at her. For always at the back of my mind lurked a fear that something would happen to part me from Aunt Theo. And a child's mind must always form a picture of what words convey. They are not mere empty sounds; they are living things, and sometimes they hurt.

She looked astonished at my changed face and staring eyes. "Why, what is the matter?" she asked.

But I only looked away to where Aunt Theo was sitting beside Miss Danebury. And it seemed to me that above the beautiful brow was a wreath of white blossoms and over the graceful figure fell a snowy veil. And that I stood alone, gazing at her, in such utter loneliness and desolation as never had my heart conceived.

The vision was only memory of a figure I had seen the previous day at Mrs. Kirkmann's, called "The Bride." Those words of Margaret Parbury's had called it up. But it was so vivid and to me so terrible that I felt myself on the verge of tears. I could not have answered that question. Fortunately at this moment tea and coffee were brought in, and the gentlemen entered with its appearance, so cousin Margaret's attention was diverted. I retired hastily to an obscure corner. The world and all that was contained in it had suddenly narrowed down to a point of self-interest. My own life was entwined and connected with this other beloved existence. So long as that existence was bound up with my own, so long was mine endurable. If it was taken away, its love, its exquisite sympathy torn from my side, how could I bear the loss? Who was there to atone for that one loved and lovely being to whom all my young soul had gone out in a flood of childish idolatry?

I looked at the dark face of Neal Danebury, at his tall, strong figure, his fiery masterful eyes. I saw those eyes were ever on my aunt's face, sometimes tender, always longing and passionate. There was no doubt her presence meant a great deal to him. He hovered about. He offered her coffee. He lingered by her side and her cold indifference seemed in no way to discourage him.

Presently there was a general stir. A "round game," was proposed. A table was cleared, and cards pro-

duced, and a box of counters. They all crowded round. I saw Aunt Theo rise and look about the room. "Where's Sâba?" she asked. "She might join in. It's only *vingt-et-un*. She will soon learn."

But Nemesis was to descend on Sâba Macdonald.

Grandpapa interposed. "Sâba is going to play for me," he said. "I—I imagine a contribution from my violoncello will not be unacceptable."

"But you won't expect us to listen, Barker!" exclaimed grandmamma injudiciously. "You know what a 'round game' is, and how noisy."

"Oh, you can please yourselves as to listening," he said genially. "I never play cards, and I don't wish to waste a whole evening. Sâba, child, open the piano. I am going upstairs for my 'cello."

"Poor Sâba!" said cousin Maria suddenly.

They all looked at her. It was so rarely she ventured on an independent opinion.

"Oh! she is very fond of music," said my mother. "I'm sure she would rather play with her grandpapa than at cards, wouldn't you, child?"

I was truthful for once. I looked round the circle. I looked at Aunt Theo. I said, "No, I wouldn't. I *hate* playing with grandpapa!"

There was a moment's silence, then the old General burst into a smothered laugh.

"Not surprised! not surprised! Children will be children! It's too bad to turn her Christmas evening into a music lesson, eh? Can't we beg her off?"

"She is a naughty, disrespectful child!" exclaimed mamma angrily, "and very selfish. She knows how fond her grandpapa is of music, and that she is giving him pleasure by playing his accompaniments, and yet she makes a rude speech like that."

"You are certainly very outspoken, Sâba," said grandmamma coldly.

"And not too polite," added cousin Margaret. "Little girls would have been whipped and sent to bed for such a speech when I was your age, Sâba."

Annt Theo suddenly scattered the box of counters on the table and began dividing them into little heaps.

"Go and play something by yourself, Sâba," she said, with a little forced laugh. "Soothe the evil spirit, you know. Besides, I want your cousins to hear you."

I turned away and opened the piano, and began Mendelssohn's "Rondo Capriccioso." I could see no one from where I sat. I played at first in a fine fury of indignation, but gradually, as the delicious notes fell on my ear, and the spell of the composer breathed over the composition, my anger subsided. I played on as if I loved it, which, indeed, was true.

Grandpapa was just entering the room when I finished. "Tut-tut-tut! much too fast!" he exclaimed. "When will you learn, Sâba, that music is not hurry-scurry, slapdash, noise and pedal?"

I rose from the piano. I remember glancing over at the table and being surprised to see that the "round game" had not commenced—yet. Then the old General clapped his hands, and called me over to him.

"Why, bless my soul, what a wonderful little girl it is," he said kindly, patting my head. "Where did you learn to play like that?"

"I taught her," said my mother quickly. "She has never been to a school, Uncle Parbury. Of course, she is having music lessons now."

The old General was looking at me with kind, surprised eyes, as if I was a sort of curiosity. Then he put his hand in his pocket and produced a golden coin and closed my hand upon it. "There," he said, "keep that and buy sweeties, and be a good little girl and practise very hard. Why—bless my soul, Margaret, you and Maria could never play like that chit of a thing. And she's—how old? Ten, eleven?"

"Thirteen," said grandmamma.

"Quite an Arabella Goddard," he said. "I expected 'The Maiden's Prayer,' or 'Home, Sweet Home.' What was that piece you played, child?"

I told him. He nodded his head two or three times. Grandpapa was tuning up now, so I left them to their game, and went reluctantly back to the piano. Of course it was "Cujus Animam." I noticed the card players did not neglect their game during *that* performance.

* * * * *

I think I was kept for an hour or more over those accompaniments—fragments of operas, easy transcriptions of Schumann, or Beethoven suited to beginners, and which grandpapa called "solos." And all the time there was

laughter and noise and wild excitement at the round table. *They* seemed enjoying themselves heartily. I am sure the noise annoyed grandpapa. At last he got up and put the 'cello aside, and declared he could not hear himself play—a fact which he evidently regretted more than his audience.

By this time, however, the party was under grandmamma's directions. Dr. Danebury showed them wonderful tricks with cards. Then the servants brought in wine and negus, and "crackers," which we pulled and laughed at and exchanged mottoes and made jokes and were quite hilarious. Then at ten o'clock Mr. and Mrs. Kirkmann came in from some friends' round the corner, and the genial old gentleman told us ghost stories as we sat round the fire. After that we all sang "Auld Lang Syne," grandpapa leading off with better will than tunefulness. Then mulled port and sherry negus came in, and the old ladies became very merry indeed, though somewhat inclined for reminiscences, and cousin Margaret grew quite playful and giggled more than ever, and tied Aunt Theo's streamers to the back of her chair, and pulled my hair out of all bounds, and persisted in calling grandpapa "Nunkey," which he seemed to dislike. In fact, the whole circle warmed up wonderfully, and the master of the house was almost genial, and seemed to have forgotten that the vicar of the parish church was on the high road to Rome, and that no one had listened to his rendering of "Cujus Animam."

At last came the signal of departure. All the ladies adjourned to grandmamma's bedroom, and I crept in after them and helped to get their shawls and bonnets, and put away their caps in various receptacles. Margaret Parbury told mamma I must come and spend a day with them the following week. Actually permission was given, and Aunt Theo promised to bring me. Then there was a great deal of kissing and hand-shaking and protestations of enjoyment; after which I was ordered off to bed the richer by a whole golden sovereign for my new relatives' acquaintanceship.

"But tell me," whispered cousin Margaret, as she gave a final pull to my hair, "why did you turn so pale and look so strange when I asked if your aunt was engaged to Dr. Danebury?"

I shook myself free of her, conscious only of the cruelty of her question.

"Oh! don't ask; don't say it!" I cried passionately. "It's not true. It never will be true. Never!"

I rushed away up the stairs, eager to get away from her mocking voice, her silly childish giggle. She could laugh while my whole world was crumbling into dust and ashes. She could jest about what meant a life's tragedy. I think I hated her cordially and intensely from that moment.

Poor little lonely mortal! Lonely amidst a world of manifold and beautiful things. Ignorant of the future, and caring naught for what it might hold. Taking starved heart and passionate spirit and throwing them down half despairing, half entreating before some unknown ruler of destiny!

Have I ever felt so sorry for the Sâba Macdonald I know as I felt on that Christmas night when the joy and fervour of love was poisoned for her by the first intrusion of—fear?

CHAPTER XVI.

BOXING DAY!

What a queer institution! What an odd fancy that a house-to-house tax should be levied by all sorts of people, already paid their respective wage by such important bodies as local boards and assessors of rates. Lamplighters, dustmen, turnkeys, postmen, tradesmen—there they came the whole day through, and grand-mamma had neat little piles of new money, from half-a-crown to a threepenny piece, in readiness for their calls. The ceremony was explained to me, but left an impression on my youthful mind that such matters were better managed in the colonies. You were not rated there for certain public services, and then expected to pay the servitors themselves for fulfilling their duties.

It was a cold and dreary day, that one succeeding Christmas. Sleet and snow and easterly wind kept me indoors and set me grumbling at the atrocity of English weather. There was no certainty or regularity about it; no two days alike. I had been used to have hot weather at one season; rain at another. But in England one seemed to have them all jumbled up, irrespective of their proper place in Nature's calendar. The Christmas

festivities had been too much for mamma; she was staying in bed. Aunt Theo was busy making a new Garibaldi and could not spare much attention for me. Grandmamma occupied her morning with accounts, letter-writing, and the dispensing of Christmas-boxes—a proceeding which had aroused my curiosity to an extent that demanded explanation.

This she gave snappishly between the arduous labours of adding up her pence and shilling columns and dispensing the new coinage to various claimants announced by the cook or Jane. I stood by the window and looked out on the dreary square and sloppy streets. Presently my eye caught sight of something—a small black fluffy ball; a delightful thing with two pointed ears and a brush-like tail.

It was a kitten; a forlorn and apparently homeless kitten, for it fled from one set of steps to another, mewing piteously. Now I adored cats of all degrees and sizes.

It had seemed strange to me that at grandpapa's house there were no animal pets of any description. When I saw this little wanderer at last creep to our steps and mount them one by one I flew downstairs. I opened the hall door and in another moment the small wet creature was in my arms. It took quite kindly to me. It purred and put up its back, and waved its bushy tail and showed all the signs of feline friendship. I hugged it enthusiastically. It was sweet to me to have some dumb creature to pet. In Australia I had had dogs and cats, pigeons and cockatoos, and "budgerygars." (The last named are tiny green paroquets which can be made very tame.)

I rubbed my new treasure dry with my apron and then holding it closely went upstairs to the morning-room. Aunt Theo was still at the table busy with scissors and patterns. Grandmamma's back was towards the door as she bent over her walnut-wood Davenport. I came quietly in and went over to the fire to warm the little damp cold stranger. Hardly had I put it near the fire when grandmamma gave a blood-curdling shriek, and dropping her pen, turned round on the chair. Her face was an ashy grey colour and her eyes seemed starting out of her head. "There's a *cat* in the room!" she screamed. "Theo, I know there's a cat! Turn it out! Turn it out!"

I sprang to my feet, holding the kitten tightly in my

arms. "It's only a kitten," I said. "I found it. Can't I have it, grandmamma?"

"*Have* it! Good Heavens, child, take it away!" she cried fiercely. "I *hate* cats. I can't bear them near me. Don't you know I won't have one in the house!"

"Go, Sâba," said Aunt Theo quietly. "You didn't know, of course. But it makes grandmamma quite ill if there's a cat in the room. You cannot keep that kitten."

I went over to the door in a white heat of indignation. A poor little harmless kitten; and I must thrust it out again to the world's cold mercies. How could grandmamma be so silly? I paused a moment on the threshold.

"Please, can't I keep it, if I have it only in my own room and don't let it come near grandmamma?"

"No, certainly not. I tell you I won't have a cat anywhere where I am. Horrible things! I can't endure them."

My small friend looked up at me and began to mew piteously. I put my face down to it and stroked its soft fur. How could I turn it out into the street and driving rain again?

Grandmamma stamped her foot impatiently. "Did you hear what I said! Turn that creature out at once and never *dare* bring a cat or kitten into my house as long as you remain in it."

I felt my heart swell and all sorts of wild words rushed to my lips. But I crushed them back, and went slowly away. Oh! how hateful it was to be a child! To be always ordered, scolded, ruled, never able to do the simplest thing one desired. To claim even a harmless dumb creature's affection. To hunger for love and sympathy and comprehension, and be told one should be eternally grateful because one was clothed, and fed, drilled like a machine into the routine of daily duties.

I sat down in the hall and hugged the kitten, and talked to it as I had talked to my other cats a hundred or more odd years ago. It seemed quite as long as that when I looked back. I ventured down to the kitchen and begged the cook for a little milk and warmed and gave it to the little waif. I told her that I was forbidden to keep it, and asked her counsel as to what I could do.

She was very kind. She knew of grandmamma's antipathy and could only attribute it to some "in'nard

sort o' feelin'," such as affected female constitutions. Finally, she suggested that I might ask my little friend, Miss Kirkmann, to take care of it for me, then I could see it every day and it would not affect grandmamma.

The idea seemed an inspiration. I ran up the area steps, hatless and cloakless as I was, and dashed round the corner to the Kirkmanns'. The servant stared at my damp dishevelled condition, but said Miss Ada was in her playroom, and there I rushed like a whirlwind. She was sitting in her favourite chair doing "nothing," I burst into an explanation of what occurred. We let the kitten run about the room, and played with it, and petted it for long before it occurred to us to ask Mrs. Kirkmann's permission. She happened to walk into the room and found us enjoying a romp with our new playmate.

I rushed up to her breathlessly and told my story.

"I know your grandmamma hates cats," she said. "She can't help it. They affect her in some curious way. But I don't object to your keeping the kitten here. Ada used to have one, but it died. Then she wouldn't have another."

"No," said Ada, "I loved it and then it left me, and I don't want to let myself love another animal, and lose it. But this will be your's, Sâba. That's different."

"And you don't mind—really?" I asked Mrs. Kirkmann. "How kind you are! Oh! why aren't grandmamma and grandpapa like you and Mr. Kirkmann?"

"Hush, child!" she said gently. "You mustn't expect everyone to be the same. Characters differ as much as faces and habits of life. And now, may I ask why you have no hat or coat on? Did you run along the street like that?"

I hung my head. "Yes. I never thought about anything except getting here and finding a safe place for my kitten."

"I'm afraid you'll get into disgrace when you go back. You are too impetuous, my dear. You really bring half your troubles upon yourself. You act before you think."

I considered the matter thoughtfully. Perhaps I was too impetuous. In the present instance my conduct had certainly not been what grandmamma and mamma would call "lady-like." It was simply the fruit of

impulse. Now I should have to reckon with—consequences. I wondered if I could possibly slip down the area again and make my way upstairs without discovery. But then I remembered my absence must have been detected by this time; possibly cook had betrayed my whereabouts.

Perhaps it would be best to face the consequences boldly. At any rate the kitten was safe and warm, and would have a home for the future. I could put up with scolding or punishment under such conditions.

Mrs. Kirkmann had been watching my face while I held this inward counsel. She smiled. "Better face it, SÅba," she said. "Truth is the finest virtue in the world, though it's the worst rewarded."

"I'll lend you a cape to run home in," said Ada.

"And I an umbrella," said her grandmother.

So I gave a parting hug to my kitten and returned to find the whole house in a commotion over my absence without leave, and to receive a severe scolding for my bad behaviour. In fact I had never been in such dire disgrace since my arrival, and was sentenced to solitary confinement in my own room for the rest of the afternoon.

But Aunt Theo ordered me a fire, and brought me "David Copperfield" and Tennyson's Poems and Ballads, so the world seemed a pleasant enough place under such conditions.

"I am going to Sara's," she told me, after she had seen to my comfort. "But I'm sure you'll be happy enough with your books. In fact, it's safer for you to be here. You seem always in hot water the moment you go down stairs."

"Only for you," I said, "I should run away."

She laughed and kissed me, and said I was a terrible child and she wondered what was going to happen when I was "grown up."

This point left me in such perplexity that I brought out my diary and spent nearly an hour writing in it. I had to put down the events of the previous day and the account of this morning's escapade. I confided to it the sad and all-important fact that I was "misunderstood." That there was no sympathy to be found amongst my family or relatives except in that one adored and glorious exception—Aunt Theo! That all beside her

seemed selfish and narrow-minded. That no one cared to understand me, or what I felt. That this *inner* loneliness of mine was eating away my heart and my youth. I craved a full deep passionate life and found myself cramped and bound in fetters of discipline.

In fact, I filled pages with laments and vague desires before I had written myself into a sense of calm, and was able to appreciate the comforts of a blazing fire, undisturbed peace, and my enchanter, Dickens !

I can smile at those crowded, covered, ill-spelt pages now. But they were very *real* to me when I wrote them, and the poignant misery they convey is very present to my memory.

At that time writing was a relief and a necessity. I could both imagine and feel. I hope there was more imagination than reality in what I used to describe as "Sâba Macdonald's Trials." But to the young, sorrow comes as a personal affront—an injustice. It is not their due. They cannot understand its lessons or bend meekly to its discipline. And they are impatient of all that stops youth on its golden road to happiness.

The world is for them and should be both beautiful and pleasure-giving. All in it and of it should minister to their welfare. It seems such a little thing to ask. Just to be happy. And yet happiness is the hardest thing to gain and to keep.

I can guess how that tormented soul of Sâba Macdonald longed for happiness when I read those faded records. She craved love, light, joy, beauty, a life full to its uttermost fulness—and Fate gave her only a starved, narrow existence !

There is a pain that goes with memory—the memory of "happier things," as says the poet. But what of that accompanying the sad mistakes, the hopeless misunderstandings of vanished years—years that stare grimly at one as the gates of memory fall back ? Cold spectres of misery and dreariness ; wasted hours, dead days, never to be filled or completed.

What of that "looking back" in after years on the characters and conduct of those set in authority over us ? What of the bitterness of heart that such memory brings with it, try how we may to excuse or forgive ? To say Duty may have been short-sighted—a mistaken creed invented to make household rule and family life an

equal penance. What of the dead wall of unanswered entreaty against which our young hands once beat so persistently? What of the harshness that chilled and the terrors that froze the young ardent love only longing to speak itself, but for ever driven back into chill silence of propriety?

What of the cruel logic which proclaimed Wrong as Right, and Truth as Lies, and Faith and Love as mere hard dull facts? For in such guise these things came to us and none could or would explain them.

What of Tyranny masked as parental control, of Religion turned into dry-as-dust "duty to one's Maker," that Incomprehensible, pitiless, iron-hearted Being set on high where eyes could not see, nor prayer reach Him? At least, not our eyes; not our prayers.

Oh, children! pitiful host of suffering, speechless, tortured creatures, how my heart goes out to you all as I read Sâba Macdonald's tear-stained records, and know they might be multiplied a thousand-fold by other records never to be written, by other histories never to be told! I see you all, a countless throng, beseeching, praying, questioning. Your lives fraught with misery because of that dread Unknowable whose Hell awaits your unregenerate souls! Because of sins committed long ages ere you existed. Because you ask and ask, and pray and pray, and no one answers you. Because though your faith be as a mountain instead of a grain of mustard seed, no sign comes to you, nor any token of the Pardon and the Pity you crave. Was it God or devil, Fate or man, who ruled these lives of yours and made them bitter with an everlasting bitterness that no Afterwards could sweeten? Was it God or devil who left you writhing, tortured, sin-stained, because of some childish fault, that held you condemned to Eternal torment if the day of its commission found it unconfessed, which only meant—unpunished.

Oh, children! dead and gone, was there no softer creed to teach you than that of Hell fire and Eternal Damnation? Was there none to pity those burning, tear-scorched eyes of yours, searching the darkness in agony of terror? To hear you sobbing piteous entreaties: "God help me and forgive me, and make me a better child!" Was there none, oh children, martyred and misjudged, to whisper that the same voice which condemned sinners said

also: "Whoso hurteth a hair of one of these little ones——"

None to make the meaning of Love as plain as the meaning of Duty? None to help your stumbling feet along the rocky road, or take you aside to where velvet turf lay green, and cool streams rippled in the sunlight? Was there no one (if half mad with fear you asked of God, and Heaven as having *personal* connection with yourself) to soothe your terrors, and point out that no human sinner on this weary earth is one step nearer heaven than another? That but for the *hope* of some better fate to come, the whole created world would be as desperate and as mad as you seemed yourself! None to strip the lie from creeds and false worship, and look religion honestly in the face as God's help to man, not man's self-erected ladder to God! None amongst the hypocrites, the self-satisfied, the creed-sticklers, the lip-worshippers, the learned, or the fools, to say: "Rest, and be at peace. The answer is not here or now. God's own self shall give it thee!" Was there no one to translate your timid advances and gauge the depths of the little loving nature made cold only by shyness and by fear? Was there no one to understand how solitary and how unhappy you were, though your lessons were learnt and your tasks performed, and you trotted off obediently to bed and showed dry eyes and quiet face above the bed-clothes when the light was fetched?

But afterwards? After its last flicker had died down some long corridor of darkness and the last echo of departing feet had passed into silence—what of that hour of loneliness, poor little lonely soul? You and the angels alone know of it. Perchance its tears have washed out some later record of sin or error. Perchance it bears the stamp of extenuation.

If God be more merciful than man it might well bear such a stamp; it might well cry aloud: "See what I suffered in blind ignorance of life's manifold meaning and hear in Heaven, Thy dwelling-place, and have mercy and—forgive!"

* * * * *

That long afternoon passed and at last tea-time came. Rachel summoned me and seemed inclined to commiserate my loneliness.

"But you see, miss, your grandpa' and grandma' are

that strict as never was. It's all right as long as you please 'em, and does everything like clock-work, but then we h'aint machines, as I says to Jane, and sometimes we must get a bit of liberty as is only natural."

"It was only because I found a kitten and wanted to keep it," I said, as she brushed and tidied my hair, and put on a fresh apron. "How was I to know grandmamma didn't like cats? She never said so before."

"She can't abide 'em," said Rachel. "I've heard her screech the house down because a stray one came in by the h'area gate and ran up the kitchen stairs."

"And I love them so," I lamented. "And this was such a lovely kitten; with a thick coat and a bushy tail and the sweetest little face. I could have kept it up here quite away from grandmamma's rooms. I can train animals to do anything. I'm used to them. You've no idea how lonely it is without a pet of any sort!"

"You're a queer young lady, miss. I doubt it's being brought up in them wild countries that's made you so. Sometimes Jane and I says you're as *old* as old; and h'others, why you're downright childish. Now, I think you're tidy, and I do 'ope you won't get into any more scrapes to-night."

I went down stairs very timidly, but the blessed sight of Aunt Theo's skirts going into the dining-room gave me courage. She waited for me at the door and I went in with her.

Grandmamma took no notice of me and grandpapa was reading a newspaper and seemed unaware of my entrance. I slipped into my usual seat, only hoping I should be overlooked.

Alas! that hope was vain. Grandpapa put aside his paper and caught sight of me. He harangued all tea-time. He told me what children were like in *his* days, and how sadly I differed from that model. He spoke of the wasted hours of that afternoon which should have been spent in learning a new trio of Beethoven's. He grumbled at my mother's absence and declared I must have worried her into her present state of health. I maintained absolute silence. It was no use to speak, and less to try to vindicate any of my actions. I tried to harden my heart and pretend to myself that I didn't care, but for all my assurance I found salt tears trickling

down into my cup and had much ado to gulp down morsels of food without betraying how hard they were to swallow.

In vain Aunt Theo tried to change the conversation, spoke of Colonel Tollemarche, of the Vicar, of the old General. Again and again did my amiable relative return to the charge and point out my shortcomings, my dereliction from the path of duty. My overweening sense of importance displayed before my elders and described as "showing off," simply because I played the piano a little better than most girls of my age. That remark was the "last straw." I became conscious of a sudden determination to play in future as other girls of my age *did* play; to declare the trios and duets and "arrangements" were far beyond my capacity; to stumble over the reading of a new piece of music as grandpapa always stumbled; to adopt his methods of time, and take every possible advantage of "rests" and silent bars. I could not get worse scoldings for such doings than I was in the habit of receiving when I did my best. Besides, it would really be amusing to take grandpapa at his word and torment him as he tormented me. So after tea was over and he suggested some practise in his room I at once acquiesced.

That was indeed a delightful evening. When he dragged the time, I followed him. When he wanted support I played *pianissimo*, as he was so fond of telling me I ought to play. When he shirked any difficulty I waited, and meekly suggested I would continue to do so until he had got it right. When he ignored the treble clef—always a bugbear to his limited capacity of execution—I insisted that he had overlooked it, and conscientiously gave him the notes. In fact, I enjoyed myself and avenged myself at the same time and left him in a thorough bad temper; yet quite unable to prove I had been the cause of it. I had shown myself so painstaking and so obedient to his instructions, that even his conceit of himself was lowered. For if I played as he desired and the effect was—untranslatable, the fault could not lie with me, or the piano. Poor grandpapa! I can smile now, but it was no smiling matter in those days. Every blunder possible to ignorance, and every fault sacred to the mind of the amateur were his! And yet he loved music—or *said* he did—and certainly took more pains to prove it than anyone I ever met. I often thought it must be his own attempts at performing that he loved;

his own temporary importance on those semi-professional occasions; his own laudable ambition to announce to his long-suffering friends that the same music was to be heard in *his* drawing-room as on the platform of St. James's Hall.

The same music! Ye shades of the great and gone! how ye must have shuddered at that boastful proclamation! For music is something more than mere pages of printed notes; mere effort to put those notes into sound. It is something of which Mr. Barker Heavysage's soul was wholly ignorant, and wholly devoid.

CHAPTER XVII.

To write of the happenings of these first months of my life in England would be to fill a volume that probably no one would read. For, however interesting the early incidents and events of one's life seem to oneself, it is hardly possible that such events would occupy the attention of a third person, even as a lesson in what to avoid. I shall, therefore, put aside those diaries, with their dates and records, and content myself with a general summary.

I made acquaintance with Margaret and Maria, and visited them at Rutland Gate. The splendour of that mansion and the fact that they kept a footman impressed me very much; more than my cousins themselves; for Margaret was really very silly, and poor Maria such a weak, flabby creature that one could only liken her to a feather pillow, unable to stand alone and impressionable to every passing touch. Whenever I spent a day with them they used to question me unceasingly. What I did; what my grand-parents did; what we talked about? How I liked them? Whether Aunt Theo went out much into society? What *sort* of society? How did I like the Anglo-Indian set, who came to spend the day, because grandmamma could give them the real Indian curry? Did I admire Miss Tollemarche? Was she engaged? Did I know Dr. Danebury had proposed once already for Aunt Theo, and would be certain to do so again? Had I ever seen his mother and sisters, who lived in Palace Gardens? Did I know his rich aunt and uncle in Gloucester Terrace, Hyde Park? Weren't they just like the Indian idols in grandmamma's drawing-room? How did I like early Victorian

furniture? Who chose my dresses and hats? How did I come to be possessed of such a head of hair when they had scarcely enough to cover their pads? Did I think cousin Margaret too tall (she was six feet)? Had I ever been at a *séance* at Mrs. Kirkmann's? Had grandpapa seen the wonderful medium who floated up to the ceiling and went into a trance? Would I like to go with them to the Davenport Brothers? They were really wonderful. They called themselves spiritualists and had their hands tied and sealed and were shut up in a cabinet. Yet in a moment when the doors were opened they would be found perfectly free, their hands released and the seals unbroken. Of course it was trickery. But what wonderful trickery! All London was rushing to see them. It was impossible to get a seat unless you engaged one in advance!

And so on, and so on. Margaret had a seemingly exhaustless flow of conversation. Then after lunch the carriage would come round and they would drive me about—through the Park, across Westminster to see the Abbey, Waterloo Bridge, and the Houses of Parliament. Then through Temple Bar to St. Paul's and the Mansion House; back again for tea in the big double drawing-room facing the park. Then the old General would make me play to him, and "tip" me generously, and so a cab home. There—more questioning, and coldly expressed hopes that my conduct had been circumspect and "lady-like." I found, also, that Margaret Parbury was suspected of being wildly extravagant. That they were living far beyond their means, and that undoubtedly a day was approaching when there would be a "smash up" at Rutland Gate. Grandpapa was specially severe on them. He disapproved of the carriage, the footman, the late dinners, the keeping up of a style which they were not in a position to support.

Neither would he hear of my going to a *séance* of the Davenport Brothers. They were cheats and impostors, and their cabinet was a fraud, and their hand-tying a trick. Yet he believed in the medium at Mrs. Kirkmann's, who floated to the ceiling and wrote his name there. He had seen it; he had convinced himself there was no possibility of deception. Besides, he had received a *personal message*. He had been told that the spirit of some famous dead musician watched over him and admired his enthu-

siasm for music, and promised him assistance in the said art. The spirit was an Italian, and recommended grandpapa to eschew the works of Beethoven for the florid perfections of Rossini and Verdi—advice which I considered extremely sensible.

Grandmamma scoffed openly at these accounts. She had steadily refused to countenance the Kirkmanns' dealings with the supernatural. It was either a trick, or it was devilry. She wanted nothing of either charlatan or Satanic agent. Grandpapa poured contempt on her theories. He said she was frightened. It needed strong nerves to face the hidden plane; the other side of the veil. He—had received assurance that he possessed unusual courage and unusual strength of character!

I listened eagerly to the ensuing discussion—I, who had talked so much to Ada and Mrs. Kirkmann on these matters, was naturally excited at their influence upon grandpapa. Perhaps he would become beneficent and generous, patient and charitable—a model of all the virtues, instead of merely their empty exponent.

“I, too, might become a medium; I, too, might peer behind the veil—if I wished,” he added significantly. “It would mean preparation and—ah, retirement. A withdrawing of oneself temporarily from the coarse, commonplace occurrences of life. But I feel that to perfect my psychic powers might seem selfish to others.” He looked at us all thoughtfully.

“Do you mean you would have to give up your musical evenings?” asked grandmamma, with somewhat ostentatious eagerness.

I think he read between the lines. His voice assumed its old peremptory snap. “No, Eliza, I don't mean to do—that. To give up my musical evenings would be to deprive myself of the only pure and unselfish joy left to my later years. There is no question of such renunciation, merely a denial of the flesh—eating and drinking, the pleasures of the table. Yet, though I am by nature temperate and abstemious, I have doubts as to whether an entire diet of nuts, dried fruits, and—ah!—filtered or aerated waters would suit my constitution.”

“Why, you'd kill yourself!” exclaimed grandmamma. “No more whiting, or chicken, or roast meat, or apple-tart. My goodness! Barker, don't attempt anything so foolish.”

"I said that obstacles would be put in my way—that my family would object. I felt it. I have, as it were, one foot—ah!—on the threshold, and I am dragged back from knowledge and from power by—by——"

"Apple-tart, grandpapa," said a small voice unexpectedly.

Once again had Sâba Macdonald broken bounds of prudence. Once again was the oft-repeated maxim that "children should be seen and not heard" impressed upon her by a request to leave the table and retire to her own room, and there study a treatise upon harmony.

How had things been going with that young lady of late? Lessons had commenced again, and the musical evenings were in full swing. She was always fairly content when occupied, and study was a real pleasure to her. Miss Sharpe gave her plenty to do, and the library had been assigned to her in the evenings for "preparation."

Herr Franz had also taken the law into his own hands with her music, and insisted that technique and studies *must* be the rule, not the exception of his lessons and her practice hours. The cold, dark days of January were over. With February came better weather, and an assurance that the sun had not forsaken England altogether. But there had been many bad days for Sâba Macdonald unconnected with weather; all more or less shaken into place as the puzzle of life worked itself out.

Among the many changes was one brought about by her grandfather's determination to withdraw from attendance at his parish church. He had written to the vicar to that effect, and yet had produced no change in that gentleman's intention to conduct his services as best pleased himself. Then Mr. Barker Heavysage addressed a strong remonstrance as to High Church innovations to a local paper. It was called the *Bayswater Chronicle*. When his denunciation appeared, he bought up half the edition and sent it to his friends and neighbours, and also forwarded a copy to the Rev. Arthur Rattley. Yet things only went from bad to worse. A surpliced choir, candles on the altar, preaching in the white gown, and *intoning* the service, became the accepted order of things. The fact that the Rev. Arthur's squeaky voice and faulty intonation excited more amusement than deference might have been apparent even to the said Rev. Arthur. But like his irate parishioner, he was encased in a pachy-

dermatous suit of self-conceit. The fact that St. Simon's was *his* church, that the re-organised ritual was of *his* ordering, that the untuneful intoning was *his* intoning made him impervious to outer criticism, or protesting attacks. The clergy have one supreme support in their assumed duty to less privileged beings. It is their absolute conviction of superiority. The power of ruling or controlling a human destiny is sufficiently dangerous, but when it comes to ruling and controlling a human *soul*, there is no limit to the arrogance of the spiritual despot. Multiply one soul by a church full of worshipping and credulous beings and the secret of sacerdotalism is an open one. Religious history is full of proofs that bear out this assertion. There is no power at once so sweet, so self-delusive, and so self-satisfying as the power that comes with spiritual authority. It makes man a god in his own eyes, and in the eyes of the weak, the foolish, the credulous, and the superstitious.

The reverence and obedience given in Catholic countries to the "priest" had long been envied by the less esteemed Protestant cleric. Hence, the first steps towards securing such obedience; that "thin edge of the wedge" of which I heard so much. Hence that fatal and—for England, most humiliating episode—which began with the Tractarian movement of 1833, and has been creeping on and onward like a black stream of treachery and insubordination until the very heads of the Protestant Church can only stand aghast, uttering remonstrances which their clergy don't heed, and issuing commands which they openly disobey.

At this later date of ritualistic dominance it amuses me to think of the flutter caused by such trivialities as those concerned with St. Simon's, Bayswater. To think that a white surplice and some gilt candlesticks and an occasional "vestment" should have disturbed the peace of mind of an entire neighbourhood. But I know now what such things foretold, and when I read of "Mass," and confession, of prostration and penance, of vigils and fasts, of *Protestant* nunneries and "Retreats," of the growth of that poisonous plant whose first little seeds looked so innocent and harmless, I see what my grandfather meant by his denunciations of "Jesuits in disguise." His words were more prophetic than perhaps he was aware of.

At all events, he discovered a new church and took sittings there, and it was the wonderful preaching of this

Dr. Hawker that began to influence me. It was very different from the bombastic periods and weak trivialities of the Rev. Arthur Rattley. The doctor had an intimate acquaintance with the scriptures—a powerful and emphatic delivery, an extraordinary eloquence and fund of feeling. The little commonplace church used to be crowded to its utmost extent every Sunday. He seemed so earnest and so zealous that I often longed to speak to him, to tell him the story of my private difficulties; but grandpapa never called upon him, nor did he seek the personal acquaintance of his new seat-holder. I was ignorant of where he lived or anything, except his preaching. Grandmamma came but seldom. She said it was too far to walk, and that Dr. Hawker was a “ranter,” whatever that might mean. I believe both she and Aunt Theo entertained a sneaking kindness for St. Simon’s, where the music was excellent, and a general sense of excitement might be counted upon. At Dr. Hawker’s church there was only an ordinary mixed choir, who sat near the organ and sang very badly; and the whole service, including Litany and Commandments, Epistle and Gospel, was religiously gone through every Sunday morning. I was always obliged to attend, whether I liked it or not, and the servants were sent to the evening service, so that the pew might be occupied. In fact, Sundays, with the exception of that twenty minutes preaching, were generally miserable days for me.

In the afternoon grandpapa retired to his “den,” and grandmamma indulged in a snooze, and Aunt Theo invariably ran over to her beloved Sara. My mother always went to lie down, with a volume of sermons, and I had to study some obnoxious religious “treatise,” or learn a chapter of the Bible to repeat after tea. Now and then I managed to extract permission to go to Ada’s, and we would have a walk in the square, or stay in her playroom with the kitten and amuse ourselves with its tricks and gambols. Then in the dusk her sweet old grandmother would come to us and talk in her wise and gentle way, and listen patiently to my weekly bulletin of scrapes and scoldings, and send me home the better for telling her. Braced up afresh to endure what seemed destined to be my fate.

About the middle of February the weather became very cold again. I caught a severe chill and was kept in bed. Much to my disgust grandmamma insisted on sending for

Dr. Danebury to see me, and I had to submit to the indignity of being stethoscoped and questioned, and have my lungs sounded, and my pulse felt, and to hear that I was very delicate and must be taken great care of through the rest of the winter and equally trying English spring. I suppose he did not imagine that I was studying him while he was examining me. That I disliked him even more as a physician than as an acquaintance. That I was burning to tell him what I thought of his presumption in proposing for Aunt Theo. That when he said my pulse was "jumpy," the fact was more attributable to my ill-concealed indignation than to physical causes. Aunt Theo was in the room and every time he looked at or spoke to her was a fresh vexation to me. There was no doubt as to his admiration of her, though she treated him with a cool indifference that seemed discouraging. But I knew nothing of lovers in those days, nor the obstinacy of a certain form of manly pursuit which passes for "devotion."

I was a week in bed, and he came to see me every day, although I felt certain I was the mere excuse for a glimpse of, or chat with, my beautiful aunt. It seemed to me that she was not looking well at that time. She was pale and thin; she seemed restless and preoccupied. At times she would be feverishly gay, at others dull and listless. I used to watch her sitting by the fire, her hands clasped, a dull brooding expression on her face. I longed to speak, but dared not.

I was too young for her confidence. I knew she loved me, but only as a mother loves a child. In a protective, compassionate way, not with a whole-souled idolatry as I loved *her*. I remember I used to feel very miserable as day followed day and I lay in bed watching the clouds, and counting the brief hours of sunshine. Sometimes racked with fits of coughing, always rebellious at medicine times, hating beef tea and chicken broth, and beseeching for fruit which was not considered good for me; favoured by brief visits from grandpapa, who always scolded and grumbled at me for getting ill, and declared it was my own fault. Look at him! He never got colds or chills.

To make matters worse I developed measles and had the complaint with extraordinary severity. The nursing devolved on Aunt Theo and Rachel alternately. My mother declared herself too delicate to do more than look in for a few minutes each day to enquire how I was

"getting on." Grandpapa and grandmamma never came near me at all. They sent word that they might be the means of carrying infection to other innocent people, and considered it their duty to take precautions. I cannot say that their absence grieved me in the slightest degree. If I could have seen Ada, or have had my precious kitten, I should have been quite content, but of course neither was permissible.

I was on the road to convalescence—that is to say, I could leave the bed and assume a dressing-gown and sit by the fire a certain number of hours—when the whole household was suddenly sent into shocked excitement by arrival of the Indian mail with the news that Aunt Eliza had been left a widow; a widow, with five children—four sons and a daughter. They were coming home from Bombay almost immediately, and had asked grandmamma to find a furnished house or suitable lodgings for them in her own neighbourhood.

Rachel told me more about the facts than Aunt Theo or my mother thought fit to communicate. "Your grandma' is that put out, miss; not that she cared very much for the deceased gentleman, but your poor h'aunt seems a very 'elpless sort o' lady. She has lived in them heathen countries so long that she knows nothing of housekeeping, or managing anyone but black servants. Your grandma' was talking to me only this morning about the circumstances. She seemed to think as 'ow it would be advisable for your ma to join with Lady Larkom and take a 'ouse together."

The announcement astonished me. "But mamma is always so ill. She could not manage a double household."

"She is thinking it 'hover, miss. It's not for me, of course, to go 'hinto pros and cons, as they say, but there's seemingly a likelihood of it coming 'hoff."

"I wonder what they are like?" I said musingly. "Do you know the age of my cousins, Rachel?"

"The 'heldest young gent is about fourteen. Then there's a young lady next—Miss Fannie, I believe she's called. They seem to think it will be nice for you to have a sort o' sister, miss. I don't rightly remember the names of the 'hothers."

"Mamma has said nothing to me—yet."

"Perhaps not, miss. She's only a-considering of it at

present. They can't be in h'England before the 'hend of April, so there's plenty o' time."

I turned the matter over in my mind, while she sat sewing at some warm flannel garments ordered for me. It had only just been discovered that the clothing suitable for a tropical climate is not the sort most befitting the inclemency of an English winter.

The novelty of the idea of an independent establishment pleased me mightily. Anything would be better than the cut-and-dry rules of my grandfather. The eternal fault-finding and bickering; the arguments for or against the simplest thing that came under discussion, the self-assertive superiority of the household depot.

In our own house once more, there would surely be something of the old freedom. I might have my pets, and my books, and practise at my own hours instead of being driven to those that suited grandpapa. I might even find a brotherly and sisterly sympathy between these new cousins and myself. In any case, that sense of novelty which appeals so irresistibly to youth set the scheme before me in glowing colours. There was no doubt that I cordially hated existence under its present conditions. Even if change were not amelioration, it would be—change.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THERE were no cablegrams or foreign telegrams in those days. We could, therefore, receive no news until the next mail was due. By that time I was well and able to go out once more; by that time, too, there was a hint of spring in the air—a hint of green bud and bursting leaf in the grimy shrubs of the square. A flush of rosy blossom from adventurous almond-trees that grew in prim gardens and roadways. They caused me a sick pang of heart at memory of the blossoming paradise I had left behind.

But I was too keenly alive to beauty of nature not to rejoice in this promise of spring. When Miss Sharpe took Ada and myself to the Kensington Gardens and I saw the blue sky and felt the warm sunshine, I could have sung aloud with delight. The ills and worries and annoyances of daily life seemed to fade into nothingness before the lovely smile of the new awakening world. Ada

laughed at my enthusiasm and Miss Sharpe preached "decorum of behaviour in public." But I—I laughed aloud in very joyousness of heart and greeted spring as some old friend whose face I had scarcely hoped to see again. We skirted the round pond, and then took the path past the Palace and across Church Street homewards.

In the High Street, close to Pembridge Gardens, we met grandmamma and Aunt Theo. Miss Sharpe gave me permission to join them. I learnt that they had been looking at furnished houses to see if there was anything suitable for Lady Larkom and her family.

"We have seen one we like very much in Brunswick Gardens," said Aunt Theo. "It will be quite large enough and it is an easy distance from our house. Also the rent is reasonable."

"Then—is it settled? Are mamma and I going to live with Aunt Eliza?" I asked eagerly.

"Your mamma thinks it will be an excellent plan," said grandmamma. "But nothing is settled yet. A good deal depends on her health. I am going to take her to a consulting physician in Wigmore Street and get his opinion. Everything depends on that."

"But Eliza and the children must go somewhere, mamma," said my aunt. "We cannot take them all in at Pembridge Square."

"Of course not. Your papa could not put up with such a pack of children."

She sighed deeply. I am sure she was thinking of the worry that *one* child had occasioned in that austere household.

"It must be funny to have all your children coming back to you with other children," I remarked presently. "There is mamma with me, and Aunt Eliza with her five, and Aunt Harty in Germany with one more. Why must people have children when they get married, grandmamma?"

But grandmamma only coughed suddenly and said I was too fond of asking questions. Little girls had no business to be always enquiring into the affairs of their elders. So I held my tongue till we reached home. As we stood in the hall for a moment I saw that a hat and stick not belonging to grandpapa were on the hatstand.

Also, I noted that grandmamma gave a quick look at

Aunt Theo. "I hope you have made up your mind at last," she said.

Aunt Theo's face grew strangely white. She looked at the hat and then away from it to the door of the drawing-room. Almost at the same moment grandpapa came out. "Ah, you are home," he said. "Theodora, I must request you to step in here for a few moments. Dr. Danebury wishes to see you—particularly."

Grandmamma seized my hand and hurried me upstairs. My heart seemed suddenly to sink within me, as if leaden weighted. "Dr. Danebury," I repeated to myself. Why did he want her—particularly? Was the blow about to fall?

At grandmamma's door I stopped suddenly and looked up at her excited face. "Oh, tell me, *please*—is he going to ask her to marry him?"

I think grandmamma was about to utter one of the usual platitudes, but something in my face arrested her words.

"What do you know? Why do you ask such a thing?" she demanded.

"I have heard it talked about. Oh, say it isn't true? Do, please, grandmamma, say it isn't true?"

"You ridiculous child! I don't know yet. But I hope it may be true. It would be an excellent match, and Dr. Danebury is devotedly attached to your aunt."

An excellent match! Blood seemed to rush to my face, to fill my eyes. I beat my hands together in a paroxysm of blind fury. I was beside myself. I scarcely knew what I did or said.

"That man! That hateful, horrible, *black* man! And you would let your child marry him. Your lovely, beautiful daughter, for whom a king wouldn't be good enough!"

A passion of sobs choked me. I can remember the tears like a torrent of rain. I can remember my upraised hands clasped and wrung together and beating at the air, and I can remember best of all the dark fury of the face above me, the stinging blows upon my cheek. Then all seemed blank. I don't know what was done.

I was only conscious of a dead weight on brain and heart. Something that I must carry about with me from that day forward. All this time, since Christmas, I had tried to believe there was nothing in the rumour. Aunt

Theo never would, never could accept this Anglo-Indian doctor as her husband! And now it seemed the answer had to be given—the decision made.

I was shut into some room, I don't know whose, and the door locked. I had thrown myself down and was wasting my strength in dry, bursting sobs that seemed to tear at me like beasts of prey. And, indeed, such passions as jealousy, anger, hatred, despair, are but animal forces that assert their power when the moral strength is weakened. At that moment I hated the whole world, at least the portion that made up life and experience for me. My sense of personal injury dwarfed even my indignation at the proposed sacrifice on the altar of Mammon. My soul gathered itself together for one vast rebellion. I would tell them all what I thought. I knew whom my aunt really loved and wished to marry. It was not Neal Danebury. I would speak out the truth of what I felt, and then—rush off anywhere—anywhere. Die or disappear! It mattered little which might be my fate.

And while I was thus raging and storming myself into a fever, there came a knock, a voice—Aunt Theo's voice. She was in the room; she was kneeling beside me as I lay prostrate on the floor.

"Gracious Heavens, child! What is the matter? What have you been doing now?"

I grew suddenly calm. By a great effort I sat up, and pushed the heavy hair back from my eyes and looked at her. But when I saw the quick tears of pity in her own, I threw myself into her arms sobbing out my fears and my misery. She held me closely, saying nothing for a long time.

At last my entreaties for denial would not be satisfied with anything less. Then she rose and helped me to my feet, and said very quietly, "I am sorry you take it like this, Sâba. It will not be for a long, long time—the marriage, I mean. He is going back to India. But when you are calmer I will talk to you about it. At present you are behaving like a foolish, irrational child. You cannot possibly understand my—reasons."

"I do," I burst out passionately. "It is because you are unhappy. It is because life *here* is made unbearable for you. It is because they are forcing you to marry, for he will be very rich. You see, I know. You all seem to think that children don't understand what is going on

around them. That they can't see what grown people mean or do. That because one's questions aren't answered we don't *want* an answer, and go away satisfied. But they make a great mistake. Oh! I have lived in fear of this since Christmas night, when cousin Margaret spoke of it! If I didn't love you so much I shouldn't mind you getting married. Everyone seems to do it. But I know you're *not* happy, and something tells me that you are only doing this to get away from unhappiness. But you won't get away. You'll find you are only adding a new trouble to the old. And so——"

"Stop, Sába!" she cried, in a voice I had never heard and scarcely seemed to recognise. "How *dare* you say such things—a child like you! It is atrocious! You must be mad!"

"Ah! don't be angry with me. *You!*" I implored piteously. "Perhaps I am mad, or possessed with a devil, as the Bible says. Something that tells me things, and then mocks me because I can't alter them!"

I threw myself into a chair and covered my face with my hands, rocking my body to and fro in a paroxysm of senseless blind rage with life and the world and myself.

She stood there looking at me in a helpless fashion made up of anger at my precocity, and perplexity as to how best to answer it.

Finally I solved the difficulty. "I am very—sorry," I sobbed. "I couldn't help speaking. It's like something that springs up and flames and burns in me and has to come out. I've said it now, and I feel better. And if you are very angry and can't forgive me, I must just die."

"That is exaggeration," she said, but her voice was less severe. "No one dies simply because they are unhappy or have offended someone they love. I think the best thing you can do is to sit quietly by yourself and think matters over. Try and remember that there are two sides to every question. That I look at this from one point of view and you from another. That it is quite impossible for a child of your age to enter into such a subject fully and completely. That in this life *personal* happiness isn't everything. There are duties, obligations, many things to be considered. And a man's devotion counts for something, especially if it asks no return—is content with so little as mere passive acceptance of that devotion."

I had subdued my sobs. I lifted my eyes to her face, reading it better than she dreamt of. What I saw in it held me dumb with wonder. It seemed aged by years of suffering and misery. And yet how quiet and well-meaning were her words! Only I felt that her youth had been left behind that day, even as in a lesser measure was left my own. I should never be a child again; perhaps never dare to speak again the real truth of what I saw and what I felt.

For no one wanted truth. The world was made up of lies and—liars!

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The door closed. I was left alone—alone to think out all that had passed. The enormities of my own misdeeds, the anger and indignation I had aroused; the disgrace I had incurred. But, sharpest pang of all that stabbed my heart was the thought that I had irretrievably offended the one creature I loved best in all the world.

What had possessed me to say such things—to set myself up as a judge of her actions? What, indeed?

I went back to the events of my life since I had first landed in England. It seemed years ago since that arrival. I counted, again, my misdeeds and punishments. How trivial seemed the one, how heavy the other! Take it all in all, what was this house and these people? The one a place to sleep and eat in, to be ordered and controlled and scolded and tyrannised over. The others—just faulty human beings—no wiser than hundreds who make up the population of great cities. Was it my fault that I could not behold them as immaculate? That behind their wealth, and the well-ordered comfort of their lives I saw only self—self—self enthroned? One great capital, all-important “I.”

Around this “I” moved inferior and less important persons to administer to its comforts, its necessities, its importance and its hobbies. Whoso chanced to hold other opinions, to differ from the egoist’s standard of life, was treated as an enemy and an offender. Whoso dared to criticise his actions was deserving of the severest penalty of the law. And yet enthroned amidst household gods, accepting the base metal of flattery and toadyism as friendship, giving neither thought nor care to what did not personally concern itself

or tend to its own material benefit, this great "I" dwelt in blissful content with its own perfections.

Was I to blame for seeing such things as they were, instead of as they seemed? Was it my fault that my hours of punishment bore fruit of introspection instead of repentance? Was it my fault that in looking back on lessons I had learnt I found but a series of perplexing contradictions? That I must be truthful, yet never *speaking* the real truth about anyone or anything. That I must love God and pray to Him and believe in Him, yet ask no questions as to "Why?" That it was my duty to love my relations, simply because they *were* relations; not for anything they had done for me, not for kindness, sympathy, or charity, only because some curious thing called "kinship" united us.

So ran the tangle of my thoughts, gathering up and knotting together all that I saw, and learnt, and heard, and yet must not question.

I had ample time for meditation on this special day, for no one came near me. No one remembered I had had no dinner. The fact of Aunt Theo's engagement usurped all attention, as I learnt afterwards. Grandmamma was busy communicating the joyful news to friends and relatives. Mamma had to render assistance in the writing of those letters. Grandpapa had gone to pay a visit to a certain Lady Gubbins (the wife of an ex-Lord Mayor), who posed as a musical amateur, and occasionally played duets with him. Aunt Theo had shut herself up in her room with Sara Tollemarche, who had chanced to call in. The servants were busy discussing the probabilities of a wedding. Amidst such excitement and confusion what place had Sâba Macdonald?

A pale face and a pair of swollen eyes looked out at the square; watched the carriages come and go, and the well-dressed people visiting, walking, chatting, driving. How strange and narrow was life and the world—a medley of little spots of concentrated interests! Bayswater thought all the world was Bayswater; and Kensington and Mayfair, and Belgravia and the City thought likewise only of themselves, and their important concerns. Schools of thought and science and art worked and toiled each in its own groove, and believed they were serving their generation and future generations yet unborn; but posterity would only think how much cleverer and more advanced it was

in comparison with these faulty pioneers, and laugh at their mistakes and ridicule their pretensions. So had things been in the past and so were things now, and so would things *be*, and yet one puny soul sat alone and vexed itself over the problems of destiny and felt that because it was of and among these things there must be meaning and reason for their existence, and its own.

Convention, routine, self-interest, ambition—from these pin points of importance radiated all that meant life—its sins, its errors, its follies. Who could think out so great a subject? Who go far enough back for Cause, or far enough forward for Effect? Certainly not that poor, hunched-up, weary child on whom I cast compassionate eyes and memory. Certainly not the Sâba Macdonald who had yet to realise that she did not compose the universe, or was of any more importance to its scheme than a drop of water is to the ocean, than a grain of dust to the whirlwind.

True, there are some drops larger than others; there are grains of dust cumulative, not single, save to the naked eye. But what is their temporary activity against the teeming millions of forces surrounding, partaking of, or crushing them?

Man, with all his egoism, is less a leaf on the Tree of Life than a fibre of that leaf; and as it withers and dies, and falls and rots, and lives again, so he lives on, and yet on, transmitting to other leaves of that mystic Tree the knowledge of the seasons that have been; of the miracles of nature; the message of the soft brown earth that nourishes and cherishes and gives them back to the sunshine and the sky with each renewing spring.

This is the lesson of the Tree—a lesson so simple that a child may understand it; a lesson so deep that the wisest philosophers the world has ever known may have failed to read it aright, or translate it into one comprehensible language that might set the world's Towers of Babel at defiance.

* * * * *

So spent and exhausted was I that I fell asleep. Dreams took me away from memory of my humiliation, and opened the gates of enchantment to my earth-sealed senses. It seemed horrible to awake—to be called back by a rough shake, a harsh voice; my mother's voice now. She had only learnt that I had been "rude and disrespectful."

Aunt Theo had been silent as to my outburst, and grand-mamma had not given my rebellious speech in detail. Still, my mother felt it her duty to be angry, and fulfilled it.

She informed me that I had been a source of constant worry and vexation ever since we had lived under grand-papa's roof; that she was heartily ashamed of me, my appearance, my manners, and my general behaviour. That it was entirely owing to me and the said "general behaviour" that my grand-parents were so anxious for her to leave and take up residence with Aunt Eliza. That I knew she hated housekeeping; that she and Aunt Eliza had never got on together, and yet all through my wickedness and insubordination she was compelled to make this sacrifice.

"You are always telling me that to sacrifice one's own inclinations for the good of others is pleasing to God," I observed.

She changed the subject. I had often noticed that the platitudes repeated to me had a purely *personal* application, one never intended for my elders and superiors. My mother then adverted to her health and her delicacy, for which, also, I seemed to be responsible. At least, they dated from my appearance on this "mortal sphere," and, taken in conjunction with my sex, stood against me as records of original sin. Besides, mamma frankly stated that she always had hated girls. Boys could be sent to school, and could make their own way in the world, but girls—especially *such* a girl as the unfortunate subject of these lamentations—what were they to do, except get husbands, and when ugly, bad-tempered, and useless, what chance was there of that?

Taking this as both insult and inquiry, I told her that as it was God who made me she was blaming Him for my existence. Since I had inherited a disposition and a temper, I myself was not responsible for their existence. That if I was such a worry and trouble to everybody I would go away and work and support myself. True, I was young, but I could be a kitchen-maid, or help in a laundry, or, perhaps, go into a school and teach music. As a sounding box on the ears and a furious shake were the only reply I received to my suggestions, I can only suppose they won as little favour as their originator. I was too worn out for any more tears; I think I had cried myself dry. So after the blow and the shaking, and the last angry

epithets bestowed on me, I crept away to my own room, and when I knew they were all at tea I slipped down stairs and past the kitchen door and up the area steps, and so on to the Kirkmanns'.

Their hall door was open and some people were going in. I slipped in also, and made my way to Ada's room. I found her kneeling by her bed; she was dressed in white and looked more spiritual and beautiful than ever. My kitten had followed me up the stairs and jumped into my arms. I consoled myself with its dumb show of affection, and waited till those prayers were finished. At last Ada stood up, a curious glow and exaltation in her eyes and face.

"Oh, Sâba!" she cried breathlessly, "I have had a call. I am to sit to-night in the circle."

I stared at her. "What does that mean?"

"It means that I may have influence; that through me communications will be made; that I may be the means of revealing to others what is so near and clear to myself."

"At a *séance*?" I said eagerly. "Oh, Ada, how wonderful!"

"I suppose it seems wonderful to you. But it is what I have been hoping for, expecting for a long time."

"And—and how did you know the time had come?"

"I have told you about the Voice. It spoke to me quite distinctly. I told grandmamma the message; she is quite willing. But what is the matter with *you*, Sâba? Your eyes look as if you had been crying for a year!"

I put up one hand and touched my swollen aching lids. Then I looked at myself in her toilet-glass. Heavens! what an object I beheld! My face was smudged and my eyes nearly obliterated, and my hair was half unplaited. I had on that unbecoming plaid frock, no hat or coat, and beside Ada in her snowy muslin I looked as darkness looks to light.

"Oh!" I said at last. "I have been in disgrace as usual; had my ears boxed, as usual; *cried*, as usual; been shut up in my room, as usual. I've had nothing to eat since breakfast, and I just ran round to tell you that I can't bear this sort of life any longer and am going to run away."

"Run away, Sâba! What *are* you saying?"

I hugged the kitten more closely, and took comfort from the love in its lovely topaz eyes.

"Yes," I repeated. "It's the only thing to do. No one wants me. I've offended them, or hurt their feelings ever since I came here. If I had money I would go back to Australia and the bush, and the Laird, and make him let me live with him. But I haven't any—only half a sovereign; that wouldn't take me very far, would it?"

"No," said Ada, her sweet face troubled. "But, dear, you must not run away. It's not as if you were a boy, or as if life were a story-book, where everything comes right in the end. I'm sure your people don't really mean to be unkind. It's only——"

"I know," I interrupted. "It's only that I rub them the wrong way. I'm placed by Providence among a set of people with whom I haven't a thought or feeling in common. Everything that seems right and natural to me seems wrong to them. Well, if I go away——"

"Oh, hush!" cried Ada, almost tearfully. "Thank goodness here's grandmamma!"

Mrs. Kirkmann looked amazed at my distraught appearance. I was now so exhausted and faint that I could only sink down into a chair and leave explanations to Ada.

The dear old lady was in real distress. She tried to dissuade me from so rash and foolish a determination. She pointed out that even if I *did* run away I could be easily traced and caught and brought back, and that then things would be worse than ever. She even promised to accompany me home and plead my cause. I laughed scornfully. I knew that the intervention of a third person would only make matters a thousand times worse; that if my mother or my grand-parents suspected I had made Mrs. Kirkmann the confidant of my woes they would never forgive me.

I listened in rebellious silence, refusing to promise obedience. What use? I was in disgrace with everyone. Even my adored Aunt Theo was angry with me. Life seemed empty of all interest; at an end as far as I was concerned.

Then at last Mrs. Kirkmann remembered her friends and the "circle," and that Ada was to be present. She looked from one to the other of us in great perplexity.

"Supposing I let you come too," she said to me. "Perhaps there may be a message; perhaps you may receive some advice or counsel that will alter your self-will. You

must not sit at the table, but you may remain in the room. Only, are you sure you won't be frightened?"

Frightened! I? I sprang up, all eagerness and excitement. "Oh, *do* let me come! I have always wanted to know what a *séance* is! And if spirits *do* come, and if there is a message for me I promise to obey it. As for being frightened, why should I be? Ada isn't."

"Ada is different," said Mrs. Kirkmann. "All her life she has been more or less in touch with the 'other side.' To you it is unknown ground."

"It is time, grandmamma," said Ada suddenly.

Her little face was white as a snowdrop. She moved quickly to the door as if obeying some call. Mrs. Kirkmann held out her hand to me. I put down the kitten, and taking the proffered hand went downstairs to where the "circle" was assembled.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT I had expected to see I hardly know. What I did see was merely a number of people, ordinary enough in appearance, standing in a group in the middle of the dining-room.

There was only one light, that of a lamp on the side-board. The curtains were drawn over the windows; the fire was burning low and screened by an oak-panelled screen. Mr. Kirkmann was talking to a somewhat shabby-looking man, with long hair and large vacant eyes. I learnt afterwards that he was the Medium.

As we entered they all looked round.

Ada was still a few steps in advance. She spoke to no one. She went straight up to the round table and sat down. Some half dozen others also took their places. Those who remained outside the circle found seats. A great silence reigned for a few moments. Then the shabby man with the long hair said suddenly, "Let the circle join hands and let us all unite in singing a hymn."

I had subsided into a chair beside a thin, sad-faced lady in black. She suggested, "Shall we gather at the River?"

Forthwith everyone burst more or less tunefully into song and I noted that the circle were holding each other's

hands. After the first verse a storm of "raps" began. They sounded overhead; on the walls; in fact, everywhere in the room.

"Our friends are here," exclaimed the medium. "Let us question as to who is present, and if darkness is needed?"

I clutched at the hand of my neighbour. "Don't be alarmed," she whispered. "The spirits never hurt us. Even those who are unbelievers."

"Are you an unbeliever?" said I.

"I was; but my doubts are passing away. I received a message that proved convincingly my dear husband was on the next plane, and anxious to communicate with me."

I felt awed. "And did he really speak to you?"

"Not to me by word of mouth; only through Mr. Ezra Jakes, the medium. To-night I may be more favoured. But why are you amongst us? You are a mere child."

"So is Ada. I am a friend of hers, and Mrs. Kirkmann permitted me to come in to-night."

"Ada is wonderful," said the lady. "We have heard that she would conduct the *séance* to-night; that Mr. Ezra Jakes would not be needed. But we shall see."

"Are those 'raps' really done by spirits?" I asked.

"Of course; who else? Presently they may ask for darkness. Then there is music. You see that concertina? It will be played on and carried round the circle, and I have heard bells unlike our earthly ones, and sometimes a voice speaks."

I began to tremble a little. Such dealings with the occult and invisible seemed a little bit uncanny. Yet my unfortunate knack of questioning the wherefore of things came into play once more.

"But surely it's rather—rather *silly* for spirits to do such things; to come back to this world after they've left it for a better one, and rap at a dining-room table as a signal of their presence."

"How do we on this lower plane make known our presence to each other? Don't we knock at the door? In like manner those who revisit us use the signal to which we are accustomed."

"Oh!" I said, and relapsed into silence, for Mr. Ezra Jakes announced that darkness was required. Someone turned out the lamp and put the screen entirely

round the fire. The room was now almost in total darkness and once again the voices took up that "gathering at the river," and sang it with full-throated enthusiasm, if surprising ignorance of harmony. I could see nothing. I did not sing; I only kept tight hold of my companion's hand and listened with beating heart to rustling, to raps, to strange and fearsome noises all around and about the room as if invisible beings were flitting to and fro, with ghostly garments and soundless feet. Suddenly there was a fresh manifestation. The alphabet was asked for—at least, Mr. Ezra said it was. I heard his voice calling letter by letter. As the desired one was spoken a rap announced the fact and at the conclusion of a word came three quick little raps.

"It is the electric telegraphy of spiritualism," whispered my neighbour. "Isn't it wonderful?"

I whispered an assent. My fears had gone now and an intense and eager curiosity had taken their place.

The message proved to be an intimation that "Viola" was there with us. That, furthermore, Mr. Ezra Jakes would not be needed for a time. He was to withdraw and Ada would take his place. Also the spirit wished for light.

"Dear me! that is very unusual," observed my neighbour. "As a rule we sit in darkness the whole time."

It might have been only a trait of my irreverent disposition that sent me off on the track of a text, corroborative of her words. While I was pursuing it to its authority the lamp was relit, and the faces of the "circle" stood out once more. My eyes turned to Ada. She was gazing straight before her, but her eyes had a strange vacant look in them. Her right hand was clasped in that of her grandfather, the left was held by another member of the circle—a thin, weedy-looking young man with an ascetic face.

For a moment or two no one spoke. The medium was standing in somewhat sulky dignity near the fireplace, his hands clasped behind him and his eyes fixed on the ceiling as if he expected to find something there more worthy of his attention than the circle he had been ordered to quit.

On the table came a loud, imperative rap, as if one called "attention." Ada's eyes lost their fixed stare, her hands relaxed the clasp of those beside her. She

folded them together and leant back in her chair as if asleep.

Then, quite suddenly, she began to speak. Only the voice was not Ada's voice. It was deeper, more solemn.

"I come here to-night charged with a message from some Being who gives no name—a man. This message I am to write. It will then be taken to the person for whom it is intended."

She bent forward and groped with her right hand as if in search for materials to inscribe this message. Someone rose and placed paper and a pencil before her. She seized the pencil and for some moments wrote rapidly. Then, still with her eyes closed, she folded up the paper in a square compact form and laid one hand upon it. Everyone was looking at her. I, in awed and fascinated silence; the others as if such things were by no means uncommon to their experience. Suddenly a cool soft breeze seemed to fan my face, yet there was no draught or any open window. I wondered whence it came, but even as I wondered I saw Ada lift her hand and the letter rise and float out across the room as a leaf on a current of air. Only it floated steadily and straight and without any gyrations, and fell into my lap—*mine!*

I stared at it and then at Ada, and at the watchful, attentive faces all around. I heard someone say: "It is for you. Read it."

But something else—some inward voice—seemed to whisper: "Not *here*; or now."

I took up the paper and placed it in the pocket of my dress. At the same moment Ada began to speak again.

She spoke so rapidly I could scarcely follow her. The words were not the words of a child. I cannot remember half of what she said though I can recall her face and the rapt attention with which those present followed her remarks. She spoke of a common meeting-ground between the spirits of the departed and the *seeking* spirits of those on the physical plane. She spoke of souls who were earth-bound by reason of sin; of wrong committed and unrepented; of sudden death; of self-destruction. She spoke of powers granted even in this life to the pure in heart; the power to hear and to see what is inaudible and invisible to grosser faculties. She spoke of existence spent in developing those faculties instead of uprooting them, thereby killing out the spiritual forces with which

all humanity is dowered, if it would only believe the fact instead of ridiculing its possibility. Of other wonders she spoke; of guardians or guides given to each human life—aiding, comforting, upholding it on the pathway that leads to all knowledge and to eternal content. But for *one* living being who listened to the inner voice, or trained its faculties to accept spiritual truth, ten thousand would turn deaf ears, incredulous minds, stubborn disbelief to the teacher's gentle efforts. And of many other things she spoke; seemingly as the mouthpiece of some wise wondrous force of which I, at least, understood nothing. Even those accustomed to such experiences hung breathless on the child's words. They flowed on and on like a river at full tide; and as suddenly as they had begun they ceased. Ada sat up; opened her eyes; looked vaguely round the circle of attentive faces.

"They have brought me back," she said wonderingly. "Oh, I am sorry. I—I wanted to stay. It was so beautiful!"

The group unloosed hands and rose slowly.

"We will ask for nothing more to-night," said Mr. Kirkmann. "The usual manifestations would seem commonplace after what we have seen and heard."

Mr. Ezra Jakes seemed annoyed, I thought. He had not been called upon to work any of his usual signs and wonders. He drew himself up and looked with some anger at his young rival.

"This can scarcely be called a *séance*," he remarked. "It is more a case of trance. The trance of one possessing the faculty of clair-audience—a thing quite apart from clairvoyance, I may remark—hence the possibility of *light*. Sound can be transmitted along the telepathic waves emanating from the spiritual to the human brain; but manifestations, such as are usual under my mediumship, require darkness and concentration of thought undisturbed by surrounding objects. You—you are sure you don't wish for a little extension of—of our meeting to-night?"

He spoke to Mr. Kirkmann. There was anxiety in his tone. But it was Ada who answered him, simply and directly. "We do not want anything more, Mr. Jakes," she said. "You are not a good medium, and you attract bad forces. Besides—why do you have wires up your sleeves?"

Every eye turned on the unfortunate man. Those in his immediate neighbourhood moved away and left him standing ashy-faced, shaking, humiliated, before that childish accuser.

"I—I really don't know what you mean," he stammered.

"Oh, I think you do. I am sorry to have to tell you this; but I am bidden to do so. Spiritualistic trickery is shameful and cruel. You profess to spiritual influence and yet you play tricks. You must not come here—ever again."

The man blustered and stamped, and got into a very human and unspiritual rage. But he met with no sympathy. The Kirkmanns looked coldly and angrily at him. My friend, the mourning lady, rose and accused him of deluding her with false messages from her dead husband. Other people murmured vaguely. I heard one man suggest "search," but at that indignity Mr. Jakes drew the line. He said he had wasted his time on unworthy subjects; that he shook the dust of this ungrateful house from off his shoes; that it would be a marked one henceforward among the elect, and vain would be its endeavours to procure any fresh medium to throw light on the Way, or reveal the mysteries of the Sacred Path.

Having said all this he took his departure, and those who remained began a discussion on the evening's events. Ada was just her simple natural self again. She came to me and enquired what I thought of the proceedings? I could not form any direct answer. I was both perplexed and impressed.

"What happened to you?" I asked. "Do you remember?"

She smiled in her old wise way. "Of course. I was sent to sleep and taken far up to a beautiful other world. I saw my mother and we talked together until at last she said I must come back, for I was wanted; and that I must send that man away. He was bad, and an impostor, and we must not have him here any more."

"Is that all you remember? Nothing about me?"

"Did you have a message?" she asked eagerly. "That was not from me. It was the spirit who controlled me."

Such things were past my understanding. I gazed at

her in my stupid, wondering way. I felt in my pocket. Yes, the letter was there. The message sent from some, to me, unknown sphere; the message as yet unread.

The voice of Mr. Kirkmann broke in on us. He came up to Ada and laid his hand on her golden head.

"Dear little one," he said, "God has sent you to open our blind eyes, I think. While we were looking for wonders and miracles we were passing by the real truth; we were lending our spiritual senses to deception. Through the channel of your pure soul a new light has been revealed. That light we shall follow by prayer and much searching of our spirits. But never again by *this* means."

He looked at the table, at the circle, at the ceiling whither mediums had been propelled, at the signs they had written there. Perhaps he thought of other wonders of which I knew nothing; of messages given and received; of all the strange and singular methods by which "communications" and "manifestations" had been made in that very room. And yet he had suddenly lost faith in them all. He had been travelling to Truth by a wrong road. He had been credulous, and allowed himself to believe because he *wanted* to believe. I heard him say these things as he dismissed the circle—all that strange crowd of beings, who loved the mystical, the wonderful, the incredible. I heard them grumbling and complaining; they were as yet unsatisfied. He told them they would never receive satisfaction in the old way again.

And Ada only stood there with that soft wise smile on her lips, as if she saw or heard things which our grosser senses were unable to see or to hear.

"And a little child shall lead them." I found myself saying that over and over again. For I was full of awe and wonder, and half afraid of this child whom I had called friend, and yet who, to-night, seemed to have been transformed into some other being, scarcely of this world at all. Yet it was she who recalled me to things material and important.

"Sāba, you ought to go home," she said anxiously. "They have not missed you yet. They think you are in your own room. And you have been scolded and punished so much," she went on pityingly, "that it will not be wrong for you to return as you came. Someone is watching for you at the gate—a kind woman who is your friend:

Go straight back, and no one will know of your coming here. And when you are alone in your room take out that letter and read it. If you obey what it says you will live more happily, and understand better what now seems so hard."

She led me away. I cannot remember speaking to anyone, or wishing anyone good-night, but I remember the cool night air, and the quiet stars, and a voice exclaiming, "Oh, Miss Sâba, I'm so thankful you've come back. I was just going to run in and ask if you were at Mrs. Kirkmann's. There, come along and have some supper. You've been starved all day."

It was Rachel's voice—kind-hearted Rachel who alone had thought of me. I crept down the steps and went to my own room by way of the servants' staircase. She brought me hot milk, and bread and butter and fruit, and helped me to undress and get into bed.

No one else came near me to wish me good-night; not even Aunt Theo. I felt I must have irretrievably offended her, but I had reached a stage of numbness and deadness that mercifully shut off all keener feelings. Besides, I wanted to read my message. I begged Rachel to leave the candle a little while, and the moment the door closed I took out that letter from my pocket.

I opened it with fear and yet with a vague hope that I might be about to receive some real comfort at last. The writing was minute but very distinct. It was not like Ada's usual caligraphy.

Thus ran the message:

"Child, cease to rebel. Learn to be patient and tolerant. The lessons of life are hard, yet are they taught only in kindness and mercy. You crave love, but your nature repels it. Do not hope for comprehension, yet do not despair of happiness. Some measure of it falls to every earthly lot, though not as they dream and desire of it. Yours may come through *servicing* others. Yet they who serve and wait have also their hour of reward. Banish the crude and foolish theories in which you have sought refuge. He who has created thee shall He not guard His creation? This life is but one step on the ladder stretching towards infinity. Mortal eyes may not pierce that distance, nor mortal brain conceive of it. Into the great circle of immortality all shall pass at last who seek

the way and crave the highest good. Keep your eyes fixed on what is above; from thence alone flow light and comfort and healing. There is One ever near who loves you with such love as earth cannot give. Open your heart to receive and believe in that love and the things of your sad environment shall happily vex your soul no more."

That was all.

I read it again and again; a sense of peace and comfort came to me such as I had never known. I saw myself in a new light, and saw a self-tormenting, dissatisfied, morbid being, far readier to descry faults in others than in herself; consumed by feverish discontent; unable to accept life as a gift with meaning and beauty behind it. Nervous dejection, hopelessness, dissatisfaction, these things had ruled my mental and physical life to the exclusion of healthier feelings. Yet life meant heroism and patience, as well as happiness and self-content.

Oh! how wonderful the thought seemed. How sweet were the tears that rushed to my eyes. I could pray again. The great blackness rolled back like a curtain, and I fell asleep with those tears on my cheek and my precious message clasped to my heart.

Peace with God. The sense of sins forgiven. The promise of help along the stony road. The blessed assurance of love around me, about me, insignificant atom in creation's scheme as I knew myself! Oh! the deep joy, the sweet peace; and oh, thrice blessed sleep that folded quiet arms around me, and hushed me on her breast.

CHAPTER XX.

It is pleasant to wake up in a chastened and repentant frame of mind. To be able to review past misdoings in the light of good resolutions; to determine that such misdoings are a thing of the past, never to be repeated; to feel a wonderful superabundant trust in an all-watchful Providence; to open the Bible with a breathless haste for the discovery of some new and helpful method of meeting the day's trials and temptations.

We know there are such things; that every day brings them to us and that the hardest thing in the world is to be "good." But we have been assured that goodness is possible. That the world is full of good people and good children, and that our own special naughtiness springs from a bad, wicked heart—a heart that must be changed, and that can only be changed by God's Holy Spirit. So we pray. Oh, how earnestly we pray, and how hard we strive to keep those old doubts and whispers of the Evil One out of our minds. But he is lying in wait for us. He says "Are you sure that God lives in heaven? That He *can* hear you? That if everyone on this side of the globe were offering Him their morning worship now, He would have to listen to *uncountable millions* of petitions at the same moment!

"Think of it—uncountable millions; and yours one of them! How can you expect to receive a special answer? How do you *know* you are heard?

"Faith, you say. But what is faith? Believing or *trying* to believe in something no one can prove to be true. Who was there in the Beginning to write what occurred? How could the world spring into existence in six days? And do you know we are keeping the wrong Sunday? It is not the Sunday of the Bible at all."

We try to shut our ears; we won't listen. This is the voice of the Tempter and we have resolved he shall not stand between us and God any longer! So we pray. Oh! *how* we pray, to be delivered from doubt and fear and not to have this terrible voice for ever whispering away our poor little new-born faith.

The sun is high in heaven, there are birds singing and chirping. There is gold glad sunshine over roof and street. It is spring, and the earth is young once more, and we are young and hope is with us—wonderful, intangible, exquisite hope! We are beginning a new life also; a new life from *to-day*. We are going to be obedient and patient and dutiful; we are not going to vex our elders or question their authority; we will be meek and humble, and try to win love instead of repelling it. Oh, surely it is easy to be good and to be loved if one sets one's heart upon it.

We won't think of hell and eternal punishment. We will try to think that God is Love, and sent His only beloved Son into this world to save sinners, of whom we—

personally—are the chief. So we pray. Oh! *how* we pray; and how light grows our heart and how happy we feel! We could sing aloud for very joy of the beautiful world and the beautiful life in it. We try to remember all our benefits and forget all our trials. This is the era of a new birth. We shake off the old tiresome, wicked, slothful feelings. They are done with for ever.

That new heart; that new spirit! Oh, yes, they *are* possible. They are to be won and treasured for our very own if only we pray aright and are sincere in our petitions. How strong we feel. What peace is ours! When will the first trial come so that we may prove ourselves strong to bear it; so that our light may shine out and convince those who once wronged us that we are changed, reborn, repentant?

No more wild rages or fits of temper. No more rebellion at the duties of the day. No more criticism of our elders. These belong to that old self—that dreadful, wicked, troublesome self lying there somewhere in the background, like the shed skin of a snake. It is our skin. We have shed it; we have left it behind. Oh! beautiful world of goodness. Oh! blessed angels that have taken our prayers to the footstool of Grace. Oh! happy, happy “We,” that have learnt the truth and the way, and are only eager to obey and to follow.

We have read our chapter. It is a little bit perplexing, perhaps; a little inclined to show that the Christianity of the world is not in one single degree the Christianity of Christ. But we say to ourselves, “God looks not at the outward appearance, but at the heart.” So perhaps the hearts of these people whose conduct puzzles us, is all right with God. Perhaps they only act in their queer, contradictory way to *prove* that we are not to judge them by externals. If God does not do so, it is surely presumptuous for us to attempt it.

We read on. How simple. Only love. The whole of religion, of life’s duty, just love. Love for each other and love for God who made us. Then why—

Ah! we stop abruptly. We have resolved there shall be no more “whys.” They are the root of all evil. We must not question; we must accept. We must not doubt; we must believe. We must never lose sight of that one great assurance, “God is Love.” It is a little unfortunate that we lose our place at this moment;

that the Book slips, and as we catch it, opens at a fresh perplexity. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God."

A fearful thing! But why? Is He not Love, and does not love mean pity, pardon, comprehension? Then why is He represented here as unjust, unmerciful, unforgiving? Why are sacrifice and suffering alone pleasing to Him? Why had His innocent Son to be the victim of atonement? How easy to have forgiven us without that Tragedy of the Cross. How much easier still to have given us better hearts, kinder natures. Then we could have pleased Him according to His wishes?

We shut our eyes; we shut our ears. We *must* not think such thoughts. We are drifting back to our old bad habit.

Love—that is what we have to keep before us. "God so loved us"—We give another look at the open page. Christ speaking to His disciples: "If any man come after Me and *hate* not his own father and mother, he cannot be My disciple." *Hate*?—but a moment ago it was Love.

If we told our parents we hated them because we were Christ's disciples what would be the result? Could the sowing of strife in the home, the denial of the affections, of nature, be in conformity with the doctrine of the Son of God? And was He not also Son of Man? Did He hate his father and mother? We catch our breath suddenly. But He had no earthly *father*. Mary the Virgin was only espoused to Joseph of Nazareth. She was not his wife when the angel appeared with the intelligence that she was to have a son. Therefore he must not be judged by ordinary rules. What would mean disrespect in a disciple is the privileged utterance of a Master.

Family love and unity did not appeal to Christ as things of vast importance. They were mere accidents of life not fit to stand in the way of higher things. When the call came, all else was disregarded. "He that loveth father or mother, wife or child, brother or sister more than Me, is not worthy to be called My disciple."

We sigh and put the Book aside. This is a thing too high for us. We are not able to bear it. For how is it possible to love the Unseen and the Impersonal as we can love the dear human comprehensible creatures who are of our own state and nature?—Those we can see,

hear, touch, understand? But the other—Oh! how far away, how hopeless, how bewildering it all is!

Gone is the morning's glory—the light-hearted acceptance of joy with life. Are we happy now? Are we reborn? Are we changed? Is the old skin shed and cast off, or merely shuffled aside? Is the old life lying in wait for us just behind that door, and are we going to meet it in that new brave way?

Have we only had a glorious wonderful dream, and are we now awake, or is that the breakfast-bell clanging loudly in the hall below? We tremble and turn faint. Fain would we sink on our knees once again and pray for guidance, but if we are late we shall be scolded or punished.

They—those fussy members of the household, who rule us so strictly—would perhaps excuse us if they knew how we had been employed. On our knees and with God's Word. Shall we tell them? And shall we speak also of our new discovery and our new resolve?

This is a Christian household—a virtuous, upright, God-fearing family. Surely they will understand our new important resolves; will help us; pray with us; encourage us. For they, too, must have learnt all these wonderful truths; taken them as the rule and guidance of their lives. How else could they face God in His sanctuary? How else judge the lives of others?

We take courage; we go down stairs. We enter boldly, though the bell rang five minutes ago. We smile at the cold, stern faces turned towards us. We say they are not stern at heart. God reads them better than we can read them. He knows, and He is Love. How fearless we are! We take the rebuke as it is deserved, yet we answer it. "We had not lingered in bed. We had only been—been——"

Why does our courage fail? Why can't we look them fairly in the face? "Been reading——" we falter.

Reading! How angry Christian voices can be! What business have we to read in the mornings? There is a time for all things. In future all books shall be taken from the bedroom. Filling our brains with trash and nonsense instead of attending to our duty! And so on; and so on. It is a little hard on us.

We sit down; we take our bread and milk and whisper

grace over it. The voice is still going on. "What were we reading?"

Ah! now our opportunity has come. We look up; not boldly—we are remembering to be meek and lowly in heart.

"It was the Bible!"

"The Bible! I don't believe you. Speak the truth. It was one of those trashy novels you are always trying to get hold of!"

Can our ears deceive us? We are not *believed!* What shall we do now? We think of texts, but they might be taken as arguments. We must not argue with our elders. We think of silence and of prayer; prayer that their eyes may be opened and their hearts softened so will they believe us. All things are possible to Faith. And have we not read of its reward. So we say nothing; only set our teeth and wait for a miracle. Our own small comforting bit of evidence that what we have said is true. Strange to say, it does not work—not in this particular instance. The accusing voice goes on. We repeat our assertion; this time with scarlet flush of indignation and a less degree of meekness. These are accounted signs of guilt, of bravado, of disrespect.

Someone is sent to our room and ordered to bring down the book by our bedside. We are to be confronted by our own lie, writ large, that all may see and read our shame. But we smile happily, we know it will be all right now. Our innocence can be proved so easily. Oh! why have we doubted?

There is an ominous silence—a silence filled by such trivialities as the chipping of an egg-shell, the breaking off of a morsel of toast. We go on with our own breakfast. It is, to our thinking, the sign of an easy conscience. Strange that to other eyes it should assume the shape of defiance.

Is it a long or a short time before the messenger returns? We hardly know; we are so perfectly satisfied. For once we are to come out triumphant from the ordeal of Faith. There is the rustle of a print dress. All eyes turn to the door. Our eyes turn also. Why—what is this?

We see a book held out. But the cover of the Bible was *black*. Who is playing this foolish trick upon us?

It is the messenger, of course. She has made a mistake,

Stay; she is being questioned. We have dropped our spoon; we seem to have lost our appetite. Our heart grows cold and sick, and we feel our knees shaking. Yet we are not guilty. We *did* speak the truth.

And now the waters of wrath are flooding our confused senses. "*Liar.*" Yes, that is what we hear. It is bad enough to be unpunctual, disobedient, disrespectful, but added to these misdemeanours comes now the sin of untruthfulness. Do we know the fate of liars? Have we heard of the lake of brimstone and fire; of the worm that never dies; of the fire that is never quenched?

But we are dumb and desperate. Who has played us this trick? Who could have put "Nicholas Nickleby" in place of our familiar leather-bound Bible?

And then the old fierce madness comes over us. Is *this* the way prayer is answered? Is this the way Faith is rewarded? That voice goes on and on, and we hear our enormities repeated again and again. Oh, hateful moments! Oh, pitiful sufferings of youth and ignorance. We don't attempt to defend ourselves; we can't. For there is none to believe, even as there is none to help. We don't cry. We are far beyond relief of tears. Besides, have we not put childhood away from us? But scalding drops gather behind our stiff eyelids; and in our ears is a sound as of rushing waters. The room goes up and down; the faces jeer and mock. They are not human faces any longer, they are the faces of fiends and devils such as we have seen embellishing the margin of an old "Pilgrim's Progress." There is Apollyon and his angels. Hoofs, tails; grinning, horrible monsters, and they are triumphing over us. They are mocking at our beautiful morning dream; mocking at the failure of our miracle; mocking at the idea that we should esteem ourselves of such importance as to fancy for one single moment we were right with God in heaven, and therefore with the world.

The accusing voice goes on and other voices join in chorus. Will they never stop? Will they drive us mad? Are we to start on the new birth and the new birth-right branded with a false charge? Why won't they believe? Oh! why; why; *why?*

* * * * *

There comes a strange silence and a great peace. Are

we asleep, or are we dead, and is this heaven—this new peace, this *sense* of drifting whence we know not? Only there is no fear in our hearts and we simply float on and on through infinite solitudes. Sometimes we are alone; sometimes Someone is with us—a lovely being, with eyes tender and wise, and full of pity. Such pity as we have never seen in human eyes. And other faces come up out of the mists, and we see wide fields of billowy clouds. How they toss and roll and sway, like waves of a mighty ocean. Yes, this must be a dream. Why can't it go on? Why must we ever wake?

* * * * * *

But we are waking. We open our eyes. The room is dark, and there is a strange scent of drugs and queer odours and someone is sitting by the bedside, working. We watch her; her face is strange, but kind. We wonder who she is. We ask. But is this our voice so faint and weak and far off. She starts and looks at us. Then we know the face. It is that of an old friend. We gasp a name. The old familiar voice answers us. It is our nurse of childhood's days. She has come back. But what has happened? We hear her bidding us be very quiet for we have been ill—very, very ill; and she was sent for to nurse us. And now we must get well and not talk; just lie still and sleep, and take nourishment. We laugh—a weak, funny little laugh that ends in coughing. We wonder how long we have lived, how much we have dreamt, and how much is reality? We try not to think because it hurts. But there is something we remember dimly; some haunting, pursuing misery that has obsessed this long stupor. What was it? What was said or done to us before—before—

It has escaped again. We lie quite still and try to piece ourselves together. Illness such as this is new to us. And not to know, not to feel we have been ill, is very strange. At last we put a question. The answer surprises us. "Two weeks."

Two weeks—fourteen days and nights—we have lain here, delirious and unconscious. Where have we been all that time? It is all a blank, all utter nothingness, save for that dream of the tender face and pitying eyes.

* * * * * *

The brief sleep of Death—the other side of the closed

door. Whence come such thoughts? And what of a message—a message sent from that spirit-sphere? So far, yet at times so near. Thought and memory creep back wave on wave, gently, peacefully, harmoniously, and following them comes a sense of day and night and the simple, common things of life once more. And far, far back brood the shapes of misery and despair; the sense of sorrow endured, but put aside—of no consequence beside the graver issues of life and death. Injustice and wrong trouble us no more. The soul is basking in sunshine of pure thankfulness, and life is sweet because youth is sweet, and we are still so young!

* * * * *

Which things are an allegory, or a page out of Sâba Macdonald's life. Take them as you please.

END OF BOOK I.

BOOK II

WHAT THE GIRL ENDURED

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BOOK II

WHAT THE GIRL ENDURED

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CHAPTER I.

A PLEASANT, sunny room ; the window is open and a light wind stirs the branches of a flowering chestnut-tree in the garden. There is a scent of lilacs and wallflowers. On the table stands a large bowl of primroses ; another bowl of white hyacinths is on the window-sill. I wake from a long dreamless sleep and ask myself how I come to be here—whence this lovely lazy sense of well-being, of idle dreamy delight.

This is not my own room ; I am quick to see that. It is furnished simply, yet prettily. The dressing-table is flounced with white muslin over pink ; the curtains are tied back with rose-coloured ribbons. There is a dwarf bookcase in a corner filled with books. The bed on which I am lying has snowy muslin draperies depending from a ring in the ceiling, so that they give the bed a tent-like effect. I rub my eyes and sit up. How did I come here ? There was no room like this in Pembridge Square.

As I move and bend forward I hear a sudden familiar little sound—a *mew-w-w*, prolonged and gentle. Then something soft and black and warm leaps on the white quilt and rubs its head against my arms.

My kitten—my “Stray,” as I named it. But how comes it here ? Where am I ? As I hug it, I am conscious of strange weakness ; my head swims dizzily and I begin to shake ; I lie back against the pillows. The little soft creature walks to and fro over the white quilt, purring loudly with content and recognition. But I close my eyes and try to *think*.

Am I at grandpapa's, or at Ada's, or where ?

Strange that thought should be such an effort. It makes me quite tired and sleepy. I close my eyes ; but through the closed lids I can feel the golden sunlight pierce, and it burns far into my brain, and then I lose the clue once more.

* * * * * *

Waking, sleeping, wondering, enduring, I lose all count of time. People come and go, and I wonder why they are all so kind and gentle. Ada comes and sits by me for long hours ; but we are very quiet ; we don't talk much now. And Aunt Theo comes—with the old loving look in her eyes and the old tender words for me. And Jean is here—old Jean Macgregor—and Rachel ; she, too, flits in and out in stiff print or her black afternoon gown. And my mother—she, too, comes in and out and asks me how I feel, and gives me medicine, and jelly, and grapes. I cannot understand it all. Why should everyone be so kind ? Why am I never scolded ? Who is the serious-faced gentleman who comes in, and smiles at me and says, " Well, and how is our little friend getting on ? "

It is very perplexing, because I cannot *hold* the things, or the meaning, or the people. They shift about, and come and go and change so often. I can hardly tell whether I am asleep or awake half the time.

Then quite suddenly one day my head gets clear. Mrs. Vandrupp is standing by the bed now. I am greatly surprised. I had thought she would not trouble to come and see me. But I am so pleased to see her pleasant face and hear her funny English that I become quite cheerful. I even confide some of my puzzle to her, and she solves it. I learn that we have come to Brunswick Gardens—mamma and I, and that my Aunt Eliza and my cousins are expected almost any day. I was brought here in an invalid carriage, of which I remember nothing. This room is so pleasant and quiet and sunny that it was given up to me. All this has taken weeks, and yet I am still in bed and unable to " get up my strength." Mrs. Vandrupp assures me that it is only " naughty little gels " who refuse to get up their strength when they have tonics, and jellies, and chicken broth given them every day. I tell her I will certainly try to follow her advice, only somehow it doesn't seem to rest entirely with myself. And at this she goes

over to the window and looks out on the garden for quite a long time. I ask her how large is the garden, and if there are flowers and fruit trees in it, and if those are bees I hear always buzzing and murmuring close to the window. She comes back, and her eyes are a little red, so I think the sun must be very strong and hot. Yet I feel strangely cold.

She is very cheery and we laugh together. She asks me if I am fond of the sea, and says when I am stronger I must go away to it, and bathe, and boat, and get rosy and fat like other children. I laugh again. It seems very funny to picture myself rosy and fat—I, whose cheeks have never known colour and whose frame has been more than once described as "almost a skeleton."

But in some way she has brought me out of vagueness into touch with life again. I wonder how I got ill, and why it is so hard to get well.

The next time the serious gentleman comes to see me I recognise that he is a doctor—some great and skilful man from Harley Street. He feels my pulse and sounds my chest and looks at my tongue. He says, "And how do we like our tonic?" and "Can we take cod-liver oil?" and "Is our strength getting up?" and "Do we take our Liebig, and port wine?" Then he goes away with mamma, and outside the door they stop and talk in whispers.

But my ears are strangely acute to-day. I strain them to listen, for I am weary of this mystery concerning me.

"I fear, I very much fear there is a tendency to—*to decline*," says the serious gentleman. And then come some questions as to "family tendencies," "inherited weakness," "too highly-strung, nervous organization." I have not read books for nothing, and I know what all this means. I lie back on the pillows and smile. I feel perfectly convinced I am *not* going to die; something within me tells me that. Life is too full, too important for me to forsake it on the threshold. I have something to do first. I am not very clear what the "something" is, but I shall know some day.

The buzzing voices go on: "Vital powers, constitutional weakness, excessive imaginative faculties." What funny things Harley Street doctors do say! I must really give them a lesson in "vital powers," and the effect of imagination. *Their* imagination! The voices cease, and

I hear the sound of footsteps dying away in the distance. I lie with half-closed eyes meditating a surprise; but I want Ada's assistance. I must wait for her daily visit. Usually she comes between four and five in the afternoon. Presently mamma returns; she looks cross, and tired, and worried. She says I *must* take cod-liver oil. I have tried to do so already, but it is too abominable. It makes me quite ill even to see the bottle. However, I tell her I will try, and she says something about orange wine, and then goes away.

My faculties are so clear to-day that I examine the details of the room and the contents of the bookcase with a sense of real interest in them. I see girls' books in a shelf to themselves. My old friends "Queechy," "The Wide Wide World," "Home Influence," "The Lamp-lighter," and "Andersen's Fairy Tales." Some other girl must have had this room and collected these books. I wonder what she was like. It seems strange to have taken possession of another person's property and house.

My eyes search the next shelf—Bulwer Lytton, Scott, an odd volume or so of Cowper, Tom Hood, Eliza Cook. Then a shelf of modern novels—Miss Braddon, Florence Maryatt, Annie Thomas, Wilkie Collins.

"Lovely!" I say to myself. "All these at my disposal. I must make haste and get well." When my dinner comes I eat it all, despite want of appetite; at least, with the assistance of Stray.

Then the blinds are drawn and I am told to sleep. I ask if Ada is likely to come. Jean Macgregor says, "If she does, ye'll ken she's here; and if she does'na, weel, ye'll joost put up without her."

Then I doze and wake and think until the door is softly opened and the golden head and sweet face I am longing for look in upon me. I spring up eagerly; my languor has vanished. I recognise something of the old impetuous Sâba Macdonald only eager to put impulse into execution.

Ada is astonished. I pull her head down and whisper the great secret in her ear.

She looks alarmed. "Oh no, Sâba! I daren't. You're not strong enough."

"I shall never get any stronger lying here. I must make a beginning. Come, Ada—you know where my clothes are? In one of those drawers, I'm sure—and my

dressing-gown is hanging behind the door, and the slippers are under the bed."

Still Ada hesitates. "Do let me ask your grand-mamma or Jean Macgregor."

But I will not hear of such a thing, so she finds my undergarments and brings them to me and very slowly and carefully she helps me to dress.

I slide out of bed and stand on the floor, holding on to the bed-post for support. I realise how very weak I have become. How funny my limbs seem, all shaky and uncertain, as if they had forgotten the duties of support!

Ada stoops and slips on my shoes. How easily they go on! I stand up quite alone then, and give a little laugh of triumph. "There, you see, I *am* well enough to get up. I shall walk to the window; I want to see the garden."

I step forward, balancing myself with outstretched hands. There is certainly something the matter with the floor; it rises as if to meet me half way. I feel dreadfully sick and make a sudden clutch at Ada. She gets me into a chair and I lean back with closed eyes. The soft air steals in, and the garden scents are all about me. How sweet they seem! Ada dabs my temples with eau de Cologne, and then gives me some water. The deadly nausea passes, and in a few moments I feel stronger.

"How surprised they will be!" I say, and try to smile; but the smile is cut short by a shock, for I am suddenly confronted by a weird-looking figure, and I sit up and stare at it, wondering what other child is in the room.

It has a small white face, very small, very white, and the eyes look gigantic, staring out of deep hollows; and the hair hangs short and heavy to the shoulders, and Sâba Macdonald's hair was wont to reach her knees. Behind it, sweet and compassionate, I see Ada's lovely eyes.

"Is that me?" I whisper. She puts her warm young arms around me, and hides my face against her breast.

"You have been ill, so very ill; that is why you look so pale, but soon——"

I move restlessly. "I wonder what made me ill?"

"You took a chill that night coming to us, and you had had nothing to eat, and they said you were very strange at breakfast time, and then you fainted. Your aunt helped you to your room to lie down, and suddenly blood poured out of your mouth. They were all frightened

and sent for a doctor. After that you were in high fever and delirious. For two whole weeks you never stopped talking, save just an hour or two when you seemed to sleep."

I gave a weak little laugh. "How interesting! I wonder what I talked about?"

"Your aunt scarcely ever left you," she goes on; "and they sent for Jean Macgregor, too. It was a terrible time. And this house had to be taken because of your aunt, Lady Larkom. By the by, they are to arrive to-night, did you know?"

"No. Are they really coming at last?"

"Yes. But you won't be allowed to see them until you are stronger. You must have no excitement."

I think I kept very quiet for a few moments. Slowly everything was coming back to my mind. The message; that morning of triumphant humiliations. Then I grew uneasy. What had become of the message? And my diary?—that foolish, tear-stained record of misdemeanours, opinions, sufferings. Where was that? Into whose hands had it fallen?

"Now what makes you look so scared?" asked Ada suddenly.

I told her about the message. "Oh! if it was lost—what should I do?"

She suggested that it might be in Aunt Theo's possession, and the thought comforted me. I knew I could trust her.

"Why have they cut my hair?" I asked presently.

"They had to; it was so thick and heavy. The doctor wanted to have your head shaved, but your aunt begged them not to do that; so it was cut half off. But it will soon grow."

"Oh, I don't mind," I said indifferently. "I have always been ugly; I don't suppose my hair will make much difference."

Then I asked her to turn the glass aside so that it should not reflect me to my own eyes every time they looked in that direction. I gazed at the garden and the trees; the great chestnut with its upstanding sheaves of rosy blossom; the green swaying fronds of acacia. I drank in deep draughts of perfume. Oh! beautiful world that holds long summer days, and songs of birds, and hum of bees. Oh! world, where sunlight chases shadow, and the twilight

is like a dream within a dream, and the moon a pale mystery old as itself. How could I have wished to leave you ?

"Is this summer in England ?" I asked Ada.

"Not yet," she said ; "it is only spring. To-morrow will be May Day."

"How big is the garden ?" I went on. "As large as the Square ?"

"Oh no ! London houses only have very small gardens, sometimes far too small for a tree to grow in. But this is a fair size. There are several trees—chestnut, acacia, laburnum. Do you have those in Australia ?"

I shook my head.

Then she brought out her work and sat beside me, sewing busily. And there we were when Aunt Theo came in. She looked amazed to see me up, and—or did I fancy it ?—more alarmed than annoyed. But she tried to hide the shock my altered appearance gave her. Ada left me when she came, and we sat together as in the old times, not saying very much, only quietly happy. At least I was happy once again, for I knew myself forgiven.

Presently I remembered about the message, and timidly put the question.

"It is quite safe," she said, "and all your papers, dear. I put them all in that old school-desk of mine and locked it. I had often intended to give it you. Here is the key on my bunch." She took off her gloves and put her hand in her pocket and brought out a ring on which were several keys. She detached one.

"The desk is there," she said, pointing to the chest of drawers. "No one has read or seen anything, child, so don't look so frightened."

"If—if I had died," I said suddenly. "Oh ! how angry that diary would have made them !"

"I should have burnt it," she said hastily. "And, indeed, Sâba, it is not quite wise of you to write down such frank truths, but—what are you staring at ?"

My eyes were on a ring sparkling on the third finger of her left hand—a ring I had never seen there before ; a half hoop of diamonds, glittering in the sunlight.

"That new ring of yours," I said.

She flushed hotly, and looked away and was silent. Then I *knew*.

"I suppose it is your engagement ring ?"

She nodded. "Yes. I thought you had seen it?"

"No," I said, forcing memory back into old channels. "When will it be, Aunt Theo—your marriage?"

"Not for a year. Dr. Danebury is going back to India next month, but he returns in a year's time."

"A year!" I clasped my hands tightly, conscious of a great and sudden relief. "Oh, I am glad it is not—soon! A year—twelve whole months. And so much may happen in twelve months."

"Yes," she said, "even death."

I looked quickly at her face. How cold and chill and *hard* it seemed. I dashed off into a new track. Was Aunt Eliza really to arrive to-night? What was she like? Did Aunt Theo remember?

"Not much. But I believe she is very musical—the only one of us who exhibited any talent. She was a pupil of Moscheles. Your grandpapa is quite elated at the idea of her return."

I flushed to my temples. "Oh! then he won't want me any more. I am so glad!"

"Poor Sâba!" she said. "I am afraid those Tuesday evenings were a sore trial to more than one of us at Pembroke Square. But now you have talked enough, I think. Let me help you back to bed. I am not sure your mamma will be pleased at your getting up without permission."

"I have only been sitting up for an hour."

"Quite long enough for a first attempt."

She undressed me and steadied my feeble steps across the room. "Good gracious, child, how thin you are! What are we to do to fatten you up?"

There was cheerfulness in her voice, but a sadly anxious look in her eyes. I took upon myself the task of prophecy.

"Aunt Theo, I am not going into a decline as that doctor said, and I am not going to die. I *feel* it, though I can't say why."

She gave a queer little gulp in her throat. "I'm delighted to hear it. I do so want you to get well, because I have a scheme in my head about you."

"Oh! What?" I implored.

"I oughtn't to tell you yet, but perhaps it will help you to get well. It is only that your grandmamma and I go away every summer when London gets too hot and dusty to be pleasant. Sometimes we go on the Continent, to Paris, or Dieppe, or Boulogne, Now if you make haste

and get strong, I will take you with us this time, about the end of July, or beginning of August. Would you like that ? ”

Would I ? Needless to put down any answer. To go away, abroad ; to taste the delights of foreign travel, foreign scenes ! I was scarcely strong enough to bear the excitement. But then, the variations I could play on the theme, the never-ending changes to be rung on its melody ! It altered the bitterness of my tonic, making steel and iron almost palatable. It gave to my determination of “ getting up strength ” a new fillip.

The old morbid wretchedness had departed. People were so kind and I had given so much trouble ; I ought to be grateful, and I tried hard to be so. After all, doctors could not help it if medicine was unpleasant. One must hold one’s breath and take it.

Aunt Theo put on her bonnet and gloves and spoke tender words, and told me, above all things, not to idealise people too much, and pour out all my affection on one object. From which I fancied she must have read some of those confidences of mine. I gave her the key and begged her to put it away in a drawer. I had a shamed sort of reluctance about opening that desk. As for the message, I knew it by heart ; I could repeat it word for word.

CHAPTER II.

My room must have been in a remote region of the house, for I heard no signs of arrival, no bustle or confusion. Yet next morning I learnt that Aunt Eliza and her family had arrived and were under the same roof.

Jean Macgregor told me when she brought my hot milk in the morning.

“ Oh ! what are they like ? ” I asked eagerly.

“ They’re no exactly weel-favoured,” she said slowly. “ Tho’ your aunt hersel’ is a braw leddy, in a silken goon and crape wi’ a grand ‘ pirl ’ to it, and mair rings and clinkin’ bits o’ jewels aboot her than seems fit and proper to the estate o’ widowhood.”

“ Yes, yes,” I interposed eagerly ; “ but the children, the girl—cousin Fanny—what is she like ? Pretty, or——”

The thoughtful gaze I met checked further words,

"I wouldna say ye were ony great beauty yoursel'," observed Jean. "Not but what beauty is a snare of the evil one, and women are a' the better for plain homely features and smooth hair. No, Miss Sâba, I niver thocht much o' your looks but ye may reckon yoursel' nae sae bad beside yon lassie frae the Indies. I doot it's the sun that does it, but to hae licht hair and a nigger's skin and green eyes—weel, weel, I'd no choose sic a land for my bairnies' birthplace an I were a leddy."

I repeated the catalogue of Fanny's charms to myself—light hair, a nigger's skin, green eyes! It did not sound promising. Well, it would be something to find my cousin uglier than myself. I wondered if I should be allowed to see her. I did not trouble about the boys; they were sure to be rough and unpleasant. All boys were. But a girl—a cousin, too—almost as good as having a sister! Many a lonely day and night of my life had known the ache of longing for such a tie.

I had plenty to think of until breakfast time. Again brought by Jean; she dumped the tray down on the bed.

"There's a black woman, too," she said. "I forgot to tell ye—a fearfu' heathen creature. She slept on a rug on the floor in my Leddy Larkom's room, an' she winna' touch Christian food. She's waitin'-maid to your aunt, an' to the youngest bairn—a bit laddie, and bonnier than the ithers. Wae's me! I dinna like the notion that a heathen woman will be aye meddlin' in the hoose, and findin' fault wi' honest victuals."

"I know," I said triumphantly. "She's an *Ayah*. All Indian ladies, I mean all ladies who live in India, have *ayahs*."

"Weel, they ken their ain business best, I suppose," said Jean. "But to a Christian woman, the sicht o' those black fingers and that black face, and the grin-grin-grin o' the white teeth o' her, seems just a fearsome thing."

I went on with my breakfast. I was eager to repeat yesterday's experiment—to dress and sit by the window and perhaps receive visitors. Jean watched me with surprise.

"Ye're actually eatin' your food, not peckin' at it like a stray birdie. 'Deed, an' you're lookin' better the morn. Maybe ye'll cheat the doctor yet, my bairn. The Lord grant it."

"Oh, I shall not go into a decline," I said quietly. "And something *here* tells me I shall not die." I laid my hand on my heart and looked at her astonished face.

"Ah, weel, ye were always the strangest creature! Maybe ye've heard a message in the nicht watches, same as Samuel did. I am wishful it may be a warnin' to ye, for a sair trouble ye've been to your poor ailin' mither, and the grand folks in the big square yonder."

"Jean," I asked abruptly, "have you come here to live?"

"An' what else?" she said. "Do ye think that your mither can housekeep an' tend a big hoose like this an' a second family, too? She sent for me again, an' I'm cook an' housekeeper for ye all, an' Rachel Dibby, she's to do the hoose work, an' how the twa families will agree is mair than I can answer for. But there, dinna ye fash yoursel' ower sich matters. I must be goin' now; there's the orders for the day to get an' to mind. Maybe Rachel will be here to wash an' tidy ye."

She went off and I lay thinking over matters, and wondering, also, how the "twa families would agree?"

Presently I became aware of noises. The house was not so quiet as usual. There was a sound of scuffling, and some crying—the peevish crying of a spoiled child; and then more scuffling and whispers near my door. I felt the colour fly to my cheeks. Then I heard a voice say, "I will look in, I tell you I *will*." Then the door was opened and a boy peered in.

Such an ugly boy; very dark-skinned, with thick black hair, and rolling eyes, and thick red lips. There was something repulsive to me in his whole aspect. I felt indignant at such an intrusion.

"Go away," I called out. "This is my room; you're not to come in."

For all answer he laughed and pushed another figure forward—a girl this time; cousin Fanny, the girl cousin, the almost sister.

I stared at her, and she stood in the middle of the room and stared at me. She was ugly, as Jean Macgregor had said, no doubt of that; a cold, forbidding, hopeless ugliness that had no promise of better things. She was lanky and thin; she had a skin as dark as her brother's and pale brown hair very smooth and oily, and pale-green eyes that reminded me of a snake. In fact, "snaky" best describes

her appearance and her effect upon me. With an effort at politeness I asked her if she was my cousin Fanny.

She gave a sulky sort of nod, and began looking at everything in the room, fingering the articles on the dressing-table, pulling my clothes about, opening drawers, and irritating my nerves to the verge of temper.

"You mustn't touch my things," I said; "it's very rude of you."

She only gave me a look out of her green eyes and went on with her investigations. Presently the door opened wider and another dark face looked in; another dark, sallow, lanky boy. He said something to the girl in Hindustani. I knew it was Hindustani from hearing it at grandmamma's. Then they both looked at me lying helpless on the pillows, and laughed—shrill, harsh laughter that was both insult and mockery. I sat up in a sudden fury. "Go out of my room," I said. "You are horrible, rude children; I *won't* have you here!"

I seized the bell-rope hanging by the wall and rang it furiously. It brought my mother and Rachel on the scene. There were now four children in the room, and on being ordered out they commenced diving under the bed, rushing to and fro, clinging to chairs and tables, and accompanying these manœuvres with shrieks and grimaces. To make matters worse, the *ayah* appeared and gabbled Hindustani to the accompaniment of infuriated gestures. Finally, she got them out of the room, but I was shaking like a leaf and on the verge of hysterics. Mamma sat down and fanned herself, and declared the children were impossible. Perfect young fiends! No manners, no ideas of decent behaviour. She could never put up with them in the house—never! It appeared their mother could do nothing with them, and the *ayah* very little. So the prospect was not cheerful. Grandpapa and grandmamma were expected at any moment, and my aunt was not out of her room, and none of the children decently dressed. I listened to all this with that sense of grey looking white beside *black* that is so pleasing to the small offender. By contrast with these new sinners Sâba might pass into veritable saintship! At least, she was not flagrantly rebellious and unmanageable. I think she chuckled inwardly over the treat in store for the martinet of Pembridge Square. How she regretted being unable to witness the meeting between him and this brood of hereditary descendants!

"And, oh dear! you are not washed nor your room tidied," lamented my mother at last.

I suggested sitting up in my dressing-gown, if she would help me as Ada had done. She was astonished to hear of my late temerity, but finally agreed to my entreaties.

"Your grand-parents will want to see you also," she said. "Do you feel able to bear the excitement?"

I said I did. But, in truth, I grew nervous at the bare thought of it. However, once washed and clothed and sitting in the big-cushioned chair by the open window, strength seemed to come back to me. My interest was awakened. It was a new experience to have a set of unruly and unmanageable juveniles about the house; to be able to compare their modes of behaviour with my own:

I was only just ready, and Rachel was tidying up my room, when the visitors' bell rang. Mamma hurried off, and I had to remain alone and expectant for the best part of half an hour. At the expiration of that time, familiar voices sounded in the passage. Grandpapa and grandmamma entered, accompanied by a stout, dark lady in a black silk morning-gown, and a widow's cap. She was a perfect duplicate of grandmamma, except for a little additional height, and a mere sprinkling of grey in her hair.

I knew her for my aunt, Lady Larkom, without any introduction.

"So this is the poor little invalid," she said. "It is so unfortunate. I thought she would have been a nice companion for my Fanny. And I hear she is too weak to leave her room, or even bear her cousin's presence."

I said nothing, but submitted to be kissed, and heard grandpapa uttering a great many "tut-tuts" as he surveyed my altered appearance. I am sure he was asking Providence what he had done to be afflicted with such a remarkably ugly set of grand-children. Of course they all made remarks about me in Hindustani.

I ventured a meek enquiry as to the musical evenings. It appeared they had been more or less unfortunate of late. Poor little Mrs. Jellico, who had promised to play on one occasion, had failed to put in an appearance owing to a bad cold. But grandpapa never made excuses for a broken promise or a broken appointment, still less a broken musical engagement. Mrs. Jellico had, therefore, fallen under the ban of his displeasure. She was never to enter his house again; never to be forgiven for so dire an offence

as that of inconveniencing the autocrat of Pembridge Square. I had to listen to the enormities of her conduct until I was weary. Grandmamma was reminded that the unfortunate lady was never to come to dinner or tea again. In fact, she was henceforth ostracised from that august household.

"Now that you are here, Eliza," continued grandpapa, "I shall feel more independent. I count upon your assistance, you know."

The new aunt gave a fat chuckling laugh, the very echo of grandmamma's, and said she had sadly neglected her music in India. What with the heat, the children, the many calls on her time, her health, and now her sad loss, she felt little inclination for practice. Besides, it reminded her so sadly of her beloved "Jacksy," who used to play the flute. I found that "Jacksy" was her husband. Grandpapa then turned to me and said it was foolish to get ill. I must make haste and get strong and be ready for the music practises of old. I said I wished to get strong, but even as I said it I held up a shadowy hand, almost as thin as a bird's claw.

"I'm afraid I can't play Beethoven with *that*, grandpapa," I said. At which he "tut-tutted" more than ever and paced about the room in a restless fashion he always evinced when in rooms. Finally, he said he must go; he had important business. So the others got up and waddled after him, and I sank back with a blessed sense of relief, and thanked my stars I was not living at Pembridge Square any longer.

But before the Larkoms had been a week with us I almost wished myself back. They devised mischief and annoyance from morning till night. They sneaked and spied and told lies by the bushel. They would take money out of purses, or stores out of unlocked cupboards. They drove Jean Macgregor wild, and sent prim Rachel into fits. They turned the garden into pandemonium; they tormented my kitten at every opportunity; they broke some of the best ornaments in the drawing-room, and spoil the tone of the piano by hammering and thumping on it to make what they called "tom-tom" accompaniments to Indian songs such as they had picked up in the native bazaars, or from native attendants.

In fact, there was no device or mischief that they did not attempt. Mamma was like one distraught. I think

she and Lady Larkom did not agree very well. Aunt Theo tried to pour oil on the troubled waters. She said the boys must soon be sent to a school, and that Fanny must have a governess. In fact, I think the idea was that she and I were to be instructed together as soon as I had recovered sufficiently for lessons. However, week followed week and I was still in my room, and the governess scheme did not come off. I heard afterwards that Fanny flatly refused to learn anything. Her one idea of education was to read stories of the sensational order, and she spent innumerable pennies on *Bow Bells*, the *London Journal*, the *Boys of Britain*, and other improving fiction. These journals, with their appropriate woodcuts, and delectable contents, she carried about wherever she went, and devoured at all opportunities as she devoured sweets and fruit and cakes. I thought at first she shared my own passion for reading until I found that her taste lay in the line of fiendish villains, impossibly beautiful and wicked ladies of title, sirens of the stage, and such dramatic episodes as abduction, adultery, and murder. Over such scenes and incidents she positively gloated. I often wondered if she imagined life would be anything like these narratives.

However, all this excitement and worry seriously retarded my convalescence. The perpetual alarms, screams, rows and vexations told on my nerves, and I was still too weak to leave my room or go downstairs. As for Ada, she simply dreaded the new element introduced into our peaceful times. The two elder boys had taken it into their heads to pay court to her. She was so pretty and so great a contrast to themselves that I did not wonder at their admiration. But I greatly objected to their methods of showing it. They would throw letters and flowers suddenly in at the window because we took the precaution of locking the door. They would stand in the garden and shout and sing, and talk Hindustani until our conversation was rendered impossible. They would lie in wait for her departure and quarrel as to who should see her home, in spite of her protestations that she wanted neither. In fact, they quite spoilt my one pleasure and my one friendship, and still further added to my regret at the new arrangement.

But out of evil sometimes comes good. Ada came flying in one morning to say that her grandmother was going to take her to the seaside, and that she thought it

would do me a world of good to come also. Mrs. Kirkmann was now with mamma, bent on winning her consent to the plan.

I was in ecstasies at the idea. I loved the sea beyond everything. It was pure rapture to think of long days to be spent on sand and shingle; of the drowsy music, and the never-ending wonders of the waves. We sat with pale faces and eager ears listening for the step that should bring news of joy or—no, we would not believe in disappointment. It could not be possible to find one reason against my going, when there were so many in its favour.

At last Mrs. Kirkmann came and mamma with her. I *was* to go. All questions as to dress were waived for the nonce. Anything would do, said Ada's grandmamma; the older the better. One or two cotton frocks which Rachel could "run up," and a shady straw hat. That would suffice. And we were to go the next week, and this was Wednesday.

It was a long, long time since I had felt so happy, or looked forward to anything so keenly. I wondered not a little at my mother's permission, but perhaps she was thankful to have an invalid off her hands and one child less in the house.

At any rate, I was to go to Brighton the following Monday—away from London's heat and dust, away from these terrible cousins, away from the irritating environment of the "two families."

Oh, happy days of expectation! The cotton frocks were bought by Aunt Theo, and she and Rachel fitted them and made them up with a pleased recognition of their prettiness. And a blue serge skirt of Aunt Theo's was altered in my service, and quite a stock of hats came in to be "tried on." So the days were busy enough till my little trunk was packed, and a supply of books put in. Then one June morning, attired in one of the pink cottons, and with a shady straw hat like Ada's on my short, thick locks, I waited with beating heart the announcement of the cab-wheels and—freedom.

The getting off was not without some excitement. The two boys followed me to the cab and tried to kiss me, a proceeding I greatly resented, and they stood leering and winking at Ada, who looked prettier than ever, and then shouted all sorts of foolish things after us, and Fanny screamed out that she would have my room now I had

gone. However, I was far too happy to mind even that threat, though I was glad to think I had my desk safely in my little trunk. Fanny and her brothers would have thought nothing of breaking open the lock to see what I kept in it.

* * * * *

How sweet was the air ! How brilliant the sunshine ! How lovely the sights and scents of the country—that green English country of summer-time, my first English summer ! I rested against the cushions of the carriage as the train whirled us onward, leaving London further behind. I was quietly, blissfully content. My illness and weakness stood out as veritable blessings in contrast to this new delight. My heart *ached* with gratitude to the kind friend who had brought it about. I could not tell her half of what I felt, but I think she knew.

I am confident I should have chosen Brighton out of all other seaside resorts had I been given a choice. My reason would have been simply that it was the Brighton of Dickens.

The Brighton of little Paul and Mrs. Pipchin, and Dr. Blimber's young gentlemen. The Brighton where Florence and her little brother had listened to the call of the sea, and watched the gulls hovering over the troubled waves. The same sea, the same waves that I should watch, while I lived over the scenes painted by that master hand. I had read many books and studied other authors since the day I had taken "Dombey" from the shelf in grandpapa's library. But I had found none who had the art of making characters *live* before the reader as real personages ; none to whose pages I could return again and again and read and re-read with the same delight. Bulwer Lytton was a master of historical detail, and Scott stood for all time as the writer of his country, but Dickens had a magic charm unpossessed by either—the charm that drew tears and smiles ; the charm that gave *life* to his creations so that they should stand out in men's memory as types of character and humanity in all its varied phases of good and evil.

It was Dickens who was accompanying me on my holiday. Volumes read and volumes unread lay in my trunk, and would delight and cheer me on my journey back to health. I had blessed the former occupant of my room when I discovered that the last shelf of the

bookcase held the "Curiosity Shop," "Oliver Twist," and "Dombey."

I had by this time made the acquaintance of "The Woman in White" and "Lady Audley's Secret," but their fascination was merely that of sensation; of wonder at the plot and how it would end. Who thought of such things with the author of *Pickwick* and *Nickleby*, of *Pecksniff* and the *Chuzzlewitts*, of *Mrs. Gamp* and *Captain Cuttle*, of *Paul Dombey* and *little Nell*? Not I—even at this time. Scores of writers great and wonderful, have lived and died since then, and writ their names upon the roll-call of fame. But he, the master of his craft, still stands unsurpassed; defying imitation, and surviving the sneers of envy and mediocrity.

CHAPTER III.

I WONDER why happiness is less prone to speak itself than sorrow or discontent? Perhaps because it is satisfied with its own consciousness of being happy, and needs less sympathy.

I find little to say about those first quiet blissful days at Brighton. I only know they were blissful—peace, rest, the enchantment of books and delightful talks. The fun of watching the bathers and seeing *Ada* splashing and dancing in the sea among them. The delight of lying idly on the shingle watching the fishermen, or being lifted into a boat and rowed over the blue, blue waters.

The bracing air soon began to prove its effects. My strength came back surely, if slowly. From being drawn in a chair I was advanced to short walks, then carriage drives to the Dyke and Downs and surrounding country. There was nothing now to vex or perplex or distress me. I simply existed placidly and delightfully, and began to put on flesh and get some colour into my white face, and feel a little more like the *Sâba Macdonald* I had used to know. By degrees we became familiar with many of the faces and figures, both of the children and their grown-up companions. But *Mrs. Kirkmann* made no acquaintances, and though *Ada* and I often spoke or were spoken to by the young paddlers and bathers, we never became very intimate with them.

One morning I was sitting by myself on a bench above

the beach and the bathing machines. I had a book with me; it was "Oliver Twist," but I was not reading it. I was watching the vessels far out against the sky-line. Ada was bathing and Mrs. Kirkmann shopping. I expected her to join me in about half an hour. As I sat and mused I was conscious of a wheeled chair that had passed two or three times in front of my seat. I had not paid special attention to it, though I had a vague idea I had seen its occupant on other occasions. She usually wore a thick white veil, and carried a rose-tinted parasol edged with fringe. By the side of the chair walked a stout youth with a pasty-looking face and strange eyes. He wore his hair long and was dressed in a careful and yet unusual manner. At first I could not understand what made his style unusual until I noted the open Byronic collar, and big loose tie and brigand hat.

Each time they passed they looked at me, and I looked at them. Suddenly the chair stopped close to my seat. The lady shifted her parasol to one side and spoke. Now that she was near me I saw that she had a very beautiful complexion, made up of red and white; that her hair was wonderfully luxuriant; and yet that she was far from young. In fact, there were so many wrinkles round her heavy-lidded eyes, and her very red mouth, and even her throat, that I thought she must be considerably older than her muslin gown and floral hat and general air of "twenty-seven" warranted.

"Little girl," she said, "will you tell me if that old lady who is generally with you is not Mrs. Kirkmann, the great spiritualist?"

I felt surprised at the abrupt question, but I answered that Kirkmann was the lady's name. She nodded her head two or three times.

"I thought so. I am pleased she is here. I desire to make her acquaintance. Are you her granddaughter?"

"No," I said, "I am only a friend, staying with her granddaughter."

"Oh," she said, turning sharply to look at some passing figure. "You don't look very strong. Dorian, my dear, wasn't that Mrs. Decie who just went by? No, the other way. You're looking at the sea."

The fat youth gave a languid stare after the retreating figure. "It is like her walk," he said. His voice at once arrested my attention. It was so deep and resonant,

and he spoke with such curious deliberation. "But she would hardly be here so early in the season; it would unfit her for her duties."

"People sometimes are a duty to themselves," said the lady in the chair. "See how I have to sacrifice my inclinations. My mind is shot with moods in direct contradiction to the pattern on which it is engaged. Although I love the sea," she added pensively.

"You only love it when the call of society has ceased with the season," observed the young man with the beautiful name.

That name enchanted me. I had never heard it or seen it; it came as a novelty and a surprise. The only pity was that it did not in the least suit its possessor. It seemed to me the appellation of a poet; someone handsome and accomplished and artistic. But this fat youth was eminently commonplace; in appearance, at all events.

"Are you expecting Mrs. Kirkmann to join you soon?" enquired the lady presently.

I said I was. Her eyes fell on the book in my hand. She asked its title. As I mentioned it she raised her eyebrows almost to the roots of her beautifully crimped hair.

"What a book for a child! It is full of horrors. Even more coarse and commonplace than his usual works."

Coarse! Commonplace! Such words applied to Dickens! My face flamed. "Everything he has written is beautiful," I exclaimed. "There is no living author to compare with him!"

My energy attracted the attention of the fat youth. He favoured me with a long, lazy stare.

"What do you know about *living* authors, or dead ones either?" he asked. "You can't have got much beyond Hans Andersen, or Elizabeth Wetherell."

"I have read a great deal," I said, and rattled off my list—prose, poetry, history, romance. The amusement of his face deepened to attention.

"Your opinion is more valuable than your age suggests," he observed; "but my mother happens to be a poetess herself, and I have been brought up amongst literary gods and goddesses. We, therefore, have higher ideals than those of the vulgar class your favourite author loves to depict."

I was silent. It was the first time that literature had come to me with any personal exterior touch. I felt considerably impressed by the knowledge that eminent persons were conversing with me.

"Poetry! Do you really write poetry?" I asked the lady. "It seems so wonderful to meet anyone who does that. I often think I would give half my life only to see Tennyson!"

Tennyson. Was her smile again supercilious? It seemed so to me. I wondered who she could be. Not Eliza Cook? She must be dead. Not Elizabeth Barrett Browning? Oh, was *that* possible?

"Would you, oh, *please* would you tell me your name?" I implored.

"My name has two significations," she said. "The world knows me as Lady Medora Giles, but my Muse and literature claim me as only 'Medora.' Possibly you have heard, or read——"

"No," I said, with some shame. "But I have not long been in England; and I am not allowed to read much. I wish I did know some of your poetry."

"You would probably be very candid in your opinion of it," she said.

"So you are not English!" exclaimed her son suddenly. "My instinct was right. There is something wild and foreign in your eyes, an aspect that made me put you down as of the Southern type."

"Oh, I am Scotch," I said quietly.

There was a moment's blank silence. He again studied the horizon and murmured something of "amaranthine effects." There was a faint smile on Lady Medora's red lips and she peered at me through her gold-handled eyeglass. "You are by no means an ordinary looking child," she remarked; "and to know Dickens—appreciatively—at your age—by the bye, how old are you?"

"Thirteen," I said.

"Humph, you look younger. Have you any speciality? I mean talent, genius, inclination."

"I am fond of music. I can play Mendelssohn and Schumann and Beethoven."

"Ah! I thought there was something of the *enfant prodige* about you. Do you hear, Dorian? she is a musical prodigy. She must come to us. My dear, when do you return to town?"

"I don't know," I said doubtfully. "I have been very ill and am staying here to get up my strength."

"I thought you looked delicate. But interesting—decidedly interesting; *n'est ce pas*, Dorian?"

Dorian condescended a sulky glance and said something in French. At that moment I saw Mrs. Kirkmann approaching, and drew my new acquaintances' attention to the fact. They waited until she came up to my side, and I stammered a sort of introduction.

"This lady wishes to know you."

"I know of you, madam," interposed the Medora; "and have long wished to be present at one of your wonderful *séances*. But in London one has so many claims on one's time it is difficult to do all one wants. And my health is not strong. Permit me to supplement my little friend's introduction. I am Lady Medora Giles, better known to my friends as 'Medora.' The poetess, in fact. You probably know——"

Mrs. Kirkmann *did* know; they shook hands, and the fat youth was introduced again as "my son, Dorian."

"But you must allow me to explain," said Mrs. Kirkmann. "We have given up our meetings; I mean, we have no circle now for purely psychical manifestations. They reached a certain point, and then a change began."

"It usually does," observed Dorian. "Sometimes it is the change of discovery, or deception; sometimes the purely elementary change of failure."

"In our case," said Mrs. Kirkmann, "it arose from the discovery that mediumship was unnecessary. There is another path, a higher and purer one; that of individual effort."

"Yes, exactly," murmured the poetess. "Highly interesting, I am sure. And are we to suppose, dear madam, that your investigations came to a standstill as— as in other cases?"

"I know nothing about other cases," said Mrs. Kirkmann. "I have told you we hold no more meetings. There is no—no need for them."

"But you believe in spiritualism?"

"Do I believe in my own existence?"

"We are somewhat sceptical, I am afraid," interposed the son of Lady Medora; "but your fame had reached us; and my mother and I were most anxious to make some investigations on the same lines. For my own part,

I always think there is a certain amount of self-deception (self-hypnotism is the scientific phrase) in these matters. The human mind can be trained like the human body. And what it is trained to do, it does."

"You may be right," said Mrs. Kirkmann quietly. "Of course, we have taken a great deal of pains and care over our investigations, but still I cannot say that they were ever quite satisfactory."

"Supernatural studies are delicious," interposed the poetess, with a little affected shiver. "Can anything exceed the joy of diving into the unknown; lifting a corner of the curtain of mystery for a peep into——"

"Darkness," suggested the son. "The craze for that lifting of the curtain has existed in every age, and in every country of the world. But what have they learnt? or if they *have* penetrated into the mystery they have never revealed it."

"Miracles are merely the unexplained phenomena of the dark ages," said Medora; "and ghosts and witches have existed since the days of Moses. The dear Chaldeans and Egyptians were ever so much cleverer than ourselves. I wish they would reincarnate again and come amongst us."

"We believe in magic and mediæval witchcraft, you must know," said Dorian, turning his strange eyes on Mrs. Kirkmann's attentive face. "I have seen wonderful things in—in Paris" He smiled mysteriously. "Yes, far too wonderful to speak of to the ordinary British mind. In reality the world is a theatre on whose stage the most frightful and terrible things are being enacted. Some we can see and explain; some we can see and not explain; and some we can neither explain nor see." He paused and pushed back the picturesque hat from his brow. "You know, of course," he added suddenly, "that the real secret of mystery is an element of the diabolical."

Mrs. Kirkmann started, and I saw the colour rise to her face.

"Yes," went on the young man emphatically; "there is an evil agency at work in nature far more fascinating and deadly than any goodness; also far stronger. Happily it may not have come into your circle; or you stopped on the border line. Some go beyond that, and find the consequences disastrous."

"My son has witnessed extraordinary things in foreign lands," observed Lady Medora proudly. "After leaving Oxford he travelled a great deal. But I fear we are intruding upon your time in very unceremonious fashion. Perhaps you will do us the honour of calling? We are staying at the 'Bedford.' I am always at home between five and six."

Mrs. Kirkmann said she would be delighted and the chair was wheeled away, with the fat youth in attendance. I explained the meeting, and she told me that Lady Medora was a very well-known person in London. She lived at Lancaster Gate and was considered most eccentric by reason of her dress, her juvenile "make up," and her craze for celebrities of all sorts and denominations. Every fad of the day found a patron in her "Salon," as she called it. Musicians, artists, singers, actors, poets, writers, dramatists, clairvoyants and spiritualists, Buddhists, mediums, Mahatmas! In fact, no science, occult or otherwise, failed to attract her attention, and each exponent of such science obtained a hearing or an audience in her house.

"The son is very clever," continued Mrs. Kirkmann. "A little too conceited, perhaps; too much of the *poseur*, but she has fostered his vanity by every means. Adulation and idolization are bad training for a young man. He has travelled a great deal, as you heard, and spends a great deal of his time in Paris. He speaks French well enough to be taken for a Frenchman, and affects that 'artistic' style of dress to aid the delusion. They are really very extraordinary people."

"Why does Lady Medora paint her face like that?" I asked.

She smiled. "Oh, my dear, there is no accounting for the foolishness of women! She was a noted beauty in her youth and I suppose she thinks art can supply what nature denies. She has one good trait—her devotion to her son. I think he returns it, too, despite his affectations."

"I should like to read her poetry," I said.

"I have never read it," said Mrs. Kirkmann. "I believe it is somewhat erotic and emotional. Some has been set to music. I told you she had all sorts of composers and executants about her."

"And may I really go with you when you call?" I asked eagerly.

She regarded me with some doubt. "I don't know if your people would approve. She is such a very extraordinary person. And as for Dorian——"

"I wish he suited his name," I remarked. "But he looks fat, stupid, and uninteresting."

"He is a wonderful conversationalist. You cannot judge him by this morning, nor do I suppose he considered us worth wasting his gifts upon. I was surprised at his views on spiritualism," she added thoughtfully.

"Was he right? Did you come to what he called the border line?" I asked.

She did not reply for a moment. Her eyes were on the sea and on a slender white figure crossing the shingle and coming towards us.

"I was afraid of harming Ada," she said softly. "I—yes, I think with Dorian that there is an evil principle in the universe stronger, fiercer, more dangerous than we dream of. It lurks in subtle byways and under seeming good. It lies at the root of strange crimes and unnatural passions. The horrible tales of the Middle Ages have root and foundation in this principle. There are Devil worshippers even as there are faithful Christians. Books exist whose every page is an account of demoniacal horrors. In truth, child, we are ignorant of half the laws that govern us spiritually or physically. Phenomenon exists, but no one has yet found the *real* key to its existence. There are dreadful faiths and horrible cults in the world of to-day even as there were witches and wizards in the dark ages. Of this, I am sure, Sába, that if we wish to part with our inheritance of faith in God, we can sell our souls to evil and obtain awful powers in this present day, even as those magicians and wonder-workers of the East obtained theirs in the years of old. And it was this fear, this dread of tampering with the Unknown Forces, that made me determine to break up our circle. Spiritualism is all very well, but when one catches a glimpse of the powers at the back of it, one is wise to take warning and avoid temptations."

I was silent. I could not fully understand her meaning, and I had wondered of late why she and Ada shunned all talk on the old lines and in the old way. Now I realised that beyond Faith stood Fear—a lion in the path of discovery. Yet, as I remembered my experience and my beautiful Message I could see no hint of danger,

or of wrong behind the phenomena she spoke of. Ada joined us while I was still pondering these things. Her grandmother told her of the meeting with Lady Medora and her son. She was greatly interested.

"Isn't he called the 'Apostle of the Beautiful'?" she asked eagerly. "We read a report of his lecture on the art of 'Beautiful Living among Things of Beauty.' Don't you remember, grandmamma? and how he ridiculed the narrow lives of limited incomes, and called Bayswater the 'Home of Wool-Work and rep suites.'"

"Yes, of course. Oh! I told you he was very clever, Sâba. His lecture made us almost ashamed of our narrow drawing-room lives, as he called them, leave alone the drawing-rooms themselves."

"But does he *do* anything?" I asked. "I mean paint, or play, or write?"

"He is going to write," she said, "but at present he lives as I told you—partly at his mother's house in London, partly in Paris."

"And where did he give that lecture?" I asked.

"At Westbourne Hall," said Ada. "I am so sorry we did not go. We read about it afterwards in the *Bayswater Chronicle*, and the editor said we must now all refurnish our houses and banish the crude blues and reds for sage green; and throw away our jingling 'lustres,' and shell baskets, and wax flowers; consign wool-work to the inmates of the workhouse, and try to live the life of appreciation!"

"But all the same, our furniture is very ugly, and our notions of colour horribly inartistic."

"Yet sage-green doesn't sound very promising," said I. "I wonder what his mother's house is like?"

"Are they staying here for long?" enquired Ada eagerly.

"I don't know; but I am going to call on them at the 'Bedford' to-morrow. And they asked me to bring Sâba."

CHAPTER IV.

MAN proposes, and the plan "gaes aft agley." Next morning brought a note from Lady Medora, to say she was obliged to return to town, and must reluctantly postpone the pleasure of receiving us until we met in London.

I was very disappointed. The poetess and her son had interested me immensely. I had looked forward to another meeting with keen anticipation. However, there was nothing for it but to submit. The same post brought my usual weekly letter from Aunt Theo. She was in the midst of gaieties—balls, parties, theatres, and the opera. She raved about Adelina Patti, who was enchanting London and defying rivalry. Incidentally she mentioned the departure of Dr. Danebury for Calcutta to take up his appointment. Then she referred to affairs in Brunswick Gardens. The children seemed to get worse. A tutor came daily for the boys, but he only complained of their uncouth manners and general ignorance. My kitten (now a cat) was kept under the careful supervision of Jean Macgregor, otherwise its life would have meant a series of petty persecutions. Mamma had been ill again, but was better. She wanted me to return now that I was so much stronger. I had better make up my mind to come back the following week. I told Mrs. Kirkmann this. She said it was a pity to send me back to London and its heat and stuffiness before I was really strong. However, we must make the most of our remaining days, which we accordingly did. We lived out of doors, or on the sea, and Ada and I grew ruddy and brown. She had lost much of her childishness now, and grown very tall; her mysticism was still a part of herself, and her conversation would drift to occult subjects in the old unexpected fashion.

One day, when we were being rowed over to Hove by our usual old boatman, I asked her whether she had ever "sat" again for manifestations. She told me no. "I

hear and learn all I wish," she went on, "without assistance. The Voice speaks to me just as ever. Not so often, perhaps, but in any need, or trouble, or difficulty I hear it."

We drifted off into one of our old talks. I told her at last of that morning when I had felt like one re-born into a new existence and then of its pitiful termination. It seemed incredible to her that I should be placed amongst such unsympathetic people and surroundings.

"It is so unnatural to be unhappy—physically and mentally unhappy as you are, Sâba," she said. "And I'm sure it is not good for you."

"I don't know who is to judge of that ; but good or bad, it seems my fate. I must put up with it."

She studied me in the old wise, thoughtful way. "You look so much better and happier since you came here," she said.

"I'm afraid I take a great deal from my surroundings. Now with you and your grandmamma I feel perfectly content. I am never thrown into those fits of temper and aggravation that seem my constant lot at home, or with my grand-parents. I often wonder if any other child is blessed with such a set of unlovable relations as I possess."

"I often wonder, too. Those cousins of yours are perfect horrors."

"They are," I agreed cordially. "I was so looking forward to their arrival, thinking of a new and cheery sort of household, and just look how it has turned out !"

"And in five days more you have to go back to that life."

"Yes," I said. "And the further infliction of a new governess to be shared with Fanny !"

"Oh, but that won't happen yet ! In July the schools break up and don't open till September. London gets quite empty in August ; everyone goes to the sea, or country, or the Continent."

Suddenly I thought of Aunt Theo's promise.

"Get well and strong, and I will take you with us to Boulogne or Dieppe."

I sat up eager and alert. "Have you ever been abroad, Ada ; on the Continent ?"

"No, never. Why do you ask ?"

"Because there is a chance that I may go." And I told her what my aunt had said.

"Oh, how lovely! I wish——"

I knew what she wished—I wished it, too. "Think if we were there together. Oh, Ada!"

"Grandmamma might take me," she said. "I have always wanted to go to Boulogne." She looked across the sea. "It's quite near, only over there. And yet, a new language, a new people; customs and habits so different from ours. Do you know the Legend of Boulogne, Sâba?"

I shook my head.

"I read it in an old book. I wonder if it is true? The story goes that centuries ago a boat was seen approaching the coast. Round it shone a brilliant light; so vivid was it that the people flocked to the shore to discover its reason. There in the boat was a statue or image of the Virgin Mary and Child. It appears that at the same time the boat was seen, some pious Catholics were at worship in a chapel at the Haute Ville. To them suddenly appeared the Virgin Mother herself, and stated that a boat was entering their port containing the said image, and that they were to build a church and place it within. The people obeyed these commands, and built the cathedral. Multitudes used to come and worship there and present offerings to the miraculous image. However, the first cathedral was destroyed—I believe, by the Huguenots."

"Then doesn't it exist any longer?"

"Not the old one, of course, nor yet the boat and the image. There is a new cathedral, built I believe, by some Catholic abbé. I can't tell you the date unless I have the book; but underneath the building is a strange and mysterious underground church, called the Crypt. That is what I have always wanted to see. It must have been in existence hundreds of years, the legend says. They found it when digging the foundations for the new cathedral, and it has been left as it was. The walls are covered with frescoes, and there are many ancient tombs. I don't know why the legend has always had such a fascination for me, but it has. Doesn't it seem funny, Sâba, to think of whole nations, people rational and educated, believing in such stories and legends? Actually making one the foundation of such a cathedral, and lavishing gifts, gold, jewels on it as a proof of their faith?"

"I suppose it has all something to do with what Lady

Medora's son called the 'Dark Ages,' " I answered. " Tell me, Ada, don't you think 'Dorian' is a beautiful name ? "

" It sounds rather romantic and bookish," she said. " Certainly its owner doesn't deserve it. Wasn't he ugly and fat ! And his eyes were so strange—I couldn't bear him to look at me."

" I wonder if he is really clever," I said.

" Grandmamma told me that his mother is quite a famous person in London—a sort of Lady Blessington. She has all kinds of celebrated and wonderful people at her house."

" Do you think we shall ever be allowed to go ? " I questioned doubtfully. " We are only children ; I suppose she wouldn't care to have us."

" She would care to have *you*—if you would play," said Ada. " You would come under the heading of a juvenile prodigy, and be of great importance ; but I—I can't do anything."

" She seemed interested in spiritualism."

" Oh ! but, Sâba, you know nothing would induce me to make a public exhibition of *that*. I couldn't ; it would seem horrible."

" That's what the professional mediums do, isn't it ? "

" Yes ; they have certain powers, but they are not satisfied, or else the people who engage them are not satisfied with those alone. They want wonders ; and to work wonders is not given to everyone, nor is it always possible to produce phenomena. So they resort to trickery. That man who used to come to grandpapa's evenings was a perfect fraud. I knew it. Of course, all sorts of strange things happened, but *he* produced them. Oh ! it was all so ignominious and humiliating ! "

" But yet, Ada—*you* ? You joined the circle."

" Only to end its existence. I knew I must do it ; I had been told."

" By the Voice ? "

" Yes. I have no recollection of what happened or what I did. I only seemed to be in some warm, bright place, resting in my mother's arms. I did not wish to come back. I felt so happy, but—the time is not yet."

She looked up to where the white clouds drifted over the deep blue sky. I watched her silently ; wondering if her mind had detached itself from things earthly and mundane and gone off on one of its flights to space. The boat

floated over the tranquil waters, and I almost wished I could follow Ada's soul and Ada's thoughts, and stray where they were straying, not for a brief while, but for ever and for ever. The world and the life that claimed me looked very undesirable things on this peaceful, heavenly day.

* * * * *

So the talks, and readings, and drives, and sails, and all the pleasant occupations of that delightful holiday came to an end.

With sad eyes I looked farewell at the sea, and the old pier, and the old boatmen lounging on the beach ; on the formal rows of houses and hotels ; on the cliffs where Dr. Blimber's young gentlemen still took their "walks abroad." Not the same young gentlemen, not the same Dr. Blimber, but probably equally well looked after and correspondingly depressed by scholastic duties.

Then the train and the journey back—how different from the journey *to* Brighton. It was very hot, and I was very tired and miserable when the cab deposited me at Brunswick Gardens. Rachel welcomed me warmly ; she said my mother was driving in the park with Lady Larkom and grandmamma. The "young gentlemen" were out also, and Miss Fanny, in company with the *ayah* and the "baby," who was six years old, had gone to the Kensington Gardens. I had, therefore, the house to myself and went to my room.

There anger seized me on the threshold ; it was a protest of untidiness. The pretty muslins were dirty and crumpled ; the chest of drawers littered over with *London Journals*, empty sweetmeat boxes, and odds and ends of finery ; old shoes and boots and old numbers of the same journal were scattered about the floor. The blind was drawn up, and the blazing afternoon sun shone in and made everything look dusty. The window curtains had been pinned back so as to leave room for garden inspection. In fact, the whole aspect of the place was changed.

Rachel, following the cabman with my box, came in upon my exclamations of wrath.

"I can't help it, miss. Your cousin would have the room, and though your mamma told her you were coming back to-day, and she was to take all her things away, she goes out and leaves it like this. Perhaps she thought you'd take hers."

"Take hers, indeed!" I was in a fine temper. I went round the room and collected all my cousin's belongings and made them into a bundle and flung them outside the door. Then I drew down the green venetian blind and rearranged the curtains. I dusted the furniture and set it in its proper place. I cleared the wardrobe of a heterogeneous collection of frocks, lace, collars, pinafores, gloves, ribbons, and odds and ends, and told Rachel to take them to their proper quarters. They had no business in my drawers.

By this time I was hot and tired and thirsty. I asked for some tea, but Rachel said it was always laid in the garden now at six o'clock, and I must wait until then. However, she brought me a glass of milk, and helped me unpack and change into a cool frock.

I heard a great deal of the mismanaged household, the awful behaviour of the boys, the "snakish" ways of Miss Fanny. Of how my aunt was too indolent to do anything, and my mother not strong enough, and my grandmother's interference only made matters worse. I sighed hopelessly over the prospect, and not even Rachel's delight at my changed appearance cheered me.

I took the precaution of locking my door and putting the key in my pocket. I then went down to have a look at the other rooms. The drawing-room which looked out on the garden was in fair order, save for the piano. It was open; the keys were sticky, and the top littered with music, all more or less torn and untidy. I also noticed several broken chairs and ornaments. Behind this room was a small study given up to the boys for their lessons. One look at that spoke enough of the prevailing spirit of misrule. The dining-room furniture had also suffered considerably.

I then went downstairs to interview Jean Macgregor and see my dear Stray. Their welcome was warm enough to raise my drooping spirits. I told Jean of my happy holiday and learnt more of the "goings-on" here. She gave her opinion that the ill-conditioned "laddies" wanted a good thrashing to knock the wickedness out of them. "The hoose is na fit for a sane body to live in," she concluded.

I felt sorry I had come back to it; more so, since I must take part in its activities. I could not play the rôle of invalid any longer.

Presently they all returned, and we greeted each other much as combatants do before a battle. The boys pinched me to "see if I was any fatter," and kicked my shins as we sat at tea under the great chestnut in the garden. As for Fanny, she sulked and would not speak a word because I told her I was going to have my own room again.

They asserted that their mother paid for the house, and therefore they were entitled to have what rooms they chose. This I denied. I said my mother shared the rent and expenses, and had the trouble of house-keeping, and therefore *she* was entitled to her choice in the matter. Finally, as we were enjoying a heated argument, the carriage drove up, and mamma, Lady Larkom, grand-mamma and Aunt Theo came through the drawing-room window into the garden to see me. I became so much a subject of discussion that the Larkoms grew jealous. They tried to divert attention to themselves by hanging round their mother, pulling at her veil, opening and shutting her parasol, and interrupting her share in the conversation. I could not get a word in with Aunt Theo, and sat in irritated misery amidst the interruptions, the fault-finding, and general unpleasantness around.

"You must come and spend the day with me," she said at last. "Come early, about eleven, and we will go down the Grove, and in the afternoon I'll take you to see Margaret and Maria."

"Will *you* ask mamma?" I whispered, not daring to put such a request myself.

I hardly expected permission would be given, but it was, and on the prospect of such liberty I lived and tried to shut ears and eyes to the annoyances around.

Taking this day as a specimen of others that followed I went through a new series of experiences. The young Larkoms were never asked to their grand-parents' house after their first memorable appearance. Therefore, both they and their mother were jealous of my constant visits, and of Aunt Theo's unconcealed affection for me. I also offended Aunt Eliza deeply by playing a trio of Hummel's one Tuesday evening—a trio she had refused to play unless she had it to practise. Now another of grand-papa's rules was "never to lend books or music." He told my aunt to come there and practise it. This she refused, or forgot to do, and on the eventful night was unprepared

to take the pianoforte part. I had been working hard at my music again, and I found little difficulty in playing this special trio, especially as Herr Franz gave me the full aid of his violin.

But my success annoyed Aunt Eliza extremely, more especially as grandpapa, with his unfailing tact, would keep referring to it. But the climax came when he declared I was to play at his forthcoming musical party: It appeared that he gave this party as a wind-up to his Tuesday evenings. After it, the poor professionals were allowed to take their holiday; after it, also, grandmamma and Aunt Theo were able to leave town and go to the seaside or the Continent. Grandpapa never went away from home for more than a day. He said he couldn't sleep in a strange bed; he couldn't eat hotel food, and besides he never knew what to do with himself. So he stayed in town and sorted and arranged the music for his autumn meetings, and superintended the British workman in the matter of cleaning, painting, or redecorating his domicile. I was naturally much excited over this party. It was given chiefly in honour of Sir Robert and Lady Gubbins, the ex-Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress.

The Parburys were to come, and the Kirkmanns, and some rich Jews, who had lately rented one of grandpapa's houses, and were supposed to be musical—at least, Mrs. Levey was, for she had played Mendelssohn's "Prelude in E Minor" to grandpapa one day, and also accompanied the "Cujus Animam." There were to be other guests whose names I did not know, and a supper was included, in spite of grandpapa's rooted objection to that unwholesome repast. It may be supposed that my presence and share in the performance were bitterly resented by Aunt Eliza; she positively sulked. Fanny made open and unpleasant remarks respecting "favouritism." The boys whooped, howled, and shouted, whenever I attempted to practise, and I was driven to ask grandpapa's permission to do it at the Square.

For once in my life I was nervous. I was still far from strong, and the ordeal of playing before so large an audience was one I dreaded the more I thought of it. Still, the laws of the Medes and Persians were not more unchangeable than grandpapa's "I desire"; so I screwed up my courage and worked hard, and Herr Franz encouraged me in my efforts and told me privately that I

was a far better performer than Aunt Eliza, despite Moscheles and experience.

Such an occasion as this of course meant a suitable frock. Grandmamma presented me with a new white muslin, and it was made up by a dressmaker in the Grove, instead of by Rachel. This added bitterness to Fanny's jealous wrath. Although she hated music and would have done anything sooner than sit a whole evening listening to the quartets and quintets of Pembridge Square, she was insanely jealous of my ability both to play and to listen.

The eventful evening arrived, and Rachel helped me to dress and did my hair in some new fashion. At the last moment mamma declared herself not well enough to go, so I had to be chaperoned by Aunt Eliza. She presented herself in the drawing-room in a very low-necked black silk gown, trimmed with much jet and crape. She wore a widow's cap, and a great many diamonds glittered about her neck and wrists. I thought she looked very massive and fine. She was, also, somewhat flushed, and given to laugh in a silly, inconsequent fashion over nothing in particular. When we were in the cab and driving along to the Square, I began to notice a strange odour whenever she spoke or laughed.

I remembered she often suffered from dyspepsia, and took brandy on a lump of sugar as a remedy. I asked her, innocently enough, if she had had some of her usual remedy before leaving home. She flared up into a perfect rage; she stormed, gesticulated, clenched her fists, seized my arm and shook me until I was terrified.

Her anger was so sudden and unexpected that I had no power to combat it. I only remember I arrived limp, and tearful at the house, and was so shaken and upset that I could not make up my mind to leave the room after my cloak had been taken off. So Aunt Eliza went downstairs without me, and presently Aunt Theo came in to know what was the matter. She saw what a state of agitation I was in, but I could not clearly explain the cause.

However, she soothed and calmed me down and took me away to have coffee, which was being served in the library. There were various hired waiters in attendance, and a peep into the dining-room amazed me with glories of silver and crystal, flowers and fruits spread out on the supper table. Then, still under my aunt's protecting wing,

I went into the drawing-room, and saw grandmamma in black lace and pearl-grey satin and all her jewels. The room itself was ablaze with lights, and gay with flowers, and all the furniture was uncovered and showing itself as blue satin instead of brown holland. There were rows of chairs and seats, and the piano was at the far end of the room and the music-stands near it. I saw grandpapa's cello in a corner by the window, and a pile of music lay on the piano.

This being a party the usual punctuality could not be enforced. Invitations were "eight to eleven," but though it was half-past eight only some six or seven guests had arrived. Seeing the Kirkmanns, I made for them directly, and once seated by my beloved old friend I felt the usual calm and soothing effect of her presence. From this vantage point I could see the arrivals, and amuse myself by watching grandmamma and grandpapa receive them. I was keenly expectant of Sir Robert and Lady Gubbins. But they were preceded by Mrs. Levey and her husband—the former a stout lady with golden hair, dressed in white satin and pink roses and a diamond necklace; her husband, a short man with a bald head, a hooked nose and the tribal "badge of descent" plainly visible. Grandpapa's greeting and fuss over these people astonished me. I had yet to learn how important a thing is money, even if made by the sale of cigars, or the effecting of loans at compound interest.

Following the Leveys came Margaret and Maria, splendid visions in tarletan and silk, and with puffed and crimped hair, in which nestled white camellias. Then some strangers I had never seen, and at last the ex-Mayor and Mayoress. The lady in ruby satin and lace, and wearing pearl ornaments, and a cap with *marabou* feathers tipped with gold.

I gazed at these gorgeous figures with mingled awe and wonder. I had never seen so many fine persons in the Pembroke Square drawing-room; never seen grandpapa so affable and self-important. As soon as the ex-Lord and Lady Mayoress were seated, he announced that the music would begin.

Herr Gottfried and Herr Franz had arrived at eight o'clock, and been relegated to the "professional quarter" near the music-stands and instruments. Grandpapa now cleared his throat, looked round at his assembled guests

and announced that they were about to hear Beethoven's "Quartet in G Major, Op. 18."

"We cannot, of course, expect it to go quite as it does at the Monday 'Pops,'" he remarked genially. "We are not *quite* up to the standard of Joachim and—ah, Piatti. But I venture to say we can hold our own with them—as amateurs!"

This remarkable speech brought forth smiles and applause. Then there was a general rustling of skirts and settling into places, while the giving of the "A" and the respective tuning up of the strings went on. Just as Herr Franz was about to give the signal, grandpapa jumped up again. "I forgot to say that—talking is—ah—forbidden during the performance. It disturbs us. Between the movements, of which there are four, you are at liberty to—ah—converse. But not while the—the movement itself is—ah—being executed."

There was no applause this time, and I thought the faces looked more bored than expectant. However, Herr Franz tapped his desk, collected the eyes of the other three performers, gave a nod and off they started. I had heard Beethoven's "Op. 18" very often. It was one of the quartets grandpapa's 'cello could master. It is a work strongly reminiscent of Mozart and in the same key as his "No. 1" of the six quartets dedicated to Hadyn. It went very well, thanks to the two Gottfrieds. At the end of the *Allegro* there was faint applause, emphasised by a buzz of voices. People seemed eager to take advantage of liberty of tongues. Again a rap, again silence, and so on until the quartet ended with its finale, the *Allegro molto quasi presto* about whose *tempo* I had so often heard disputes. Naturally—because the 'cello has something to do with the spirited devices of contrapuntal treatment.

Poor grandpapa! He floundered along with Herr Franz giving him notes and duplicating his part, and at last, very red and breathless, played the concluding chords, and put aside his instrument.

At that moment a slight stir and movement at the door made me look round to see if there were any new arrivals. To my amazement I saw entering the room Lady Medora Giles and her son.

CHAPTER V.

To say I was astonished beyond all power of expression is to say very little. To meet here in grandpapa's prim mid-Victorian rooms that painted, bewigged travesty of youth, and her equally strange-looking son, was little short of a shock. Everyone was looking at them as they entered—Lady Medora leaning languidly on Dorian's arm, and raising her gold eyeglass from time to time to scan the surrounding faces.

Grandmamma rose from her chair and went forward, and grandpapa came bustling up as soon as he noticed them.

I turned to Mrs. Kirkmann. "I did not know grandpapa knew Lady Medora," I said.

"Nor I. Perhaps they are recent acquaintances. This sort of party is rather out of their line. I mean they only accept art in its professional sense. I will go and speak to them," she added. "They don't seem to know anyone."

She moved away to the group in the centre of the room. I noted Dorian was speaking in his usual impressive manner to Aunt Theo, who again introduced him to Miss Tollemarche. By this time I was nearly extinguished between the billowy frouces of Margaret and Maria, who commenced one of their interrogative conversations with me. We were, however, soon interrupted by the approach of grandpapa, who offered his arm to Lady Gubbins, and conducted her to the piano with great ceremony. It appeared that she was to perform the first movement of Schumann's "Quintet in E flat."

Margaret giggled at her appearance, and made fun of her nodding feathers. At the same moment Mrs. Kirkmann returned to her seat. She was accompanied by Dorian Giles. He shook hands cordially with me and remarked

that he had heard I was to take part in the musical programme.

"I am so glad they are all amateurs," he said. "Only the true artist can afford to be an amateur. I told Mr. Heavysage that, and made him my friend for life. We met—I really forget where. I know there was music going on. He invited me to-night, and I said I never went anywhere unchaperoned and would only come if I might bring my mother! And to think that you, sad nymph of the Brighton shingle, you are his granddaughter."

I felt so embarrassed by his notice and his loud voice, and the attention we were exciting, that I could only blush and stammer I was very pleased to meet him again. He added to my confusion by taking Lady Gubbins' empty chair and bringing it near my own.

"I believe I am in Bayswater proper," he remarked; "a region sacred to the domestic virtues; to gruesome wall-papers and jingling lustres; to rosewood and mahogany. I gave a lecture about them. You may have heard of it? I did it purely out of compassion. I feel so sorry for people who have to sit in those hideous penitentiaries called 'Victorian' drawing-rooms. We are at the worst and ugliest period of England's inartistic history. I want to benefit my country if I can by opening its eyes to the beauties of dimness and obscurity; of blurred outlines and undefined colours. I'm afraid the task will be a hard and an ungrateful one."

His heavy-lidded eyes roamed around this drawing-room of grandmamma's. It's jingling glass chandelier, its blue satin upholstery, its ornamental gilt chairs and preposterous ornaments. I expected some remark, but at that moment the opening chords of the quintet sounded, as given by the *arpeggiotic* rendering of the ex-Lady Mayoress, and we were perforce silent.

I had never heard Lady Gubbins play before, and assuredly I wanted no repetition of the treat after enduring that murdered *Allegro brillante* of Schumann's beautiful work. It defied all Herr Franz's skill in managing refractory teams. It spoke amateur in every broken chord and badly phrased passage. It wound up with much floundering and confusion; each instrument following the other in a hopeless endeavour to "catch" lost bars. But Lady Gubbins herself rose from the piano smiling and

delighted, and grandpapa declared that not even Arabella Goddard could have done it better!

There was great applause.

Following the quintet came grandpapa's solo, "Cujus Animam," Lady Gubbins playing his accompaniment. Dorian Giles remarked that "good intentions might occasionally be perverted by circumstances." I was not quite clear as to what he meant. Also I was becoming very nervous, for I knew that the time for my own performance was drawing nigh. There followed a brief interlude, during which wine was handed round by the waiters, and Dorian Giles was seized upon by various Bayswater notabilities and taxed with the unforgotten heresies of his Westbourne Hall lecture. Meanwhile Lady Medora had descried me, and beckoned me to come and speak to her.

She was a fearful and wonderful vision amidst those plain satin gowns and caps, and stolid "nature-unadorned" faces. It made me nervous to look at her shaking head, her tremulous hands, her dim artificially-darkened eyes; at the brilliant red patches on her cheeks, the strange white smears on her withered neck and shoulders. I should have thought grandpapa would never have tolerated so extraordinary-looking a person in his house. But then I remembered her title, and the flattery of her gifted son.

She asked me when I was going to play? I said I hoped only at the end of the programme. But much to my annoyance she immediately called to grandpapa, and tapped his arm with her fan and told him she had come expressly to hear me, as she had made my acquaintance in Brighton. On hearing this, grandpapa said the trio should follow immediately on Mrs. Levey's solo. And presently Mrs. Levey arose and rustled over to the piano. After much fussing with gloves and fan and handkerchief, and removal of music-stands, and opening of the piano lid, she proceeded to pound forth Mendelssohn's "Prelude in E." Lady Medora gave an affected shudder.

"Wherever that woman goes she performs that same piece of music!" she said to me. "I believe it is the only thing she knows."

I made no reply. I had never seen Mrs. Levey before, nor heard that Mendelssohn Prelude. It had the advantage of being very short. Then grandpapa led

her back to her seat and paid her all sorts of compliments, and the waiters came in for the empty wine glasses, and my hour had come.

I should not have minded that so much had not grandpapa taken it into his head to announce my performance in a brief speech. He told his guests I was a recent arrival from Australia, that I had inherited *his* musical gifts, and that they must make excuses for any deficiencies of style by remembering I was very young indeed. At which there was great clapping and laughing, and I found myself seated at the piano and gazing at the music on the desk with a vague sense of wonder as to how it and I came to be in our respective places. Then I heard Herr Franz's kind voice and whisper of encouragement, and the mists cleared and some of my old coolness came back.

This "Terzetto" of Hunten's is very brilliant and effective, and presents no great difficulties to the player. It has also the merit of being very melodious and "catchy." Consequently, I received a great deal more applause than my actual performance warranted. But I was thankful when it was over, and quickly made my way back to my old corner. Unfortunately, I was not to be let off so easily. Lady Medora clamoured for something *alone*. She wanted to hear me by myself. Grandpapa therefore called me out of my retreat and told me to do as I was asked.

I went to the piano and played Schumann's "*Träumerei*," and then the "*Arabesque*" recently taught me by Herr Franz. Lady Medora was wildly enthusiastic. She insisted I must appear at one of her evenings. Upon which her son reminded her that there was only one more to come off, and that happened the following week.

"Very well; she must come to that. She is quite a little wonder," said the poetess. "She will make a sensation. One tires of Goddard and Kuhe and Lindsay Sloper. A child like— What is your name, by the way?"

I mentioned it. Mr. Dorian turned round quickly.

"What a singular name! But it suits you. I could not fancy you as commonplace Mary, or Elizabeth, or Susan. How I wish people would show some artistic sense in the bestowal of baptismal signification. Sâba? That is charming. I will call you that."

He turned suddenly to grandpapa and buttonholed

him, so to say. "Don't you think so much instrumental music is rather—monotonous?" he asked. "Let me suggest a song. I know Miss Tollemarche sings, and if I may venture to obtrude the fact—so do I."

Grandpapa said that it was not his rule to introduce vocal music, but, of course, on such an exceptional occasion—

The young man swept his heavy hair back from his brow and walked over to the piano. I watched him with the greatest interest. His mother lifted her eye-glasses and observed that "he would probably sing some of her verses."

There was quite a hush of expectation as he struck a few weak minor chords. He had not the musician's touch, I thought, however much he possessed of the feeling. He suddenly flung back his head, gazed at the ceiling with a rapt, intense look, and began to sing.

Being no judge of vocal proficiency, I could form no opinion except as to the eccentricity of the performance. The words were weird and wild, and Mr. Dorian's mode of expressing them even more weird and wild.

Everyone looked puzzled, even grandpapa. But Mr. Dorian Giles was a celebrated person, and had made people talk a great deal about him and his opinions. Besides, he rarely favoured Bayswater with his presence at its parties, being much in request—so his mother told me—at the houses of great and notable folk on the other and fashionable side of London.

At last the deep notes ceased to roll and throb through the room. He played a few more chords and then rose. He looked at the attentive, if puzzled, faces, and smiled.

"I hope I have not bored you," he said to grandpapa, who was hovering like an uneasy ghost round his precious instrument. "My songs are somewhat uncommon, I allow. I abhor the Sims Reeves' type. It has killed musical art as far as tenor voices are concerned. Generations to come will persist in thinking 'My Pretty Jane' a classic, and 'Tom Bowling' will go down to posterity as a gem of 'purest ray serene.' Opera has ruined more singers than it has immortalised. Patti is threatened with the same failing—that of 'grooviness.' All great singers have been groovy. You will find that she will

stick to 'Somnambula,' and 'Il Barbiere,' and 'Dinorah' to the last day of her life. I mean, of course, her operatic life."

People were standing about and listening to him now. He had quite broken up the music. He talked on for several minutes and then asked Sara Tollemarche to sing. She had a rich contralto and gave "Caro mio Ben" in excellent and almost professional manner. Aunt Theo looked delighted when I stole to her side to express my wonder that her friend had not sung here on other occasions.

"Your grandpapa doesn't care for singing," she said, "however good."

That answered all. What grandpapa did not care for was not worth introducing into grandpapa's house.

After the song there was a general move to the supper-room, grandpapa leading the way, with the ex-Lady Mayoress, and General Parbury taking Lady Medora under his charge. As there was not room for all, Aunt Theo, and Margaret and Maria, and Sara Tollemarche, and the poor "professionals" had to wait their turn. But, to my surprise, Mr. Dorian joined us.

"I am too young to be relegated to dowagers," he observed. "There is no joy in the prim first freshness of an undisturbed supper-table. I like to feast on ravaged spoils; on the purple confusion of pillaged grapes; on jellies quivering pathetically over their own demolition; on the jaundiced pathos of the sliced orange in its cut-glass environment! I love everything that is unusual and unnatural. I wish I could find disciples."

"Decidedly most people prefer what is accepted and conventional," said Sara Tollemarche.

"I know they do. It will be my mission to upset all that; to arm a crusade against propriety with its steel fetters; to give youth its day, and make of the wisdom of our forefathers lessons in what to avoid and disobey and condemn. I foresee a glorious future given up to the young; a future when they shall be free to sin, and have no leisure to repent; a future when Art and Beauty shall be the rule of all lives; a future when no virtue shall be accounted of any merit unless it is cut out on a new and vicious pattern; when we shall live unnaturally and speak in parables, because speech is the only perfect art of personal deception; when the old shall hang upon our lips and drink

in our rejuvenating philosophies, and learn to laugh with the Homeric laughter of the ancient gods."

He paused, and Margaret began to giggle. "That is something like the way you talked at your lecture," she observed.

"It is the way I always talk when I have a chance," he said. "I have a passion for phrases. We are all actors, you know—more or less bad, because few of us have the courage to speak our lines as we ought to speak them. We keep our best acting and our best parts for ourselves as audience. It is selfish and unwise. We lose well-merited appreciation, and are never certain of our own powers."

I don't know how much longer he would have gone on in this strain had not his eye fallen upon Herr Franz and Herr Gottfried. Their presence suggested music of a different kind from the concerted order. He begged for a violin solo. Herr Franz said he had no music with him for the accompanist.

"Oh, give me the key, and I will follow you," he said confidently. "I know harmony and theory perfectly, although I am not much of an executant."

So Herr Franz took out his violin and they played together; short, quaint bits of Raff, and Vieuxtemp, and Bach, and we listened or chattered until some of the supper eaters returned.

Then Mr. Dorian did a strange thing. He came up to me.

"You must come in to supper with me, Sâba," he said. "I want to talk to you. You are that rarest feminine thing, a perfect listener. Some day I am going to write a book—a great and wonderful book, at which all the world will stare and gape. But first, I am studying life—every grade and form of it. I want to grasp the feminine soul, but it is elusive. I should say the first thing it learns is deception—self or universal deception. Now you are by way of being a genius, and you look—original. Therefore you interest me. Come, we will go and sit near my mother and enjoy ourselves. I am never in such good form as after two glasses of champagne and seated beside someone who appreciates or wonders at me. Why do you hold back? Don't remind me of etiquette; or my duty to others, your elders, but not—to my thinking—your superiors. I shall go away from this entertainment perfectly happy if I can only shock your estimable grand-

father. I came here with that intention. So far, I have failed."

By this time we were in the dining-room, and, whether by arrangement or not, there *were* two vacant chairs beside Lady Medora. My strange escort secured them, and for the best part of half an hour I listened and laughed and wondered at the most bewildering paradoxical monologue it has ever been my lot to play audience to.

I forgot everything but my enjoyment, and promised Lady Medora that I would certainly come to her next reception. She impressed the date upon me, and then told her son he had had quite enough champagne and must take her home. We rose at last, and I found an infuriated Aunt Eliza waiting and fuming in the hall, and was told I had been "pert, forward, and disrespectful."

So the evening ended, as was usual where I was concerned, in the sudden overthrow of any little temple of self-esteem I might chance to have erected to its memory. And I was landed at Brunswick Gardens and handed back to mamma in the character of a "pert minx."

CHAPTER VI.

MAMMA was too tired to scold me, so I slipped off to bed still in a whirl of excitement. What an evening it had been, and what a finale to find myself labelled with "pertness and minxishness!"

As I took off my new frock and unloosed my hair I was going over in my mind the strange sayings of Dorian Giles. I wondered why he had singled me out for the subject of attention and I questioned myself as to the effect of such attentions. I knew I had talked and laughed. I knew that I had disregarded a message brought to me that I was to go home. I knew, also, that if this strange young man was bent on probing the mysteries of girlhood I was no less keen to discover the influences of manhood.

From the date of Aunt Theo's engagement, from the day I had noted the suffering in Captain Elmore's face and witnessed my aunt's grief, I had begun to wonder about this great mystery of sex; the attraction that draws man to woman. The strange strength of feeling that

must overwhelm a girl and make her willing to leave home and parents, and all the beloved associations of childhood, to take her place beside a stranger; to be his companion, his fellow-traveller down the vale of years; to call him "husband"; to be the mother of his children; to bear good or ill, sickness or suffering, poverty or wrong—all for *his* sake. Certainly it was a great mystery.

But life was full of mysteries. Kinship and association were mysteries; the beginning and end of existence were mysteries. The strain and stress of life, the feelings that it engendered, the complications it set up, the difficulties attending the simplest action, the impossibility of free will, free action, perhaps, even of free thought. For whence does thought come? From what source does it spring? We cannot *make* ourselves think; that is done for us by some other power. And what strange spiritual spider spins that web? How from one frail thread can spring hundreds and thousands of others, and scarcely two patterns alike on the loom? Life is no sooner set a-going than it must go on and on, or else stop. There is no pause, no waiting-place. The death of one minute is the birth of another; the march of one thought is the roll-call to another. And from thought spring all the developments of mind that form a character, and character again is our outward human label—the sign of our existence, the denoting factor of our travels; the one thing by which we are individualised.

I sprang to my feet and shook back my heavy hair, and tried to reconcile my childish appearance with thoughts and feelings like these; but the task was beyond me.

Sâba Macdonald, the thorn in the flesh to her family; Sâba Macdonald, unable to force herself into deferential feeling; Sâba Macdonald, on the threshold of life, its manifold complications, its manifold duties. And the same Sâba Macdonald had been told she was "wonderful" in a young man's eyes, and then miscalled "pert minx" by those to whom a young man's opinion was as nothing in comparison to five minutes' waiting for a cab!

I think Sâba Macdonald laughed till she cried over the memory of these conflicting scenes. The descent from height to lowest level was by no means an uncommon experience, but as yet they had not been affected by the intrusion of a male personality. As the child met the girl they laughed together over the accustomed fall, the

clipped wings, the wholesome check to precocious vanity. Yet in whatever fashion the past had been cut out, it seemed to the girl that the materials were once more fresh to her hand—fresh, original, interesting. Only, why must others have the handling of them? Why could she not cut out her own pattern and use her own designs?

Poor Sâba! So wise, and so unutterably foolish! In years to come how she will laugh at herself, looking back, back, such a long way back, to date a soul's mental growth. To see only a little faint track illuminated by a moonlit consciousness of boundaries passed, obliterated, half forgotten.

* * * * *

I slept soundly. I woke somewhat tired after my unusual dissipation, and tried to string my nerves into enduring tension. The breakfast hour would be a mild purgatory, I knew; yet when I remembered suddenly that Aunt Eliza had neither played nor been asked to play, I foresaw even worse in store for me than my cousins' unmannerly torments.

It was no use trying to console myself with thoughts of attention received, and praise bestowed. I knew what one's own family circle can do in the way of snubbing conceit; my knowledge was put to good account.

I should be sorry to say that from this day forward I could date my new aunt's unconcealed animosity towards me. But I am certain she never forgave me for my share in the success of that party, and she lost no opportunity of ridiculing my "forward" acceptance of Dorian Giles' attentions. I had little hope of permission to go to Lady Medora's evening the following week, but when a note arrived for my mother inviting us both in most friendly and pressing terms, and begging me to bring some music, everything took on a new aspect.

My mother was as elated at the reception of a "titled" invitation as grandpapa himself. But then he was wont to say that "Jane resembled him most of all his daughters."

She asked me a great many questions about Lady Medora, which I tried to answer satisfactorily. Then she set to the devising of a suitable toilette for herself, her choice finally falling on pink tarlatan. I spent the greater portion of my time in practising. I knew how much I had lost by my illness and its succeeding period of weakness. I knew, also, that I was still far from strong. But at the

bottom of all acknowledgment persisted the belief that life was not by any means over for me. Its compelling call sounded above the waters of strife, and through the mists of despondency.

Besides, there was so much to learn, to know, to enjoy. For surely my turn must come to taste the sweet as well as the bitter of its waters.

* * * * *

It was now the middle of July, and London was terribly hot and close. Grandmamma spoke of leaving town, but had not yet decided where she and Aunt Theo were to go. She wished mamma to accompany them, and there was grave discussion as to whether the sole management of household affairs could be entrusted to Aunt Eliza.

She and the children seemed to revel in the heat. They wanted no sea breezes, or bracing air. London and the Kensington Gardens and the daily drive in the park were good enough for them.

At the beginning of the September term the two eldest boys were to go to a boarding-school in Sussex, and a governess had been engaged for Fanny and the two little ones. They had been spoilt, pampered, and indulged, until they were unbearable to anyone except their adoring mother; and since the *ayah* had returned to her native country they were a general nuisance to the whole house; understanding no discipline but bribery, and no rule that was based on any system of control.

"After all, one never knows when one is well off," I reflected. I had thought myself miserable at Pembridge Square, but at least there were intervals of peace, and Aunt Theo was under the same roof. Now the days were a series of rows, scenes, screams, and fights; petty ignominies, and spites, mischief and insubordination. Yet to grandpapa and grandmamma Aunt Eliza represented her children as perfect angels. I often listened to her fulsome endearments and the barefaced flattery of her speeches with a sense of wonder. It was always "my sweetest mumsey," "my darling handsome papa" to their faces, whatever she said behind their backs. I disliked her wheedling ways and untruthfulness as much as she disliked my plain speaking. I think she was terribly afraid lest I should take a higher place in my grand-parents' estimation than any of her precious children. At all events, she lost no opportunity of showing up my worst traits and

recounting all my misdemeanours. My behaviour at that party was severely censured by grandmamma, but I escaped further scolding when grandpapa and herself were also invited to Lady Medora's evening.

I think, however, that grandpapa was somewhat annoyed at not being asked to bring his 'cello. As for Aunt Eliza, she was all sneers and sarcasm, for she had been overlooked altogether. So on the whole, my life was not of the happiest during this period. I saw Ada but seldom, as she disliked coming to the house when my cousins were about, and I was not strong enough for long walks, especially in the heat of the day. But the Boulogne scheme was on the *tapis*, and I lived in a subdued hope that it would come off—a hope of which I gave no hint. Experience was teaching me the wisdom of silence on any point whose issues were self-important.

The eventful evening at last arrived. Rachel was so much occupied over mamma's toilet that she had only time to do my hair. I had never seen my mother in real evening dress: low bodice, short sleeves, flowers and jewels. The latter were borrowed from grandmamma's jewel-case, and made a fine, if somewhat incongruous, show. The pink tarlatan was very pretty and '*buffonnée*,' as the dressmaker expressed it. There was a *berthe* of deep blonde lace, and bows of black velvet, and mamma's hair was arranged in full puffs over a pad, and then confined in a net. She also wore a large spray of pink roses and green leaves on one side of this *coiffure*.

I was in the same white muslin that had done previous duty, but Rachel had tied my hair with scarlet velvet, declaring I wanted some "set-off" of colour.

When we arrived at Lancaster Gate we found quite a string of cabs and carriages before us. There was an awning over the steps, and crimson drugging, and many footmen and attendants. I felt alarmed. So much grandeur augured a large important party—something very different from grandpapa's entertainments. We were shown to a cloak-room, and offered coffee. Then we proceeded up a wide and handsome staircase and reached a landing containing many seats, and draped with oriental stuffs and decorated with flowers. Here stood another liveried attendant shouting the names of arrivals. Mamma and I entered under a draped doorway and found ourselves in a very large, though dimly-lighted, room. Its

furniture consisted chiefly of chairs and settees. There were rose-shaded lamps and candles, and an oppressive odour of scents and flowers. The windows opened on a balcony covered in to form a sort of tent. A great many people were sitting and standing about, and there was a buzz of conversation which suddenly lulled and then sprang forth again. In the centre of the room, on a cushioned divan, reclined Lady Medora. Her son stood by her side. From the doorway the poetess looked a most picturesque being, in flowing white draperies, and wearing a large lily in her hair. On a nearer view she represented a living edition of Dickens' memorable "Cleopatra"—as falsely juvenile, as foolishly artless, as persistently enthusiastic as was ever that famous lady—or her prototype. She welcomed me effusively, and made room for me on the seat by her side.

"You are my 'star' to-night," she said. "I always have one or more on these occasions. Last time it was a new authoress. Is she coming again, I wonder? Dorian, you bad boy, attend, and shake hands for me. Tell me, is that new writer to be here? I forget her name—you know, who talks about the new religion we are all to accept."

"Miss Lucia Puffin, better known as 'Electra,'" said Dorian, releasing my hand and favouring me with his mysterious smile. "Oh yes, she is coming, and will be attended by some spirits—'Electricks,' I mean, more occult than herself."

He turned to my mother, who was looking somewhat bewildered, but after listening to him for a moment or two she seemed positively alarmed. Fortunately, she discovered grandmamma and grandpapa sitting together in a distant corner and fled to them for refuge. As for me, I was Lady Medora's possession for the evening, and to move from her side was not possible unless she wished it.

She surely must have been "Cleopatra's" model. She reclined amongst her cushions as Mrs. Skewton must have reclined amidst hers, "in attitude reminiscent of the days when she was a famous beauty and a toast." I wondered if Lady Medora had ever been a beauty? It was impossible to trace any signs of it now in that weird and raddled countenance. I thought how dreadful it must be to get old with such an endeavour to remain young as she displayed. To see the stern hand of Time coming

between the actual face in the mirror and the paints and dyes and pencils that tried to conceal its cruel work. To have delicate fabrics of lace and silk fashioned for a skeleton form from which all grace and beauty was for ever banished.

I am afraid some trace of these thoughts must have been in my eyes, for suddenly Dorian bent down and whispered that although the proper study of womankind *was* woman, there were times when it was both politic and polite to conceal one's wonder at that wonderful sex.

I think I blushed very much and grew very confused at that remark, and tried to concentrate my attention on the other guests who were arriving in a constant stream, almost as fast as they were announced.

The great double drawing-room was filled with all sorts of people—some very strange looking and very strangely dressed, and others of the fashionable and worldly type, made familiar to me by the park and fashion books. There was so much talking that people had to raise their voices and almost shout to be heard, and before Lady Medora's throne a constant succession of people paused, chatted, laughed, stared, asked questions, and then moved on for another set to take their place and do the same thing. And "Medora" herself was wonderful. She seemed to have an endless flow of repartee, badinage, *persiflage*; such airy laughter and coquettish glances and gestures! such nods and smiles and wicked suggestiveness! It was little wonder I was amazed. Every now and then she remembered me and signified the remembrance by a tap of her fan, or a semi-introduction, which was so French or so mysterious that I could never quite grasp its meaning. And through it all Dorian stood by her side and bowed and shook hands and made paradoxical observations, and occasionally whispered to me that he should ask for my "impressions," because they would have all the merit of novelty and originality.

Then someone went to the piano and sang, and a lady, in white flowing drapery and with loose curls crowned by a wreath of green leaves, stood up to recite. It was a long piece and given in French. I did not find it interesting. At its conclusion some fresh names were called out, and I saw a small, red-haired, very stout person entering the room, accompanied by two men and two other ladies.

She came up to Lady Medora and shook hands with her

in a curiously impressive manner. Then she introduced one of her attendants—a very tall man, with a flowing beard and long hair—as “Herr Gustave Helsinborg, the Swedish writer.”

A dark, foreign-looking woman was “her cousin, from Italy.” She could speak no English and Lady Medora no Italian, so a great deal of gesture and hand play came into the greeting. Then the other man, a poet of recent fame, was brought forward. He was also dark, and had long greasy curls, and wore a turned-down collar, and looked as if a nearer acquaintance with soap and water would be of decided advantage.

Dorian asked the red-haired lady how her book was getting on, upon which she turned her eyes affectedly to the ceiling, and murmured that the earthly portion had well advanced, but the “Celestial” was more dilatory—a statement that surprised me very much.

I thought I had never seen anyone so dreadfully affected. I was almost certain that she was the authoress of whom Dorian Giles had spoken. The lady of the new religious creed, who wrote under the name of “Electra.” I studied her with awed interest; I had never met a woman-writer before. Now I knew both an authoress and a poetess. How I wished theories of people were not so widely different from the reality!

Miss Lucia Puffin seemed to know a great many people, and soon had quite a circle round her. The conversation was chiefly on her side, and largely composed of the personal pronoun “I.” She seemed very wonderful, or thought herself so. And she had the oddest manner—one moment girlish, effusive, almost silly; the next solemn, portentous, mystical. Yet it all struck me as the purest acting—as forced and unnatural in its way as Lady Medora was in hers. She was constantly changing her place, dissolving one group, collecting another. Her small red head and sea-green dress made her a conspicuous object, despite her defects of stature and symmetry. Lady Medora watched her with some amusement.

“I always wonder,” she said to me, “whether that little ‘bantam’ will turn out a great success or a great failure. She has ideas of conquering the world of letters that are almost Napoleonic!”

“Has she written anything yet?” I asked.

“No, but it is on the way, and we hear so much of its

mystery and marvels that we are all expectant. She is supposed to have a 'familiar'; a guardian spirit or visitant, who inspires and assists her. Her working room is all hung with black and scarlet, and on the table stands a tall carved crucifix. Dorian was once permitted to see this sanctum; the favour is very exceptional."

She paused, and looked round the crowded rooms.

"I think," she went on, "that all my notables are here, so it is time for your exhibition, my child. Dorian will take you to the piano and introduce you."

"Oh, please, no!" I entreated. "If I can only slip in and sit down and play I shall not be so nervous, but don't, oh please, don't let him say anything about it!"

She only laughed and tapped my cheek with her fan.

"You should take a leaf out of 'Electra's' book," she said. "The 'modest violet' business is no use nowadays. Messrs. Bragg and Boast are having their innings, and it promises to be a long one."

So I was handed over to Dorian, who led me across the crowded room and set me at the piano. Then he clapped his hands loudly. The buzz of conversation ceased and heads turned in our direction.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, in his deep rolling tones, "my mother wishes to introduce to you a new prodigy. She hails from Australia, and her knowledge of music has been gained solely amid wild bush solitudes. Her extreme youth and her purely natural Academy of Instruction make her a veritable wonder. We are used to wonders, you will say, in this salon. The remark is correct, though trite. But I think we have hitherto drawn the line at the *Kindergarten*. Now we obliterate that line, and make an exception brilliant enough to offer future encouragement. There is nothing quite so wonderful in this world as youth. The old generation has, I regret to say, omitted to recognise this fact. But the New Generation, the one of which I am pioneer—and to which some of our geniuses here present intend to appeal—that, ladies and gentlemen, will make amends for past errors and past blindness. It will be a generation of prodigies. The reincarnation of Mozarts, Beethovens and Paganinis. The old will sit at the feet of the young, and marvel and weep at their own degradation. Our artists, our writers, our critics, our poets and journalists, our teachers and our masters will all be young in the glorious future whose

dawn I behold. Let me now bring to your notice one small herald of its approach. This Wonder-Child, who has learnt from the ringdove's coo and the wild-bush monster's roar of defiance, those weird mysteries of sound and harmony her elfin fingers will interpret for our delight. Ladies and gentlemen, Miss Sâba Macdonald will now play to you."

There was such a tumult of applause and laughter that my scarlet face was glad to hide itself behind the music-desk. I would have liked the floor to open and swallow me up. I *hated* Dorian Giles, and hated his mother for forcing me into notice in so absurd and unauthorised a fashion. It seemed to me that all memory of anything I could play had vanished. I only sat there like a fool with tingling ears, and a cold, sick feeling in my heart.

What to play?

I had brought no music. Printed notes made me more nervous than the friendly look of the keys. Twice I lifted my hands; twice I let them drop on my lap. Oh, if only there was not that dreadful silence! If only they would talk, ignore me, forget me!

But no, they were listening and expectant.

Suddenly the buzzing in my ears died out. I thought of Dorian's absurd words, of the "ringdoves" and "wild-bush monsters." Only harmless opossums and wallaby as far as my experience went. Then I seemed to see the old familiar places. I felt the golden rain of sunbeams and heard kind little Mrs. Birch's voice encouraging me. With that memory there rushed back the dancing, rippling notes of Mendelssohn's "Rondo Capriccioso." I rushed into it, and after the first few bars forgot everything except the rapture of its familiar passages given back to my touch by the most perfect-toned piano it had ever been my lot to use. My nervousness vanished. I played as I had never played before—as in those days of the Sydney Smith and Willie Pape's variation-and firework-school, it was unusual to play.

It was over. I rose and stood beside the music-stool trembling with excitement. I was conscious of tumult and noise; of crowding figures and outstretched hands. And then of something green and billowy flashing towards me, and a brilliant red head and two cold glittering eyes lifted to mine.

My hands were seized, and gently pressed, and a shrill,

unpleasant voice was saying, "Let me be the first to prophesy of your future, you wonderful child! Genius has claimed you for its own! Who should recognise its gifts—if not I?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE rest of that evening makes a wonderful and confused memory for Sâba Macdonald. She played again and yet again, and she heard other players and singers and much astonishing talk, and the wonderful "Electra" begged her to come and see her, and gave her a card with her address in Brompton. And the most astonishing part of all was that these people concerned themselves in no way about her relatives; only with herself. Also, she was constantly led from group to group, and person to person, and questioned as to her "early years," her life in the bush, her tastes and habits. Also she found herself at a small table with Dorian Giles, "Electra," and the Italian lady and Swedish writer. They were all partaking of delectable dishes and drinking sparkling wine, and talking about themselves, and what they had done or meant to do.

It was a new world—a truly wonderful world! How Sâba marvelled, and how eagerly she drank in the strange remarks or advanced theories of these strange personages. In especial, she delighted in the war of words between Dorian Giles and the gifted "Electra." He drew her on to perilous slopes of confession, and her desire to confess and her own estimation of herself were surprisingly evident. The book upon which she was engaged was mentioned only in a solemn religious manner. As far as I could understand, this great work was to reveal to the world, not only its author's mystic gifts, but also a new religion of life—a religion revealed solely to her and of whose responsibility she was justly afraid.

"Yet it seems my duty to speak," she told us. "When I sit alone with my wonderful thoughts and *feel* the impression of my strange mission, I know I have been chosen among many for the task, even as the Master selected His disciples. It is not for me to say 'No' to the command. The soldier obeys his general."

"Occasionally he has to obey even his lieutenant," observed Dorian.

She gave him a quick glance. They were secret enemies at heart.

"And who am I that I should disobey my clear instructions?"

"We are dying to hear them ourselves," said Dorian. "When, approximately, do you consider the time will arrive for publication?"

"That is impossible to say. Even when my work is completed I have to face the difficulty of selecting a suitable publisher."

"That won't be difficult," he told her. "There are not many—suitable. Besides, it is not as if it were a question of terms with you. That is the *last* thing which appeals to genius."

Again she flashed her cold green eyes at his imperturbable face.

"I shall certainly not give my work and time and talent to the world without suitable recompense," she said hastily.

"Oh!" said Dorian. "Then it's no use my mentioning a firm I had in view; they never pay new authors. But they advertise. Does that come into your calculations at all?"

"Of course," she said. "I shall require all the accepted methods of publicity. It is a duty to blazen forth a mission; not conceal it."

"You want the burst of full-fledged Fame, no half measures. That is wise," observed the Swedish author, who spoke excellent English.

"I want," she said—and then paused, and emptied her champagne glass. Meeting only adoration and expectation in the surrounding faces she lapsed into confidences. "I want to be a distinct and remarkable success; I want to capture a public so wide and varied that my name will be on every tongue; I want to fling down the gauntlet before the Sir Oracles of the Press; I want to prove that the force in me is a force that nothing can subdue or crush; I want to show up knavery, trickery, fraud, shams; I want to revel in experiences, and declare openly the thing that *is*, not the thing that *appears* to be; I want to soar to greater heights than ever woman soared, and teach the world that feminine genius is still existent. Science will hold no terrors for me, and philosophy no riddles. The passions of humanity, the buffoonery of religious sects, the phantasms and confusions and degradations of life—

all these I shall dissect and describe. My name and fame shall go down to posterity as the 'Fearless Writer.' Such is my ambition, and such is my desire."

"Ah! *alla buon' ora*," murmured the Italian lady with an ardent sigh of admiration.

"She is indeed wonderful!" exclaimed the Swedish writer. "Who greatly dares will greatly succeed. But—what courage!"

Dorian Giles was silent for a moment, then he smiled and drained his glass. "You will arrive, my dear lady," he said. "There is no doubt of that. You will also be well hated. '*Cela fera du bruit dans Landerneau!*' May I be there to hear it!"

"Oh, you!" She flashed one of her keen glances at him. "I have no patience with you, Dorian. You have gifts, talents, of no mean order. And yet what use are you making of them? You turn life into a fantasy, and make social conventions a background for epigrams. You have invented the doctrine of moods and made it an excuse for selfishness. You play with eccentricity like a conjuror, and do things and say things you ought not to do or say, out of sheer perversity. I often wonder why?"

"So do I" said Dorian gravely. "It only shows what complex creatures we are; doing, as you say, what we ought not to do. Which, after all, is only to prove that intention is better than action, if, indeed, it has anything to do with action. I often wonder; because I have really had the most virtuous desires and committed the grossest follies. You see, I am perfectly candid—like yourself. To one who wishes to scale the heights of fame, prudery and propriety are useless alpenstocks."

She coloured warmly and unbecomingly. Perhaps—so Sâba thought—she had not intended to be taken literally, and the indolent insolence of Dorian's eyes conveyed a message his words left untranslated.

There was an awkward pause; then they all began to talk of less personal matters. The waiters filled the glasses and Dorian Giles made Sâba a quaint speech, and said life would be one long dream if he could lie amid summer grasses and listen to her playing Schumann's "*Schlummerlied*." After which she became conscious of signals from another table and ventured to hint that she was summoned by "powers that be."

"Electra" caught her hand as she rose. "You will come and see me? *Promise*. I love music with an all-absorbing passion second only to that I feel for my art. And in my dark hours, when thought and imagination are lost in chaos, only music soothes me back to calm. Genius has its trials, child. Perhaps you, too, will find that out."

Sâba smiled faintly and said she would try to come, but that she must ask permission. Upon which the gifted authoress murmured something in Italian, and released her.

She made her way to her mother's side. It appeared that Mr. and Mrs. Barker Heavysage had departed before supper. But Mrs. Macdonald had been entertained by a gouty old peer with a rickety reputation and an admiration for the ballet. He had taken her down to supper and amused her so well that it was quite a long time before she recalled a juvenile prodigy's existence, or the fact that midnight had long struck.

Sâba drove home in suppressed excitement. However, her mother gave the usual wholesome check to such unauthorised conditions. Sâba was becoming too conceited. She must not imagine she was anything but a child, even if a young man *had* chosen to pay her very remarkable attentions.

This putting forward of Dorian Giles in a new aspect and under previously unconsidered conditions, offered the said Sâba secret consternation. She wondered how it was that in thought and feeling she and her mother were always so completely opposed. That the views of the one were in direct opposition to those of the other. Never had they regarded the same thing from the same aspect. She stood nearer the girl than any other living creature, and yet—and yet. Oh! those "yets!"

The daughter could tell the mother nothing of what surged and swelled in her young soul; of her wonders and speculations as to life's mysteries; of any feeling of sorrow or of joy. Why was it?

To-night she made one last effort at breaking down those harsh barriers. She crept closer to her mother's side, she laid one thin hand on that other hand gloved and idle on the pink tarlatan lap. "Oh, mamma, weren't you a little pleased with me? Everyone praised me; but you said nothing. You never do."

"I hope I know my duty better than to encourage vanity and conceit! You possess quite enough of both without my adding to them. These people make a fuss over you because so few girls of your age are allowed to come out of the school-room. Doubtless there are hundreds in London who can play quite as well. Only—well, it is your grandfather's fault in the first instance. However, it must stop. It quite amazed me to-night to see you talking and—*coquetting* with that absurd young man, just as if you were grown up! I consider such behaviour disgusting—at your age!"

A hand was withdrawn; a shamed, scarlet face looked out of the cab window, seeing nothing of the streets or the dancing lights. That word fell like a stone on the childish heart. Its immaturity, its dawning consciousness, were crushed beneath so terrible an accusation. It seemed to set Dorian Giles before her in a new light, and to set herself before Dorian Giles as something to be ashamed of—something that never wanted to see him or any man again; something from which the joyous, careless irresponsibility of childhood fell rent and dragged. Something—what was it that was born out of that moment? The first lesson of womanhood. The knowledge that to be simple and natural with anyone of the sex that claimed an exponent in Dorian Giles, was to commit offence against unknown laws of maidenliness. Oh! the horror and the shame! The sudden unveiling of that false god of sentiment, who has wrecked so many lives of youth; the first sight of that god as a cruel jeering fiend from whom one longed to fly and hide oneself; and then the knowledge that there was no hiding-place to be found! That he must be faced, and defied, and, if necessary, *lied* to!

Not another word spoke Sâba. But of thoughts—how could one small girl's heart hold all that crowd of thoughts? She felt stifled by their number; their bewildering questions; their pricks of shame. She longed to be alone. But when solitude brought her its blessed relief of tears she was no happier. All the events of that evening whirled before her memory. Words, looks, seemed to hammer their meaning into her brain, and yet reveal other meanings behind them.

Poor haunted Sâba! Yet another discovery made; another lesson learnt.

“Surely I know myself best, and I know there was nothing of—that sort! Not a thought. Oh, how cruel! how cruel! how cruel!”

It was cruel. But when is maturity anything else to immaturity, unless it has kept enough of youth in its own heart to remember it too was young—once?

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW Sâba Macdonald awoke to greet another morn—another day; a Sâba with something to conceal; something to be ashamed of. A girl who looked into her own sombre eyes as the glass showed them, and knew that never again would they be lifted in frank childish confidence to those of any man. Least of all to those of Dorian Giles.

Had he, too, misinterpreted her? Did “pert minx” and “coquette,” sum up this small insignificant personality for his mind? And did he laugh; and had others laughed? And was his object in studying and questioning immaturity only as cruel as a schoolboy’s instinct for dissection and destruction? He had said he intended to write a book; that he wanted to trace the first instincts of dawning femininity. What sort of revelations had been those of the girl now analysing herself? How much had she betrayed of what it was criminal to betray? An offence against the delicacy and purity of girlhood, never to be forgiven, or forgotten.

She could not remember. There had been questions strange and critical; odd, penetrating glances; the condescension of familiarity. But how was Sâba to know that such things were unusual; that between the experience of young manhood and the immature girlishness of fourteen years there is a great gulf fixed; that the girl who attempts to cross the gulf is self-condemned as immodest? Other horrible accusations had rushed in with the daylight of that first rude waking; she alternately resented and feared them.

“As if she were grown up!”

She looked at herself. Small, shadowy; taller, certainly, than before her illness, but still so ill-favoured, so childish. Why—it was absurd!

And yet the very absurdity cut like a knife into the sensitive core of girlhood. Why had they allowed her to go to this house? Why had she been singled out for special attentions? Why had men and women considered it worth while to talk to her and make her talk to them, if it was all—wrong? But then she remembered that everything that had ever pleased her, that she had enjoyed or desired, had been accounted wrong, as far as she was concerned. There were different codes for different people. Sâba Macdonald came under a peculiar one.

She tried to harden herself into indifference as to opinions held about her. After all, why should she care? She *knew*. The outer circle did not. One is not bound to accept as truth an accusation false and unmerited. Could not inward consciousness of innocence help one to be strong? She would try to believe it. Yet the trial had a sorry issue when she found that her mother's judgment was also that of her grandparents. They, too, had considered her behaviour "bold," "pert" and "immodest." Each qualifying adjective was another stone flung at the target of her sensitive nerves. She shrank and quivered under them as a whipped dog quivers at sound of the whistling lash. And yet, had she but known it, the dissatisfaction of her elders proceeded from quite a different cause than the one expressed. A great musical autocrat had been a mere nobody amidst that crowd of notable, gifted, and intellectual people. No one knew of him; or desired to do so. He had been introduced to no one and left severely alone. Such treatment, taken in conjunction with a suspicion that his presence there was more on account of his granddaughter's than his own merits, and allowance may be made for loss of temper. Also for the desire to find a suitable scapegoat. Hence another use for Sâba Macdonald.

But there was balm in Gilead. Someone who had heard and understood, brought sympathy and consolation; ridiculed the accusations that had been torturing the girl's mind; shook her out of morbid fancies, and left her with still some consolations of childhood. Besides, there was hope for the holiday scheme. "It will be my last as Theo Heavysage," said the consoler. "I have the right to exact privileges, and I shall. The Tolle-marches are going to Boulogne; so are Margaret and Maria; so are the Kirkmanns; so is your mother. And I want you,

little Madam Misery, for my own pleasure, and I am determined you shall come. I will pay for you myself, and we can share the same room at the boarding-house. I told mamma about it, and, though she grumbled, she has given in. Your Aunt Eliza is anxious to have the house to herself. In any case I maintain it would never do to leave you there with your cousins. We should have you ill again. So cheer up, and look forward to a real holiday; as happy a one as I can make it, at all events."

So the mercury rose and the pendulum swung round, and that queer jumble of nerves and feelings encased in an outer framework of undesirability grew once more normal and content. True, there was a great deal of unpleasantness yet to be lived through. True, that nothing in the home life she knew was ever made easy for her. True, that her own impulses and quick temper brought down continual rebuke. But beyond this stony desert of trials lay a broad and lovely oasis. She kept her eyes fixed upon that and forgot stumbling feet and tired limbs that had to drag her thither.

The longest week, the longest day, the longest night alike passed, and dropped like heavy stones into the sea of "have beens." And then one burning August noon the blue sea lay warm and hazy before Sâba Macdonald's eyes, and the white cliffs of England faded into a background.

Before her gleamed a new land. Harbour and quay, steamboats and vessels; a town piled high against blue skies forming a picture of bustling life and novelty. She trod French soil. The business of the *Douane* was yet another novelty. The strange voices, the language, the costumes, the queer carriages and drivers, were so many thrills of surprise and delight. Then the streets, so narrow and so crowded; the Haute Ville with its ramparts; the Basse Ville and its narrow, dirty streets, on the right of the river; the far-off dome of Notre Dame; the shops, the quaint caps and head-gear of the women, all so many wonders for untravelled eyes.

The boarding-house where grandmamma always stayed was in the English quarter of the town. The bathing and the *Etablissement* were in those days the great, if not only attraction, Boulogne possessed for English visitors. The morning was usually spent in splashing about in the sea, or watching other people splash. French families, in appropriate attire, adventuring the perils of the deep

as far as their knees could be trusted ; English maidens and matrons in their favoured bed-gown-and-girdle costumes. *Anglaise* of the most *Anglais*, dipping and bobbing discreetly in depths slightly more profound, if equally hazardous. Aunt Theo, my mother, I and Ada, and Sara Tollemarche, performed these duties unflinchingly. Then, in the cool of the afternoon, came drives, walks, excursions. In the evening there was the *Etablissement*, with its concerts and balls ; or the *Jettée* to promenade, or the fishing fleet to watch.

But of all places I loved the Haute Ville, with its old gateway, its shady walks, its ramparts, and its history. Here Ada and I came constantly with Mrs. Kirkmann or Aunt Theo. Here even cousin Margaret giggled less and became reminiscent of Godfrey de Bouillon and Colonel Newcome. Here we heard again the legend of the Lady and the Boat, and from here we penetrated to the mysteries of the Cathedral and the crypt, and grew awestruck at the thought of past centuries—of past warfare ; the sight of the spoils and tributes of superstition. There was much to hear and learn from the guide, whose broken English was more intelligible than our British-French. We paid many visits to the Cathedral under his care.

I noted that whenever we went there Aunt Theo suggested a walk to one particular spot of the ramparts as a conclusion. The view from there was magnificent, showing all the lower town and the valley of the Liane. I wondered, sometimes, if it was the view or some memory connected with the spot that always brought that sad and far-off look to her eyes ; that made her sigh so heavily as she turned away. We would stand there for long, long moments, gazing over valley and sea ; watching the sun set, or watching the moon rise ; saying only how beautiful it was, and how strange it seemed that we should be there—commonplace English folk, in a place made historical by stress of siege and war, and legends of remote ages. How strange that the little insular flutters of English visitors, English residents, English habits and prejudices, should concern a place where a Crusader had been born ; where churches had suffered sack and siege ; where an eighteenth century citadel had held a Napoleon as prisoner ; where a flotilla destined for England's naval destruction had floated. A place that had known the

invasion of Roman legions, and the thwarted ambitions of Britain's enemies.

Our old guide used to tell us stories by the ream—legends, spiritual and historical. How that Boat and Image had been preserved; how again and yet again the cathedral had been destroyed and rebuilt; had persisted in rising ever greater and more splendid on its ancient site; how the wonderful mosaic of the altar had been designed by an Italian architect and presented by an Italian prince; of the precious stones, the jewels, the gifts; the offerings in thankfulness to the Blessed Virgin, who had selected this spot for her faithful worshippers; how the faithful Abbé Haffreingue had worked and prayed, and collected funds for its restoration, and had had the glory of beholding his work completed, and the building consecrated and opened in little more than thirty years.

We heard enough of miracles to convert less unregenerate souls. Every window in the Chapel of Our Lady illustrated some event in the wonderful history of the cathedral itself. There was the arrival of the Image and the Boat; the Presentation of the Golden Heart; St. Ida and her three nuns; Henry II. bringing back the wonderful statue from Honvault; and, chief of all, the kneeling figure of the Abbé Haffreingue, and the principal bishops present at the ceremony of opening his completed work.

Why the Countess Ida should have been made a Saint we were not quite clear, but she was the mother of Godfrey de Bouillon, and after his death in the Crusades, she had erected one of the demolished cathedrals, with which piece of vandalism our good King Henry VIII. had something to do. Did we not see his very cannon balls collected and massed in the underground cellars of that mysterious crypt?

To me this wonderful, legend-haunted building, the work of a deathless Faith, and the monument of an equally deathless superstition, was a never ending source of wonder. It was my first acquaintance with any outward sign of the tremendous force wielded by the Catholic Church. It somewhat staggered my belief in hitherto approved Protestant methods of condemnation. There *was* something in such Faith, even if it was miscalled Popery; something which had worked doggedly on for sake of its accepted mission as man's salvation; something

which had translated literally those strange words : " Thou art Peter, and on this rock will I build My church."

Yet if such a mandate were accepted *literally*, what of that other which so flatly contradicts it.

" If any man denies Me before men, him also will I deny before My Father which is in heaven."

Yet was not Peter—that Rock on which the Romish Church has built its foundations—the very disciple who denied his Master *before men* ? Before God Himself, if Christ was God incarnate. Then how reconcile the two statements ? And taking its past history as a light on the path of its principles, have not the cowardice, the cruelty, and the treachery of its Founder been exemplified by his host of followers ? Is there not far more of man's arrogance than Christ's humility in the ordinations and services, the overweening ambitions of Rome ? The craft and subtlety of the Jew was in Peter ; the faith of the Christian grafted on to that parent stem was but a thing of weak and slow growth—something that paltered and failed ; that cringed and bullied, and denied alternately its Master and itself ?

" On this—Rock." Why not rather on this shifting sand of superstition, idolatry, craft, and greed ?

* * * * *

If such thoughts were the result of my visits to Notre Dame, it was strange that the place held such a powerful fascination for me. Yet it did. I remember asking permission to go to Mass there one Sunday, but the horror of my mother, of grandmamma, even of Aunt Theo, was so evident, that I felt almost a criminal. Oh ! dear stolid British prejudices, surely some day these things shall be accounted unto you for righteousness !

However, I went once or twice to Benediction with the Kirkmanns, and saw little difference to Protestant ritual, save for the use of the Latin tongue and the superfluous amount of genuflexions. I watched people light their candles before the shrine of our Lady, or in front of some altar in the side aisles. I thought it savoured something of the chandlery business to place the boxes of tapers so conveniently adjacent the objects of worship ; and *with the prices affixed* ! Also to hear that the profits arising from the sale of these tapers were devoted to the maintenance of the various altars.

It seemed hard to reconcile the *spiritual* benefit arising from the presentation of a taper, with the *material* profit relating to dusting, cleaning, and decorating. Then the offerings of jewellery, of gold and silver hearts, and diamond encrusted pendants to an image—a senseless block of marble carved into shape by the hands of common (and perhaps irreligious) workmen—struck me as peculiarly foolish. So does the savage with his fetish; so do the poor devotees at wayside shrines; but surely civilised and educated beings ought to know better.

The days of offerings and sacrifices had been abolished by Christ's own sacrifice. He had distinctly stated He asked nothing but the offering of a penitent and humble heart. Why, then, this disregard of His wishes by those who professed to be His followers?

Besides, there seemed something humiliating in offering a scrap of tinsel, a bit of earthly metal or mineral to the Most High; the Creator of the Universe. Or, if not to Him, to some intermediary glorified into saintship by human authority. For is not every pope and bishop and archbishop a *man* at heart—a man beneath his robes and vestments? Does he not think and feel as a man, with only man's limited knowledge of even why he thinks, and why he feels? Have not popes and cardinals sinned, and committed grievous crimes? Have not prelates fallen from their high estate and revealed themselves as mere mortals, and bad at that? Have not the sins of priesthood cried aloud to heaven in blood and shame and persecutions? Has not superstition laid its bloody scourge on every record of man's struggle for the truth? And is the truth any nearer?

* * * * * *

I used to sit by the hour in that great and beautiful building and think thoughts such as these. I used to watch the acolytes light the candles, and the priests flit to and fro; I used to gaze at the confession boxes and marvel what secrets were therein whispered; I used to marvel even more how people could go and kneel before a mere mortal sinner like themselves (since to be mortal was to be a sinner), and tell him their thoughts and their sins, and *believe* he could absolve them, or aid their desire for absolution. I used to read stories of saints and martyrs, of shrines and images, and relics and miracles,

yet found no foothold for belief in one single history ; of dreamers and visionaries there had been enough even in the Old Testament days, but those who supplied their place *afterwards* seemed possessed by a desire to outrival their predecessors' dreams and visions. And the Church helped deception so readily. Why? Because every shrine and every so-called miracle added wealth to its coffers, and lustre to its crown, and weight to its dogmatic commands. The little books fared ill at my hands. I hated their arrogant assumptions, and despised their paucity of proof. I never thought of Peter as a saint ; as a Rock ; as the authority he was proclaimed ; I only thought of him as the skulking, shrinking figure, creeping forth from the judgment hall of Pilate, while in the cold grey dawn the cock crew his shrill message of condemnation.

“Thou shalt deny Me thrice.”

CHAPTER IX.

THUS the lessons of life went on for Sâba Macdonald. She thought, suffered, shrank, doubted, was self-tortured and self-condemned, as neither her years nor her actual enormities of conduct quite deserved.

The friend who helped her most and understood her best was Mrs. Kirkmann. Despite difference in age the young girl and the old woman met on mutual ground of comprehension. One was alert, questioning, eager to know so much more than it was desirable she should know ; and the other had acquired knowledge for many fruitless years, only to echo the truth that learning was dangerous, unless deep. Yet there was the light of unquenched youth in her eyes and a still fresher and sweeter youth in her heart, and but for her Sâba Macdonald knew that her standard of life would have been less lofty and assured.

Taken as a whole, these weeks in the now cockneyfied old French town were a distinct part of that education which the girl desired. Besides, Mrs. Kirkmann had that rare art of letting certain things alone, and of culturing and pruning others, which is valuable knowledge for the moral horticulturist. Sâba picked up French very quickly.

She loved to listen to the chattering of the old market folk in the Halles Centrale, or watch the busy trade of the Fish Market, with its picturesque saleswomen. Such things were totally un-English, and possessed a singular attraction. They were so gay, these people; so polite; so full of chatter and laughter. It was so quaint to see "gran'mère," and "la mère," and then "la fille" at one stall. To note the unquestioning obedience and respect given to gran'mère. To watch her bargaining and selling with undisputed authority while she gossiped with the "*bonne à tout faire*," who, in frilled cap and with basket on arm, came to do her mistress's shopping. Sâba ceased to wonder that there were so many English residents in Boulogne. The life was so bright and amusing; there was so much that was quaint and interesting. The band on the promenade, the crowded spectacle of the sands, the *Etablissement*, with its amusements and concerts and balls, its card-rooms and club-rooms. Even Mrs. Heavysage agreed that English watering-places could not compare in point of attraction with this semi-foreign resort. But neither Mrs. Heavysage, nor Sâba's mother, nor Margaret and Maria Parbury, learnt a quarter as much of the ins and outs of the town, its quaint old streets, its byways and churches, its harbour and quay, as did Sâba. Such things did not interest them half so much as the antics of the bathers, the fashionable crowd on the promenade, or the evening balls and amusements. But Sâba and Ada Kirkmann, under the charge of Aunt Theo, or Ada's grandmother, had other and deeper enjoyments out of their holiday time.

Perhaps Sâba was a little too eager to tell of discoveries; to speak of the never-ending wonders of the town, and how it had grown from a seventeenth-century fishing village to be of its present-day importance. In common with most English visitors Mrs. Barker Heavysage and her friends cared nothing for French history, but a great deal for French cooking and French scenes of the "*Bain de mer*" type, such as the sands gave them every morning.

Mrs. Barker Heavysage and Sâba's mother had only paid one visit to the cathedral, and never been to the crypt at all. They preferred the sands and the pier to the ramparts, and considered Capecure and Wimille and Le Portel quite long excursions, demanding thought and careful planning. They knew nothing of the Calais road

and its glades and nooks and shady paths. But Sâba and her faithful friends had lovely picnics there, and visited farm-houses to buy milk or fruit, by way of practising their French. They penetrated to the forest, and saw the famous old Château d'Ordre, and adventured to Honvault where stood the château inhabited by Henry VIII., and a well in which that everlasting image of the Virgin had been concealed until times were less rife with religious warfare. Things such as these delighted the girl. Her mind fed enthusiastically on their interests. But of all places and scenes set in her memory as records of this time, the cathedral and the cemetery were foremost.

Sâba Macdonald had never set foot on any spot connected with death until she entered that English cemetery at Boulogne. It struck her as very strange to see so many English names on the gravestones, and to hear such histories of them as that connected with the wreck of the female convict ship in 1833. (That melancholy story dwarfed in interest the importance of consulship, or inventor, or "oldest resident.") Were they glad? "Oh, they must have been glad! Think of the horrors of that ship! The knowledge that never more would they be free to return to their native land. The long, awful voyage! Oh, they must be glad they were spared all that!"

"Mademoiselle has the imagination, the feeling, the *sentiment du cœur*," observed the old curator, who was "on duty." "It is strange that she should say those words. Most usually it is only that one hears from the visitors, 'Ah! *les pauvres diables!* It is they are better off!'"

He trotted us round most conscientiously, did that old curator, telling us of the famous dead, and showing us the beauty of monument and mortuary chapel. But the sight of artificial wreaths and metallic decorations affected me unpleasantly. They jarred on every instinct of the sacred and profound mysteries here enshrined. The climbing roses and green foliage of nature's own providing, these were lovely tributes and suitable, but why did the French people bring imitation *immortelles*, and black and white bead wreaths, and paltry images, and so desecrate the resting-place of the very dead they sought to honour?

Perhaps the most solemn hour I ever spent was the hour I spent in that cemetery. It brought the reality of death so close to the unreality of life. It made me feel that that shouting, splashing, foolish crowd on the sands below were

like figures in a dream, and that the dream would end suddenly, swiftly, even as that contemplated voyage had ended for the convict ship. And all left of the splashing, dancing crowd would mean a few feet of ground, a stone tablet, a chaplet of black and white beads.

Would their faith stand them as salvation? Their saints; their priests' wisdom; their conscientious confessions; their fulfilled penances? Even those jewelled offerings glittering on the shrine of the Virgin they worshipped. Would these things mean eternal safety, eternal joy?

Was there anything—sure? Any of all men's creeds and orders and denominations? So sure that one could say, "I *know*, and I trust, and I am happy!"

* * * * *

To come down from that solemn resting-place and then watch the froth of life once more dancing on its surface was just one of those peculiar contrasts that set my soul agog.

There was to be an unusually brilliant ball that night—the last of the season, for in September most of the English visitors left. To it were going Aunt Theo and Sara Tolle-marche, cousins Margaret and Maria, and my mother and grandmother as chaperons. I was permitted to have Ada for the evening to keep me company, and we both inspected the ball *toilettes* and appearance of the party with unusual interest. I thought Aunt Theo had never looked so lovely. She was all in airy white; no touch of colour anywhere save for the lovely flush on her cheeks and the scarlet of her lips. But the bridal appearance of her costume gave me a sharp reminder of the dreaded time when I was to lose her, and for a moment or two I could not speak my admiration. Then, with much fuss and chatter and excitement, they went off, leaving two small Cinderellas alone in the big drawing-room that to-night was empty of its boarders. We sat by the window and wondered when we should begin to *feel* the difference of those few short years that marked us off from "grown-up ones." Ada would be seventeen in less than three and I was but nine months her junior.

"Do you know, Sába," she said, "I think if I were engaged, as your aunt is, I would not care to go to so many balls and amusements. I should not like to dance

with other men—to feel strange arms round my waist, after—well, after *the one* I had chosen.”

I burst into flushed championship. If Aunt Theo saw no harm in it, or—well, *the one*—it wasn't our business. As far as I was concerned, however, I doubted whether I could ever allow any man to put his arm round me. I did not dance, and had never learnt, and the only time I had seen dancing was at Ada's Christmas party. I thought it a rather foolish form of enjoyment. That it could assume such importance in the eyes of “grown-ups” was another puzzle.

“Oh, but *that*”—said Ada. “Don't you know? All mothers want to marry their daughters, and in order to find them husbands they must take them into society. Society means going to balls and parties where you meet people, then giving balls and parties yourself in order to get to know each other. And these mothers who want to find the husbands, dress their daughters very beautifully, and entertain the young men who pay them attention, until one of them proposes; after that, and if the girl accepts, the mother says her troubles are over, and that the daughter is ‘off her hands.’ I think it's all very funny, but that is what everyone with daughters has to do. Your mother will ‘bring you out’ one of these days, and you will have to select one of the young men you meet for a husband. And if you don't select the one she wishes, there will be trouble for you.”

“As usual,” I said. “But don't let us talk of husbands. It seems horrible. Every girl needn't marry.”

“No, of course not. But what is she to do, unless she has money, or can work and support herself?”

“I should like to go back to the Bush and the Laird,” I said thoughtfully. “Life seemed simpler and sweeter there than in towns and cities.”

“Why do you always call your father the ‘Laird’?” asked Ada.

“Because he is the Laird. I wonder if we will ever go back to Scotland? He said in a year or two. But mamma told me he had been very unfortunate, and lost a great deal of money, so I know it won't be next year.”

“Were you fond of him?”

“Oh yes! He was rather strict and stern with me, but not in the same way that mamma is. He would talk to me often for hours. I learnt so much from him. But

he did not like me to put too many questions, or argue, so I had to listen and keep in what I wanted to say. Ada—" I added, after a pause.

" Yes ? "

" Do you *remember* your parents ? "

" You know about my mother, and my father died when I was only four. He is a sort of shadowy memory. Why do you ask ? "

" Because—only, of course it couldn't be—and your grand-parents, they are so united," I added disjointedly.

" They never quarrel—do they ? "

" Never, to my knowledge."

" Well, papa and mamma used to quarrel dreadfully. Oh, it was terrible! I have often heard him say he wished he had never married her, Oh, Ada, *think* of giving any man the chance of saying that. I should die with shame of it ! "

" I expect you would get used to it," said Ada calmly.

" All married people quarrel. They can't help it. A lover is quite a different person from a husband. I told you once how I had studied them before, and *after*. You will find your aunt will quite change after she is married, even if she doesn't care for Dr. Danebury."

" Why do you say that ? " I interrupted angrily.

" Why ? Oh, because I am *sure* if she cared for anyone, it was that handsome captain we met last Christmas! You remember ? "

I nodded. Of course I remembered. But I also knew that I should have resented a marriage with him as much as with the Anglo-Indian doctor. It was the *fact* even more than the factor that aroused my jealousy. I could not bear to think of that dear and lovely personality given over to the charge and keeping of a man—to be his own, his very own, in that closest, most uncertain of ties—marriage. There was so much tragedy behind it. The disillusion and discontent and bitterness of which my childish years had taken note. There was even brutality—possible. A coarse or refined form of trampling on feminine instincts, feminine sensitiveness, feminine ideals. And then to love, and hear the lips one loved speak such cruel truths! Oh, how could women endure it? Why did they not kill themselves rather than put their necks into such a yoke?

Could I, or Ada (I looked at her), ever brace ourselves

up to face such terrible possibilities? And yet grand-mamma and mamma and Aunt Theo had all been little girls like ourselves—once. Had all stood on that dividing line we were approaching. Had all lived through those three momentous years which turned immature girlhood into some forthcoming heroine of romance.

"I shall never marry, Ada," I said at last. "Fortunately I am ugly, and I shall have no money. According to books, men only marry for beauty or for wealth. That's lucky for me."

Ada laughed softly. "You are a funny girl, Sâba! What with religion and romance, and your way of dissecting everything, and of criticising your elders and never accepting a fact, but always questioning its 'wherefore'—I really wonder what you will make of your life? I wish I could know, but I shall not be a looker on much longer."

This assertion took us on to a new path of speculation. Ada's perfect certainty of an early death, and equally perfect content with that certainty always interested me. I think it was on this night, as we sat by the open window, and looked up at the blue heavens, and watched the shining stars set gem-like in the soft velvet of its depths, that I won from her a promise.

"Ada," I said, "if your soul is *there*, if you can look down on this world, if you can *remember*, will you try to come back and see me? Will you try to give me a sign that life does not end with death?"

She kept silence for a long time. Perhaps she was questioning of possibilities; perhaps awaiting an answer. At last she turned and looked at me. Her eyes soft and deep as if with thoughts unutterable. "If it is allowed, Sâba—I *will*. But you must not be frightened," she added.

"Why should I be? I am not frightened of you here."

"No, because I am alive—a creature of flesh and blood, like yourself. It will be different—afterwards."

"How do you know?"

"The whole conditions will alter—speech, sight, hearing, move through different channels. I may even see you, touch you, stand beside you, and you will not know. Grandmamma has never seen my mother, but she has been in the room with grandmamma, and I have seen her as distinctly as I see you."

Then we drifted into fragmentary talk, odd and unchildish as Ada herself—talk that would have amazed our elders, to whom we were merely insignificant, ordinary children.

The evening passed at last and Ada had to go home. I went to the room I shared with Aunt Theo, and sat on my little bed in the corner, and tried to picture her dancing away those puzzling hours ; letting that sacred waist and lovely form be the temporary possession of a set of beings called “ partners.”

And all because society demanded that men and maidens should meet and be attracted, and receive proposals or make them ; marry, and grow into quarrelsome, prosaic couples such as grandpapa and grandmamma, or my own father and mother, or any of the countless Mr. and Mrs. “ So-and-So’s ” who made up life and the world ; the great vast crowds passing ever, ever onwards, to the mystery of Death and the—Beyond.

CHAPTER X.

THAT pleasant holiday was over. London claimed us all again. London hot and dusty and airless. In the parks were vast spaces of burnt, dried grass ; the leaves were turning brown. The flowers in garden square, or window-box, were dead and faded.

Brunswick Gardens bore signs of the destructive nature of boys. Aunt Eliza had lightened her mourning on account of the heat. Fanny was as ugly as ever, and the home life as unpleasant. However, with the departure of Paxton and his brothers came a brief period of peace.

I was permitted to return to Miss Sharpe and her tuition ; to resume my lessons from Herr Franz, and alas ! to attend those musical evenings at Pembridge Square. I was, therefore, less at home than had been the case since my illness. I was also permitted to read what I pleased. I associated very little with my cousin, and put up with her constant spiteful remarks and my aunt’s sarcasms as philosophically as possible. I was learning the uselessness of rebellion ; learning to become more silent, more self-restrained. If only I was not interfered with I was quite content ; but unfortunately the system of “ rubbing one the wrong way,” fault-finding and lecturing, was that most favoured by the guardians of youth in those days.

I forget now how soon or how long it was after my return when I became suspicious of something wrong in the household.

The wranglings and quarrels between my mother and my aunt were succeeded by fits of violent hysterics and prolonged isolation on the part of the latter. For two or three days she would refuse to leave her room, and it was from Jean Macgregor I heard a hint of what took place there. I kept my own counsel, and only wondered that grandmamma suspected nothing. But she usually called early in the day, and the outbreaks took place at a later period. If mamma knew of their cause she said nothing to me. I was always forbidden to go to my aunt's room, which was jealously guarded by Fanny; but on occasions I had lingered outside in the passage and heard scraps of foolish talk, foolish laughter, hysterical fits of weeping, or violent abuse. So, on the whole, the life was far from pleasant, and my antipathy to Anglo-Indian ways and influences grew stronger. Would Aunt Theo ever become like her sisters, I wondered, and then shrank in horror from the disloyalty of the doubt.

Week followed week. Winter was at hand and grandpapa full of excitement at the prospect of the Popular Concert season. This time he proposed to take me occasionally as a lesson in how concerted music ought to be played. I suppose he was still blind to the fact that it takes four *players* to make a quartet.

In the autumn and early winter I thought London inexpressibly dreary. There seemed to be nothing going on, or if there was, I had no share in it. I was not allowed to go to a theatre, or in fact to be out at night, on account of a fresh cough I had contracted. If required for a Tuesday evening I was sent in a cab, and either returned the same way or slept the night in my own old room. Those were halcyon occasions, made delightful by the old fireside talks with Aunt Theo; talks from which all reference to her marriage—even to the preparations of the *trousseau*—were eliminated; talks in which she sometimes encouraged, sometimes checked me; yet never failed to express the old wonder, "What *will* your life be when you grow up to womanhood?" "How can you think of such things?" or, "Are you a child at all, Sâba Macdonald?"

* * * * *

Christmas came—my second Christmas in England. To

say it was a few degrees more dreary than the first is to say enough, for grandpapa chose to have the dinner at his usual hour, two o'clock, and great and many were the grumblings thereat. Furthermore, the tribe of Larkom was added to the previous list of guests. Sara Tollemarche and the old General refused to come. A two o'clock dinner, a long afternoon and evening were not exactly their idea of a "festive" gathering.

For that matter they were no one's, except grandpapa's. It was a miserable day; wet, cold and foggy. My mother had wished me to go to church, but the weather was so unfriendly that I was excused. In pouring rain we proceeded in two cabs to Pembridge Square. We duly arrived and were duly welcomed, and gave greeting and received our presents: half a sovereign for the two elder boys, Fanny, and myself, from grandpapa; gifts of various sorts from grandmamma and Aunt Theo, and Margaret and Maria. Then polite and unnatural conversation of the Sandford and Merton type. Then dinner—heavy, stodgy, formal Christmas fare. After that meal grandpapa withdrew, having no male guest to claim attention. We children were sent to the library with nuts and fruit and crackers to amuse us. About five o'clock I was summoned to practise with grandpapa in his own "den." The others played cards and "consequences" and draughts. At seven we had tea. After tea, music. That is to say, I played accompaniments, and one or two of the "Songs Without Words." Aunt Eliza performed some wonderful variations of Moscheles, and Aunt Theo sang a few modern ballads in her sweet mezzo-soprano.

Then Aunt Eliza was wise enough to discover that the children were tired and sleepy, so cabs were sent for, and we all went home more or less relieved or depressed.

In contrast with this Christmas day, the previous one I have described was absolutely Dickensonian! I found myself wondering how long this sort of life was to go on—its dull monotony, its cramping routine. I had fallen among these people, but was I never to get away from their narrow lives until my own had been equally narrowed? Was all that great wide world of life beyond the boundaries of Bayswater, a life in which I could have no part? Was it impossible for a girl to get out of her groove unless she accepted marriage as the gate of freedom? I looked out on a wide area of "young ladyism."

I thought of Aunt Theo and her sisters and their friends; of Margaret and Maria settling down to "old maidenhood," leading empty, silly lives composed of visiting, gossiping, novel reading and fancy work. I thought, too, of the Kirkmanns, who had given up so much time and research to deeper things than mere worldliness and of their disappointments; of the stone wall against which they had eventually struck those outstretched, eager hands. A year had come into my life, and a year had gone out of it. That time would never be mine again. If I had done ill or well, learnt much or little, the record was sealed and done with. I had to face a new year. Perhaps I should find myself facing many and yet be equally "an unprofitable servant."

The thought came to me like a shock. Everyone ought to do something with their lives—else why were we here? What should I do with mine? It was clear that now was the time for definite purpose, for making up one's mind. I had just read "Jane Eyre," and the idea of that quiet little authoress working at her masterpiece amidst those Yorkshire wilds fired me with ambition. All these strange thoughts and imaginings, this *inner* life of myself, surely they meant something. The struggle of some chained force to free itself; to gain egress from a prison of environment which it cordially detested. These environments were so many blemishes in the scheme of creation. How was it they were so often unsuitable? I thought of Charlotte Brontë, of George Eliot, of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, of Charles Dickens (if those sorrowful childhoods of his characters were representative), of Shelley, Byron, Keats—how unhappy they all had been!

"To learn in suffering what they taught in song," was that indeed the fate of genius? I turned to histories of great artists, great reformers, great inventors—always the same story, the story of strife; the wearisome efforts at gaining the world's belief; always a bondage of conventionality before the liberty of mind worked its own way to freedom.

The thought of these struggles was not encouraging. In the first place, one had to discover *what* it was one wanted to do, and then cut down or leap over every barrier that stood in the way of doing it.

I don't know why the thought of barriers put "Electra" into my head, but suddenly I remembered her. Was the

book written yet, or only on the way to fame? And Dorian Giles, where was he, and his mother, my "Cleopatra"? Not a word or sign of these people since that eventful party. Should I ever see them again?

The memory of Dorian Giles made me hot and uncomfortable. The memory of "Electra" made me curious. I remembered how she had pressed me to come and see her. It had not been possible at that time. Then had come those weeks in Boulogne. And since my return, lessons and music and home troubles had so occupied me that I had not thought of her at all. I wondered if I could see her? I felt certain my mother would not take me. Yet perhaps Aunt Theo might, or perhaps——

I caught my breath at the temerity of the idea. Why should not I go alone? What need to tell anyone? Very often I stayed to dinner at the Kirkmanns' and did not return home till dark. It would be quite easy to get to Brompton by omnibus from Kensington. I knew my way to the High Street. Or else I could take a cab. I had grandpapa's half-sovereign, and another sent by the old General. Perhaps that would be the safest way of making the journey.

The idea fired my brain and gave me no peace. It was with me when I opened my eyes next morning. Then cold water descended upon it in the shape of Christmas holidays. I was not to resume lessons for a fortnight. It seemed an eternity to wait. I wanted counsel; I wanted advice. "Electra" seemed the only possible confidante for me.

I went about that day in a hazy cloud of speculations and plans. The weather was again atrocious; snow and sleet were falling. The wind was bitter. Indoors things were well-nigh intolerable. Aunt Eliza was locked in her room. Fanny said she was keeping in bed as she had caught a cold. The boys were quarrelsome and objectionable. Someone had forgotten to order coals, and the cellar was nearly empty. There was only one room with a fire, and round it the quartet of boys crowded, so that I had no chance of getting warm.

I sought refuge in the kitchen and found Jean making scones and plum cake. I watched her, wondering if I should ever be able to cook. I won permission to beat up eggs, and stone raisins, by way of preliminary. I made her tell me about Scotland; about the Laird; about his boy-

hood's home in the Highlands ; about the Auld House where I had made an unwelcome and unexpected appearance ; about my early life in Australia. In fact, I learnt more than I had ever known yet about family history and family matters. I wished I could have explained to Jean how unhappy I was and how perplexed. But she would only say it was my "cantrips." She could not imagine me as a thinking, enquiring, human creature. Something with a soul eagerly set on learning the meaning of life ; looking out on it from a far higher and wider standpoint than that of her own narrow Presbyterianism.

I passed the morning more happily in that warm kitchen than I could have passed it with my cousins. Jean had lifted her eyebrows at hearing of Aunt Eliza's indisposition, but made no other remark. I also heard some news that set me thinking of an opportunity for carrying out my scheme. Mamma was going to dine and spend the rest of the day at Pembridge Square. With Aunt Eliza and the inquisitive Fanny safe in their locked room, the coast would be clear. I might slip out, take a cab and make my way to Brompton Square, pay my visit, and return in the same manner. I grew hot and cold as I thought of the scheme. If I was missed they would only think I had gone to the Kirkmanns'. I would *do* it.

I had behaved so well for such a long time, been so obedient to command and control, that this carefully planned piece of independence seemed alarming. All happened as Jean Macgregor had said. Mamma departed to Pembridge Square, saying she would probably not return till the evening. At dinner Fanny came down and partook of stewed beef and apple dumpling, and bullied her young brothers and was bullied by her elders. In fact, the meal was as uncomfortable as it generally contrived to become in their company. But I was too engrossed and excited to care about rudeness, or table manners, or even personalities aimed at myself. Such trifles mattered little when one was on the threshold of great doings ; when the life of childhood and coercion were about to be shaken off ; when a traveller was about to start out on the road of independence, caring nothing for old misleading signposts ; determined to find a new way—a way no other traveller had ever yet discovered. How eagerly I slipped off to my room to prepare for that expedition. With what care I selected hat and frock and gloves ! I put on

a waterproof cloak over them, and borrowed an umbrella from the hat-stand. Then I slipped quietly out of the front door and found myself in the street.

A passing hansom signalled with upraised whip. I jumped in, gave the address, and was driven off in the direction of Kensington. Only then did it occur to me that I had no smaller change than my half-sovereign. Examination of the published fares on the splashboard informed me of the charge by distance and the charge by time. I read both carefully. I was quite unable to guess how much it would cost from Brunswick Gardens to Brompton Square. But then I told myself the cabman would know, and perhaps, also, he would have change. So I sat back in glorified content and felt I was indeed on the threshold of independence.

The drive was long and dismal. All the shops were shut, and though the snow had ceased, the streets were slushy and the pavement black and slippery. Christmas-time in England had changed its weather along with its spirit; that was self-evident. At last the cab pulled up. I was at my destination. Nervously I got out and asked the man what I had to pay. He gave me a scrutinising glance, and then said, "Three-and-six."

I took out my purse and asked him if he could give me change. "No, that I can't, miss," was his answer. I looked hopelessly about. "I've only half a sovereign," I said. He suggested that my friends in "the 'ouse might be able to do it."

I therefore mounted the steps and rang the bell. After some delay a maidservant appeared; she wore a dirty cotton dress, and a dirtier cap. I asked if Miss Electra were at home. She stared. "No sich person lives 'ere," she said. I took out my treasured card and saw my mistake. "I mean Miss Puffin," I said.

"Oh, she's h'engaged for a hour," was the answer.

Consternation succeeded my recent elation. "Could I wait?" I stammered. "I am very anxious to see her."

"Well, I can't say," said the girl. "I'll h'enquire."

She was departing when I remembered the question of change. I hastily recalled her and stated my dilemma. She said something about asking the "Captain," and once more left me. I looked down a dismal passage, the usual oil-clothed and hat-stand passage of those days. I saw the servant open a door on the left and go in. After a

few moments she returned. The cabman jocularly remarked that "if I was a-goin' to make a h'afternoon of it, he was agreeable to charge by time."

"You're to come in and the Capt'in will give you change," said the girl; "'e wants to see if yer money is all right."

I followed her and was shown into a dreary back room, where a dull fire burnt dismally. Beside it in a wheeled chair sat the strangest looking old man I had ever seen: He was small and had a shrunken appearance, a bald head with a fringe of white hair growing entirely round it, a pair of steely-blue eyes, and a trembling feeble mouth. He held a stick in his hands, on which he leant forward to peer at me. He was dressed in a quaint old-fashioned way, such as I had seen in pictures of the "forties." His neck seemed weak, and occasionally dropped into his coat collar, and then as suddenly shot out of it in a way that was decidedly startling. He wore a high collar and white folded neckcloth, and as his head alternately sank and rose from their encirclement he reminded me of a tortoise I had once seen emerging from or returning into its shell.

"Well, my lass," he said in an odd, cracked, whispering voice, "what is it? What is it? What do you want?"

I stammered out my difficulty, and showed him my half-sovereign. He took it and peered at it, and bit it, and then dived into a flap pocket of his queer garment and produced an old netted silk purse. From this he drew a variety of coins—half-crowns, shillings, coppers. He slowly counted out the requisite change and recounted it into my hand: I thanked him and was making my way to the door, when he whispered me to stop.

"Come back again," he said; "come back again. No one ever comes to see me. It's always *her*. Come back and cheer a lonely old boy with your company."

In some bewilderment I promised to return, and hastened off to get rid of the cabman. He now demanded another sixpence for "waiting," and I was too frightened to refuse. It struck me that my expedition was likely to cost me dear, and make a considerable hole in my half-sovereign. And pocket-money was rare and had to be treasured in those days.

I closed the hall door, and seeing no one about, I returned to the room where the funny old man was located. His

face was turned expectantly to the door. He smiled cheerfully when he saw me.

"Come in, my lass," he said. "Come in and sit down, and tell me your name, and your business. But first stir the fire and put on some coal. They neglect me sadly, sadly, sadly."

His head shot out suddenly again, and so startled me that I dropped the poker. At that noise he looked quite alarmed and drew in his head to the refuge of collar and neckcloth.

"Hush," he whispered warningly. "Hush-h! If you make a noise they will think it's Old Boy, and come and scold. He's a poor neglected Old Boy—poor neglected Old Boy—poor—neglected—"

His voice died away. I carefully made up the fire, being only too glad to warm myself. I had thrown off my cloak and removed my gloves. Now I stood up and surveyed the room and my new acquaintance with considerable curiosity. He seemed to have fallen asleep, and I began to take note of his surroundings. The room was dingy and shabby. It held sundry strange-looking pieces of furniture. In one corner stood a weird-looking box or coffer. Beside it was a square wooden stand, on which stood a large parrot-cage covered with an old black shawl. There were also some shelves holding mouldy volumes, and a cupboard on which stood some plates, cups and glasses. In the centre of the room was a walnut-wood table with four carved legs. The dirty window-panes were half obscured by dull green blinds. The window looked out on a small garden—stunted trees, sooty shrubs, brick walls and occasional cats. I turned from it and my survey, and was approaching the fire when I heard a shout.

"Gone eight bells! Gone eight bells! Time for grog, Capt'in. Hoo-ray!"

I started. The old man opened his eyes and stared at me.

"Poll!" he said, and chuckled wheezily. "Good bird! Brave old Poll! He never forgets Old Boy. Get his grog, girl, and haste about it. Damme, don't you *hear*?"

I felt somewhat alarmed. I told him I had only called to see Miss Puffin, and then had been asked to wait here until she was disengaged. The parrot proceeded to give

a series of shrill whistles, and "piped all hands aboard" some half-dozen times. The old gentleman growing weary of this entertainment, tapped on the floor with his stick and swore a few nautical oaths.

Then he surveyed me once more. "Come to see my darter, eh? My wonnerful darter?"

"Wonnerful darter!" shrieked the parrot. "His wonnerful darter! Gone eight bells, Capt'in."

"Hold your tongue, bird," commanded the old gentleman. "Can't hear myself speak. So you came to see my darter, did ye? Not Old Boy; he's laid on the shelf. He's no one's business, no one's care. But he was wonnerful too—once. He sailed the seas and fought under Nelson. Think of it child; the great Horatio Nelson, at Trafalgar—"

" 'Twas in Trafalgar's Bay
We saw the foeman lay.' "

Oh! the wheezy cracked old voice, and the tuneless notes! How odd, and yet how pathetic they seemed!

I drew up a chair and sat down. I had forgotten the reason of my visit in the sudden interest awakened by this strange old person.

"My life was on the sea," he croaked. "On the sea. Ah! treacherous and cruel they call it. Not so treacherous as woman, my dear; nor so cruel—nor so cruel. I know 'em both. 'A fool,' you say. Yes—yes, we are all fools. Only one exception—my wonnerful darter"—he chuckled again—"my wonnerful darter."

"Is she your only child?" I asked timidly. He looked so ancient, as if he might have had many families—more like the grandfather of "Electra" than her natural progenitor.

"Only child?" he chuckled again. "Ho, ho! only child! Dozens of 'em, my dear, dozens. A wife in every port the sailor owns. A merry life while it lasts, but not merry for a battered old hulk shoved into port as I am—as I am. Captain Puffin, Captain Jonathan Puffin, commander of the good ship *Victory*—was it the *Victory*? Well, well, there were a many of 'em that I commanded, many—many of 'em."

Again his voice trailed off into huskiness and silence; again his head sank. The fire was burning brightly now, and the warmth seemed to have a soothing effect on him.

Finding my chair very hard and prickly, I deserted it in favour of a footstool that I discovered. I sat there enjoying the warmth after the cold of the streets; enjoying, too, this queer new experience on which I had happened.

The next time the old man awoke he asked me if "All hands had been piped for grog," and how many "bells" had gone? I said I did not know. Upon this the parrot also seemed to wake up and muttered, "Eight bells, Capt'in; eight bells" with commendable perseverance.

"Eight bells, and where's Lucy?" demanded the old man.

I hinted at ignorance and offered to ring.

"Ring! -Wring her neck!" shouted the Captain. But his own neck disappeared into his coat collar, and his anger seemed to die away with its disappearance. "Forgotten again," I heard him mutter. "And Old Boy daren't complain. She's a rare one for punishing and discipline is wonnerful darter. Stops his grog and his baccy; makes him turn in when he wants to sit up and be jolly; won't read his paper to him. Times are bad for Old Boy, my lass, when he tries to put *his* foot down. But he's still somebody—somebody. He can sign his cheques, and draw his dividends. Aye, aye, and he can alter his will—his will. They have to be a little kind when they remember that. Damn 'em!"

All this was whispered in the same hoarse whisper, with the same queer jerking in and out of head. I found myself wishing Dickens could have seen him and described him. What a character he would have created out of these materials! But perhaps "Electra"—

I pulled myself up short. I wondered where she was—if I was to see her. Otherwise the object of my visit would be unaccomplished.

A question croaked into my ear startled me like a pistol shot. "Are you natural? Are you yourself—just yourself? Not a dozen other people, play-acting and posing?"

"Myself?" I faltered. "Yes, sir, I believe so."

"Always be that—be that. Don't *act*. Old Boy is being punished for acting once. He pretended he loved—he *had* loved—more than once; but not this time. And she caught him—women do that. You'll do it too. Caught him tight, sharp; a rat in a trap—in a trap; a pretty creature, but southern blood. Italian—oh! a

rare temper! Her mother, my dear, the mother of Lucy, my wonnerful darter. Calls herself Lucia; another *pose*. Lucy we christened her, plain Lucy; not good enough now. Deuce take 'em all. Susan and Gertrude and Rosalie; Jean and Jeanette, and Lucia and Maraquita! English, Scotch, French and Spanish and Italian—all played the deuce with Old Boy. For the matter o' that, so they did with Nelson. So they do with all the 'Salts,' young or old—young or old. Not piped for grog yet, eh, my dear? Forgotten again! It's in that cupboard over there—the bottle. Be a kind lass and get it for Old Boy. Then he'll put you down in his will for something, eh?"

My heart ached for the strange old creature, for the apparent neglect he endured, for sight of that strange wistful hunger in his eyes. I rose and went over to the cupboard he indicated. I tried to open it, but it was locked. I turned round and saw the queer old man half standing, half leaning on his stick, his fierce eyes watching me eagerly.

"I can't get the door open," I said.

He sank back; he was trembling so that the very floor shook. He struck it once or twice with his stick.

"Her tricks—her ways," he muttered fiercely. "That's my wonnerful darter. Damn her!"

CHAPTER XI.

ALMOST on those words the door opened. "Electra," the Wonderful Daughter, stood looking in. The amazement in her face was almost ludicrous. For a moment I felt sure she did not know who I was.

I came hurriedly forward. "You remember you asked me to call, Miss Puffin—I am Sâba Macdonald."

She coloured to the roots of her orange-tinted hair. Then she held out her hands. "Of course, of course! You dear child! And so you've actually come! But why are you *here*? Who showed you into this room?"

"The servant. I had no change to pay the cabman. She said you were engaged, and this old gentleman, your father, asked me to stay with him."

"Father! He's my grandfather!" she exclaimed. "His wits wander a great deal; that is one of his

delusions. But come away upstairs, I have so much to say to you."

She drew me towards the door. The Old Boy thereupon wheezed out a remembrance in which "eight bells" and "grog" took a leading part. She abruptly closed the door.

"Oh!" I said entreatingly, "can't he have what he wants? He seemed so—so thirsty."

She laughed a short, harsh, unpleasant laugh.

"Thirsty!" she echoed. "He's never anything else. He has never been able to get the sea-salt and the sea-taste out of his mouth. However—well, run upstairs, child—first door facing you is the drawing-room. Wait for me there."

She went down, and I went up. I entered the room to which she had directed me. Its windows looked out on the square. Folding doors, open and screened with heavy curtains, divided it from a back room. There was a bright fire in the grate. It shone on steel bars and fire-irons; on the usual Early Victorian furniture of twisted and heavy mahogany; green rep, lustres, valances, fringes, tassels; on a hideous Brussels carpet; on the welcome sight of a semi-grand piano, an incongruous piece of walnut; on a stand of plants in one of the tall windows and a bowl of flowers on the console table; on a variety of unbeautiful and inartistic things which proved that "Electra's" taste was less cultured than her mind.

I had taken stock of these surroundings when she arrived, looking flustered and annoyed, yet trying to conceal annoyance beneath that celebrated "purring" politeness for which she was famous.

She again seized my hands and put me in a low chair by the fire; she said we would have a nice long chat, and some tea up here instead of in the dining-room. I noticed she was dressed in a sort of dressing-gown of green velvet, trailing and without much crinoline. She wore a long scarf of mellow old lace, and some curious barbaric-looking jewellery. Her strange fuzzy hair was gathered up in a knot on the top of her head, and puffed out over her ears. I thought she looked very extraordinary. She told me the costume and *coiffure* had been designed for her by Dorian Giles from some old fifteenth-century Italian picture. So I concluded it must be all right, as he was an authority on matters of art.

"And now tell me, why have you come to see me?" she asked suddenly. I explained. I told her of the summer holiday, all my occupations and engagements since, and of how, to-day, I had come here because I wanted her advice.

"I am glad you came by yourself," she said; "I detest ordinary callers. The people who come in their best clothes and with their card-cases in their hands, and sit for fifteen minutes by the clock making stereotyped remarks. The people who expect you to return their visits dressed in *your* best clothes and holding your card-case, and staying fifteen minutes by their clock. Just as if life wasn't deeper, more important than any claims of conventionality."

"Your life, of course," I said eagerly. "Oh, how splendid it must be! A full, deep life of one's own, filled with work, with results—not the ordinary everyday eating, drinking, stocking-mending, fancy-work existence. And you are so *free*. You have no one to rule or dominate you!"

I sighed. She gave me a quick glance from her strange eyes. "Not in that way," she said; "at least, not now. But I have had troubles enough. The path of genius is beset by difficulties, strewn with thorns. And a woman? Men never forgive a woman for *doing* anything, and doing it better than themselves. They are jealous; they like best the woman who doesn't think, who will be their toy, their pet, whose brain can only grasp details of her toilette and her visiting list. Oh! how I despise them, loathe them!"

Her eyes flashed like blue-green jewels, so cold and hard and bright they looked in the half gloom. I did not know what to say, so I remained silent till she chose to remember me again.

"My book is not finished yet," she said abruptly; "or rather, it *is* finished, but the world is not ready for it. The way is not paved. I cannot be satisfied with mere mediocre success. I want all that is possible—fame, gain, world-wide repute. These things are not caught like unwary fish, by the chance throwing of a net; they need management."

This was so much Greek to me. I said no doubt it would be difficult to gain all she desired at a first venture. Then I spoke of "Jane Eyre."

Oh! the contempt with which she cut me short, the bitter things she said. "You will say next that George Eliot is a genius, instead of a mere conscientious plodder backed by a man's influence, and happily launched in days when she could have no rival, simply because not one woman in a thousand would venture out of the beaten track. Faugh! don't talk to me of women writers. They can't be great because their sex compels them to lie; they daren't give themselves away; they daren't lift the veil of conventionality; they daren't write of life as it *is*, because men would say they were improper. To know anything out of the nursery and schoolroom is improper for a woman until she is married, and then her husband is her teacher, or supposed to be, and he takes care she does not let the public into her confidence. That is our life—narrow, conventional, arbitrary. But I am going to alter all that for women. They shall be grateful to me one day."

The tea came in then, brought by the servant who opened the door for me. She had changed her dress and looked cleaner, but "maid-of-all-work" was written large upon her awkward person. I wondered whether "Electra" lived in this house alone with the strange old man downstairs for company. But I did not like to ask.

"After tea you shall play to me," she said. "Music is my passion. If I were rich I would engage the greatest artistes to come in turn and perform for me alone."

"Can you play yourself?" I enquired.

"A little, but only to myself; never for an audience. Besides, I have little leisure. Have you any conception of the labour there is in a book? Of course not. Who has—except the author! The hours, the days, the weeks, before your ideas take shape and form; the putting down of those ideas; the welding into shape of crude and sometimes unmanageable materials. Make haste and drink your tea, child, and I will show you what it is to be a writer!"

I felt awed by her commanding voice and gesture. I forgot what her father (or was it her grandfather?) had said about her "posing"; her affectations. I only felt that here at last was one woman different from those I had met and known. That by light of her teaching and example I, too, might lift myself out of the ruck of commonplace. I drank my tea quickly, and hurried over the thin bread and butter and cake she offered.

"I hate your English seven-o'clock tea," she said. "I

like mine in the afternoon when I come in from a walk, or when I am fatigued with work. It should never be a meal, only a refreshment."

"You are partly Italian, are you not?" I asked.

"My mother was Italian. I was born in Genoa, and educated at Marseilles. It was after her death we came to this detestable country. Oh, if I were rich I would never spend a winter in England—never! I would fly to the South like the swallow, and wait there till springtime came again."

She put down her cup, and rose and began restlessly to pace the room, her hands clasped behind her, her head thrown back.

"Come," she said suddenly, "and I will show you my sanctuary. But first—wait, answer me something."

She laid her hands on my shoulder and looked down into my eyes. "Tell me what made you come to me? Did you think I was wonderful, uncommon, broad-minded, a genius? I am all these, and I like people to feel that I am a woman unlike most women. Especially the ordinary goody-goody English woman. I stand alone. I have no mother, no family ties save that old man downstairs. Friends, yes—flatterers, sycophants by the score. Now what can I do for a child like you? Why did you seek me?"

I tried to explain again that I also was uncommon or wanted to be; that I wished to *do* something—to live, not stagnate. But that, unlike her, I was not free. I was trammelled and fettered by a thousand claims, ties, duties.

She listened and laughed. "Exactly. I saw you with your respectable humdrum relatives at Lady Medora's. And, besides, Dorian told me. I don't know what I can do for you, child, save turn you into a female Ishmaelite like myself. But I doubt if your courage would enable you to go as far as I mean to go."

"How far is that?" I asked.

She lifted her head and looked upwards; then, with one hand, pointed to the smoke-blackened ceiling, with the other to the floor.

"From the heights to the depths, if necessary," she said solemnly.

I was silent. I wished again that that odious word "poseur" would not flash into my mind—that I could

help conjugating her personality as the feminine counterpart of Dorian Giles.

Poseur—poseuse.

Both were gifted, and both were self-titled "genius." What would they do for the world? And how much better would the world be because they had lived in it and worked for it?

I wondered?

* * * * *

She led me to where the dividing curtains hung between the front and back drawing-room; she swept them aside. I faced total gloom; I could distinguish nothing.

"Wait here," she whispered mysteriously.

Presently I heard a match struck, and then a blood-red ray of light shot across the darkness. I saw a square room hung with black. On the walls were strange pictures and engravings in scarlet frames. Standing in the window a large heavy table, with drawers and brass handles. On it a pile of MSS., a large inkstand of ebony and glass, and a lamp of curious shape with a red globe. Low black bookshelves ran round the room filled with volumes in uniform bindings. On one side of the table stood a Venetian glass vase filled with Christmas roses and green foliage. On the other a tall ebony crucifix bearing a twisted tortured figure, with a face expressive of such agony that it made me shudder. A dim fire was smouldering under a mantelpiece of black marble. In a corner beside the fireplace was something I took for a pagoda, but which I afterwards learnt was a copy of a Buddhist temple. The whole room was extraordinary; gloom dashed with brilliant colouring—a mingled sentiment of Christianity and Paganism.

Opposite the temple stood another quaint figure, standing almost as high as the gifted authoress herself. At first I thought the image was meant for Satan, but she told me it was the god Pan. She pointed out his cloven hoofs, his strange body—half goat and half man—his wicked haunting eyes, his cruel smile. It seemed to have a peculiar fascination for her. I thought to myself that I should never have been able to write anything amid such horrible surroundings, and with that leering figure in the background.

She seemed delighted by my stupefied amazement.

"It is wonderful, is it not? Everyone says so who has seen it. Not many people have been so privileged, but all are similarly affected. You see I have to suit all my moods—spiritual, normal, Satanic. I indulge them all occasionally. This"—and she laid a hand on the pile of MSS.—"*this* is the 'Book.'"

She spoke as if no other had ever been written, or was worth counting as written save this masterpiece of her own.

I looked as impressed as I could manage to look. The writing was neat and small and precise. I thought it showed too much care and precision to be the calligraphy of genius, but I only remarked how long the story seemed.

"Long! It is not yet finished. Those pages number a thousand, but I am generous of my gifts. I intend to write at least another three hundred pages before it claims 'finale' as its tribute."

I could only murmur "Wonderful," and touch with reverent hand the pages on which this gifted soul had spent itself. "How long—I mean do you spend many hours here?" I stammered.

"Of course. Work like mine requires time, attention, concentration. Five hours daily is the least I give; more often seven or eight."

Seven or eight! And only that little pile of paper to represent the labour. Again I could only take refuge in murmured exclamations.

"When it is finished shall you publish it at once?" I asked eagerly.

Her face changed somewhat. The look of pride and exaltation seemed to die out.

"The path has to be prepared," she said. "There is a great deal more than mere 'publishing' needed to make a book a success. I must be a success. I could not brook failure. I shall want money, a great deal of money, and unfortunately money is not easy to find. All those who would help me are comparatively poor."

She trifled with a silver-handled pen lying on an ebony tray containing many implements of the literary craft.

"Your grandfather is a very rich man, isn't he, Sâba?" she asked casually.

I started. "I really don't know; I never heard."

"He has the reputation, that is why his musical

eccentricities are tolerated. To the rich all is forgiven, even the murdering of quartets."

She laughed harshly. "You see, I know. I always find out all I *want* to find out about people. I mean to make your grandparents' acquaintance, my dear."

"He doesn't care anything at all—about books," I said hurriedly.

"He will care about mine. What if I tell him it concerns a wonderful amateur musician? Would he want to read it then? Believe me, child, curiosity is an overpowering force. The desire to know what others think and others say of us is a desire never killed out by any blow to self-appreciation. But come, you have seen enough. The afternoon grows late, and I want you to play for me. For me alone."

She moved away from the table and the strange room, and drew the heavy curtains. We went back to the firelit drawing-room.

She flung herself back in her chair and bade me play what I liked. I opened the lid of the piano and softly tried its tone and touch. It did not compare with grand-papa's Broadwood or Lady Medora's lovely Erard. But I drifted on from one thing to another—from a "*Lied*" of Mendelssohn's to the "*Kinderscenen*" of Schumann; from an "Andante" of Beethoven to Weber's "Invitation." She said nothing except an occasional "go on." Suddenly the striking of a clock startled me. I counted the strokes. Six? *Six* o'clock!

I jumped up from the piano. "Oh, *please* excuse me, but I must go home! I never thought it was so late!"

She lifted her head. "Home? I quite forgot. Do you live far? How shall you go?"

"I think I must have a cab," I faltered.

She rang the bell. "Very well; one shall be fetched. I am glad your mother trusted you to come alone. Between ourselves, child, a third person would have bored me very much."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, with one of my truthful impulses. "She did not know I was coming. She was away."

"And you took French leave, as they say. Well, it is your affair, not mine. I hope you won't get into trouble. If you do, just write and I will come over and talk to your mother or grandfather. Which is the *bête noir*? Both! You poor child, I'm sorry for you. But remember what

I told you. The path of genius is beset with thorns: Take example by me and trample them under foot. Regard nothing and no one but yourself. Live your life *for* yourself and that which is within you. You are only at seed-time now—the planting and beginning of things. With me that is over and done with. Perhaps man or devil will help me to harvest-time. I don't know."

She laughed bitterly. "Anything is better than *nothingness*. To be no one in particular is the woman's tragedy. Do *something!* Be *something!* At least you will live, not stagnate.

CHAPTER XII.

I STOPPED the cab at the corner of the Gardens and got out. This time I boldly handed three shillings. "Electra" had said half-a-crown. The man said, "Thank you, miss," and drove off.

It was very dark, and I had stopped near a lamp-post. A figure passing, lifted its umbrella. I heard an exclamation; it was *mamma*.

I felt as if the earth was spinning round me. Then I grew cool with a sense of desperation.

"Sâba! *You* in that cab! By yourself! Where have you been?"

I said where. I reminded her of that famous party at Lancaster Gate, and of the famous "Electra" who had been present.

"Upon my word! What *is* the world coming to! What will you do next? I never heard anything like it! Going by yourself—to call on a perfect stranger! Taking cabs!"

She could scarcely speak for indignation. With a sense of what is done *is* done, I let her rail on. It didn't matter. I had seen "Electra," and I had spent an interesting and awakening afternoon. All things one desired or cared about had to be paid for in some coin. I was used to scoldings.

My silence seemed to annoy her. When we reached the house she bade me go to my room, and she would see me there; from which I gathered that however great my misdemeanour, it was not to be aired before my cousins.

However, as soon as we were in the hall, we were confronted by Fanny. She looked scared and white. "Oh,

Aunt Janie," she exclaimed, "I'm so glad you're home. Do come and see mamma. I don't know what's the matter—she's breathing so strangely, and she's so hot, and she doesn't seem to know me."

My mother hastened upstairs, and I went to my room and removed my out-door attire and changed to an ordinary frock. She did not come to me. A quarter of an hour passed. Still no sign.

I opened the door and looked out. The house seemed in a commotion. There was a hurry-scurry of feet; I heard Jean Macgregor's voice and my mother's; the opening and shutting of doors. I wondered what was happening. I went downstairs. As I reached the hall the front-door bell rang. Jean hurried to open it. A stranger stood there—a tall thin man with a long beard. I heard something that sounded like "the patient," and saw him follow Jean upstairs. He must be a doctor I thought. Was Aunt Eliza really ill?

I went into the dining-room. The boys were there, and Fanny. "What is the matter with your mother?" I asked her. "Have you sent for a doctor?"

She gave a sulky nod. The boys were playing cards for penny stakes and too engrossed to pay any attention to us. I sat down near the fire, which was composed chiefly of cinders and coal-dust (owing to the state of the cellar), and resolved to wait there until I heard the doctor's opinion. Jean Macgregor would tell me.

But when I saw Jean I saw also that she looked seriously alarmed. There was little heed paid to any of us. Paxton was sent off to the nearest chemist with a paper of directions, and returned later with linseed meal and medicine, and a curious sort of kettle with a long spout. No one was allowed in the sick room. Rachel had been out for the evening and returned at ten o'clock, to find us all engaged over an impromptu supper, and the household generally in confusion. From her I learnt that my aunt was suffering from a sharp attack of bronchitis, accompanied with feverish symptoms. My mother was in a great state of anxiety. She seemed to have entirely forgotten my afternoon escapade. Jean Macgregor, who was a first-rate nurse, arranged to sit up with the invalid. Her room had to be kept at a special temperature, and the kettle was steaming away when I peeped in on my way to bed.

I caught sight of a flushed face and staring eyes, and heard strange wheezy breathing. Then a fit of coughing came on. I saw Jean Macgregor raise her head. Then I fled with scared horror from sight of staring eyes and convulsive jerks; at the awful sounds of laboured breath drawn in whistling gasps through choked lungs. She must be ill, very ill.

Her personality came home to me that night in a new form—that of some one helpless and suffering. I had been helpless; I had suffered; I had been near death's shadow-land they said. The remembrance brought my aunt nearer to me than her health and activity and ungracious treatment had done.

I went to bed, but I could not sleep for hours. I seemed only to hear that painful breathing and those choking coughs. I could only think "supposing—supposing——" and trail off into fancies, pictures, scenes—each vivid and real, and each possible.

I woke to a cold grey day, to Rachel shaking me into wakefulness. "You must get up, miss, and try and manage the breakfast, and keep your cousins quiet. Your poor ma is quite worn out; your aunt is much worse."

* * * * *

After this confused days and nights; the constant visits of the tall doctor; grandmamma's weeping eyes; grandpapa's worried, anxious face and impatient "tut-tuts."

"Why did people catch cold? Why didn't they take care of themselves as he did?"—the usual formula of the egoist. The noise and quarrels of the boys that even illness would not hush; the sight of Fanny sucking peppermint, or munching toffee, and gloating over her favourite tales in the *London Journal*; the alternate night watches shared by Jean and Rachel and my mother; the question asked each morning, and answered with shake of head or warning whisper; then at last no answer at all!

That was a terrible morning. The door was locked; Jean Macgregor was invisible. My mother, worn out, had gone to bed. Rachel, red-eyed and solemn, brought us breakfast, and the children looked at one another in a questioning, hopeless sort of way.

The shadow had fallen at last. The Great Mystery was here—in our midst. I looked in my cousins' faces and

felt sorry I had not been able to like them better. They were alone in the world now ; they had no one to stand between them and its cold unfriendliness. Ugly, ill-mannered, uncouth they might be, but their mother had loved them despite such shortcomings. Was there any other in all that world to which she had left them who would so love, despite faults and shortcomings ?

* * * * *

My cousins seemed to me singularly unmoved by their orphaned condition. They ate their breakfast much as usual, though they talked less, and then only in short, abrupt sentences. Fanny shed tears once or twice, but even she seemed less affected than myself.

"Mamma always said if anything happened to her I was to go to Grandma' Larkom, in Jersey," she announced. "She lives there in a beautiful castle ; she's very rich, and has carriages and servants and lovely gardens. Miles of them ! And she's much nicer than Grandma' Heavysage. I s'pose I ought to write and ask her when she can have me."

This rather cold-blooded announcement horrified me. The girl never expressed any regret for the mother's loss. She could remember her and her plans and thought, and be more interested by the plans than affected by the thought.

Her brothers were worse. They would go to Jersey also—to the rich grandmother and the castle and the miles of gardens. They hated that old autocrat of Pembroke Square. The grandmother wasn't so bad, but the grandfather—it was perhaps well he could not hear those frank comments on his character and mode of life. Breakfast was hardly over before cabs began to arrive. Grandmamma and Aunt Theo in tears ; grandpapa wisely absenting himself on the principles, perhaps, of King David. Now the worst had happened there was nothing more to be done. Besides, he hated to be reminded of man's "latter end" and its dread finale.

All day people came and went ; some were taken upstairs into that darkened room. I heard whispers and comments and condolence. It all seemed so terribly sudden. To me that was the overwhelming part of it. I thought of that Christmas Day, of the Moscheles' variations, of the return home and the remark that she

felt cold and would have some brandy. How trite and commonplace! Was this how death swooped on unprepared humanity; in the guise of a chill, an accident, a little illness, and then—nothing more?

I should have liked to enter that locked room. I could form no idea of what death looked like; of how the talking, eating, drinking, bustling, and important entity that represented life to its fellow-beings could suddenly cease to represent it; could have no more need of the homely everyday things that lay about the room, and the house, and itself; could heed no more who opened its drawers and trunks, and disarranged its wardrobe, and disputed the ownership of its jewels, or the right to the wealth it would need no more—the wealth that could not buy it one little day or hour of life once the fiat had gone forth.

Through all those strange days, when the household was thrown out of its accustomed routine and the rooms were darkened, and weird men in soft shoes came and went up the stairs and into that closed room, my imagination followed the flight of departure more than the reality of loss. Where was she? Did she know? Could she see us? Did she read the signs of grief and know the true from the false? Was she regretting anything unsaid, undone? Did she hear Fanny's remarks about her jewel-cases, and note her pride in the new mourning because the crape was so much deeper than my own? Did such things concern one after life was finished with?

Oh! to know, to know, to *know!*

* * * * *

I think it was Jean Macgregor who gave way to my entreaties at last, and let me into that mysterious chamber. I crept in on tiptoe, awed and yet so curious, so calm. There was the bed, and something on it where I had last seen that flushed face and those unrecognising eyes. *Something!* How still it was; how quiet!

In the light of the flickering candles I saw something else—a long narrow thing on trestles at the foot of the bed.

I shuddered. *That*, at least, was horrible; more so than the silent presence for whom it waited. Jean Macgregor beckoned and I drew nearer the bed. She lifted the sheet. I started. *That*—Aunt Eliza? *That*

waxen face, those pinched, drawn nostrils, that pale shrunken mouth! I saw no trace of the ruddy, healthy person I had known. Was it thus that Death transformed us?

And oh, how *still!* That was what amazed me; for death is the one and the only stillness that we know. All natural life has motion—the tiniest insect, the smallest bud or leaf *moves*. This was so different.

A terrible fascination held me there. I could not speak; hardly breathe. But all the wonder and mystery of another world spoke suddenly to my soul from that quiet form. So would I be, so would everyone be when their hour came. And yet it was this inevitable fate, this sure and certain happening, that we tried to ignore, to neglect, to forget.

How could we forget? Death was the message of life; the result of existence. Other things might be evaded, postponed, denied; but not *this*. Not this one absolute fact, governing creation.

“Dust thou art, to dust shalt thou return!”

* * * * *

A deeper hush in the house. The new black dresses have been put on, and the elder boys go about with hands in unfamiliar pockets, and a look of importance on their faces.

A sense of waiting and expectancy. We are all in the drawing-room and the door is shut. Grandpapa and Aunt Theo are there and my mother; they are very quiet and very sad. No one cries to-day, though it is the day of the last parting. Strange men come and go, and there are carriages in the street, and presently one of the strange men comes in and says something. Grandpapa grows a trifle pale and beckons to Paxton. They go out, and the little boys follow. Through the open door I see the doctor and some other strangers. I slip away and run upstairs. *That door is open too.*

I go in. Nothing on the bed or at its foot. Only a folded sheet, an array of medicine bottles—drawn blinds, through which pale sunshine filters.

I step softly to the window. I raise one of the laths of the venetians, and look out. The street seems full of carriages, of men in black, and curious gazing people. Before the house stands a huge black carriage with nodding plumes; with four black horses. It moves on. Then I

see grandpapa and Paxton enter another carriage and so on until all are occupied, and very slowly the procession moves up the street, led by men with long veils tied round their hats, and carrying long wands, and walking with an air of being used to march in step.

So that is the end.

They will put that *Something* which I saw on the trestles into the ground. There will be prayers said by a clergyman. Will she know of that? She, who for four long days has lain in this room, and yet for four long days has left it more surely than ever that slow and mournful procession signifies.

Will she know? Will she hear? Does she perhaps linger by my side? Yet I cannot see or know that she lingers.

I drop the blind and turn away. In the glass of the wardrobe-door I see a figure facing me. I stare at it, hardly conscious that the white face is my own. How tall I look, how different. What makes the change? Then I remember.

I am wearing my first long dress. It falls to my feet instead of to my ankles. It sweeps the ground. It gives me an old-fashioned, grown-up look. I have not seen myself at full-length till now, and I gaze with a sort of awe at a changed Sâba Macdonald; with hair neatly coiled at the back of her head, with long soft folds of merino and crape giving *inches* to her slender figure.

So this is me. I have left childhood behind; I have known life, and seen death; I am on the threshold of girlhood. In three years I shall look back on to-day and date from it—what?

* * * * *

The blinds were drawn up. The house was swept and garnished. Sunshine filtered into the rooms and life resumed its accustomed round. But there was much discussion, and the children were important factors in new plans for the future. The house had been taken for twelve months. But now that Aunt Eliza was dead my mother could not afford to keep it on alone. Fanny's other grandmother had written to say she was willing to undertake the charge of her and her two little brothers, who could be educated in Jersey quite as well as in England. Owing to some fund, which I often heard

mentioned, they were all provided with means for their education, and Fanny received an allowance until she should marry. Therefore no money responsibilities attached to their present condition.

The house in Brunswick Gardens formed the chief difficulty. It must be given up, or re-let. Grandpapa generously offered us a home once more until such time as my father sent for us or returned to England. The offer filled me with consternation; my mother was proportionately grateful. She said her affairs were at present very unsatisfactory. There was a Scotch lawsuit going on, which threatened to swallow up the Scotch property before it finally decided who was entitled to its income. The Laird could not touch the income, though he had brought himself into serious difficulties by borrowing on it as security, and entangling with such security some other complications called life insurance policies. When mamma tried to explain these matters to grandpapa she usually entangled *herself* in complications, and he usually got very red and very angry and spoke of the Laird in very disrespectful terms.

Then mamma would weep and grandmamma would implore: "Oh, Barker, do have done!" upon which he would utter furious "tut-tuts" and point to that immaculate representation of all the virtues—"himself," and after informing us for the hundred and first time how he had managed *his* business affairs, and lived *his* life, and saved *his* money, and generally conducted existence on the highest Christian and moral principles, he would retire to his room and there torture his unoffending 'cello, or paste slips of music-paper over ineffective passages of Beethoven or Haydn or Mozart!

Then mamma would weep more bitterly, and lament her lot and remind her mother that, after all, she had married according to their desires and not her own. That she had been absolutely ignorant of life and its duties, although she had never shrunk from accepting the hardships of the one and the obligations of the other. Her martyrdom and her sufferings would affect grandmamma deeply, and the scene invariably ended with assurance that there would always be a home for her under her parents' roof. Sometimes a bank-note or a piece of jewellery would be added to this consolation, and tears would be dried, and there would be much coddling and

fussing, at which I (hardened little reprobate, disdainful of outward displays of affection) would secretly laugh.

I had no desire to return to Pembroke Square, and was much alarmed at the prospect. However, life had signalled me out as one of those unfortunate beings who *have* to do the "things they would not" and to refrain from doing the things they would.

A few weeks after Aunt Eliza's death found the house sub-let by the agents; Fanny and her brothers off to Jersey in care of her governess; Paxton and Walter back to school, and Sâba Macdonald older and wiser, and perhaps more patient, back in her old room and facing the old restricted life.

When she walked into that well-remembered bedroom of her grandmother and faced her new reflection in the well-remembered wardrobe, she became fully conscious of the change since she had last stood there and regarded that reflection. There was pardonable pride in the assurance that she had grown tall—at least, tall in comparison with last year's mere five-foot-nothing. There was a secret triumph, too, in those long folds that swept the ground and in her own knowledge of a successful—though unknown—abridgment of crinoline. She had diminished width to gain height. The effect was eminently satisfactory. Her hair—well, that was still a trouble. Now that it was plaited and twisted round her head neatness and primness were the result. But neatness and primness seemed to have nothing in common with those dark, stormy eyes, or that passionate soul yearning for all that was beautiful, wonderful, glad!

She was a girl now; she would soon be a woman. Life would mean a revealing, not a concealment, of its mysteries. And yet she knew herself back in prison again, laden with chains of the old forced obedience, restraint, conventionality. Those who noted the bodily growth could see nothing of the mental and spiritual change. Certain duties, certain studies, certain rules to be obeyed—let her perform and obey and all would be well. But the eager wings must not lift themselves to freedom; the soul must not breathe its longings; the heart must not betray its passionate desires. Repressed, chilled, controlled—so would life be again.

She turned from the glass with a heavy sigh, an inward prayer.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. BARKER HEAVYSAGE was in an extremely peevish and discontented state of mind.

In spite of rules and commands his life had been upset in the most arbitrary fashion. Death had been unmannerly enough to show its face very near indeed, not with a distant hint that there *were* people in the world with whom he had a calling acquaintance, but a forcible reminder that even an autocrat with engagements to keep and plans formulated and arranged, must one day put such things aside and wait on the commands of an even greater autocrat than himself.

Of sickness and of death Mr. Heavysage had a righteous horror, and these past months had brought both to his door. Even when the first shock was over there remained a worrying amount of conventionalities. The Tuesday evenings, the Monday "Pops," had to be foregone. Lawyers had to be interviewed on behalf of the orphaned children of his daughter. All sorts of worries and vexations cropped up. Last, not least, the bad news of financial difficulties on the part of his son-in-law in Australia. The said difficulties might be only temporary, but they meant that little money would be forthcoming for the wife and daughter. That Mr. Barker Heavysage was in a great measure "saddled," as he called it, with their keep, clothing and education. But for the one saving clause of Sâba Macdonald's musical gift she would have fared badly. That gift, however, made her too useful and too necessary for boarding school banishment. Youthful genius was rare in those days. The time of "prodigies" had not yet come. In some respects Sâba brought a sort of reflected glory wherever she went—his glory. That fact consoled him a little.

Its consolation was self-evident when one afternoon a neat brougham stopped at his door, and a lady, stepping

out of it, enquired for him. It happened he was in the hall *en route* for his usual "constitutional." The lady, seeing him, rushed forward with outstretched hands, and brought to his somewhat hazy recollection the memory of a former meeting. At mention of Lancaster Gate and Lady Medora, Mr. Heavysage could not but ask the lady into the drawing-room. She entertained him there with impassioned avowals of her love for music; of the glorious future of the amateur's art, so far beyond mere professional proficiency. It appeared that the fame of the Tuesday evenings and those wonderful quartets had penetrated even to Brompton Square. In fact, the flattered and delighted 'cellist could not but invite the lady to play auditor at one of these remarkable evenings, and make the acquaintance of his young grand-daughter, "herself no mean disciple of the art, inherited from himself, and cultured, if he might say so, by his advice and example." The lady, strange to say, knew the young grand-daughter, and could *now* quite understand how she came to be possessed of such talent. Forthwith the bell was rung, and the presence of Mrs. Barker Heavysage and Miss Macdonald requested. Thus Sâba was reminded of a visit and a suggestion.

It amazed her to find the famous "Electra" in her grandfather's drawing-room. It amazed her even more to find the said "Electra" a naïve and charming person, quite unself-conscious, and only bent on making an agreeable impression on the new friends. Of herself and her work she spoke very little. In fact, they were put into an insignificant background, and music was the theme on which her sparkling tongue played variations. Of one so susceptible to flattery as Mr. Heavysage she made an easy conquest. In spite of frowns and coughs and hints of "too soon yet," he suggested that the following Tuesday would see the re-assembling of the quartet party (postponed for three weeks owing to sad domestic bereavement), and also, so he hoped, be the occasion of Miss Lucia Puffin's introduction to real amateur art.

Miss Lucia expressed herself as filled with eager anticipation of such a musical treat. Then after a little desultory converse, in which occurred the names of Joachim, Strauss, Zerbini, Patti, Nilsson, and Arabella Goddard, the visitor took regretful leave, only pausing at the door

to beg that the great amateur's grand-daughter might come and see her the following afternoon, just for a little "talk with the piano." Permission was granted and cards were left in the hall. Two of

COMMANDER JONATHAN PUFFIN, R.N.

Late H.M.S. Hero.

One of

MISS LUCIA M. PUFFIN,

90, Brompton Square, S.W.

A very gratified grandpapa turned to a silent and somewhat confused grand-daughter and discoursed eloquently of "fame" and its deserts, and suggested the Hünter "Terzetto" and first movement of the Schumann "Quintet in E flat" for the next musical evening. Then Sâba assisted him to put on his overcoat, and he trampled on her dress and tore out half the gathers—a joke of which he never tired since she had taken to long skirts. Being by this time in a high state of good humour he let himself out of the front door and was seen no more till seven o'clock brought the welcome tea as its accompaniment.

By some misadventure Sâba's mother appeared to have forgotten the episode of the hansom cab, and of Sâba's unauthorised visit to the forthcoming genius. Subsequent troubles had put it out of her head. Even when she heard the visitor discussed, and of her invitation for the next day, she made no remark. At tea Mr. Heavysage could talk of little else. He "tut-tutted" the idea that it was too soon to resume his musical evenings. He also stated that he had taken an extra seat for the next Popular Concert, as Arabella Goddard was to play at it. He wished Sâba to hear her. "It would be a lesson," etc.

Sâba flushed with delight. The ominous "no suitable dress" fell on ears indifferent to such trivial necessities.

Aunt Theo came to the rescue with a happy suggestion of the ever-useful "Garibaldi" trimmed with black ribbon, and the loan of her ermine tippet in case of cold. The subject dropped and Sâba dreamt of new delights. A veritable feast of music such as had never fallen to her lot. Even the order of "Come upstairs and try over some 'cello accompaniments" did not chill her ardour. She was learning to detach herself from much temporary discom-

fort and live a life apart. She played on and on; over and over; played to a humorous memory of "Old Boy" in his chair waiting for "Eight bells, and all hands piped for grog"; of "Electra" in her sable-and-scarlet chamber, holding forth on the exigencies of genius and the publishing trade; of the queer way things came about in this queer world; of the morrow and what it might mean; and of the real purport of "Electra's" visit to her grandfather.

Mechanically she played her notes and echoed the 'cello's grunts and squeaks, mechanically assisted difficulties and waited on fault-finding and complaining. What did present discomfort matter? She was beginning to grasp the meaning of compensations, and be grateful for them.

* * * * *

This time the visit to Brompton Square was open and above board, and conducted on principles of economy. Grandpapa accompanied me to an omnibus, and directed me where to get down. If "Electra" detained me till dusk I must return in a cab, which would be paid for at the door. Then, with a parting injunction to behave myself, I was sent on my way.

Just as I turned into the Square a hansom passed me, and a familiar face looked out of the side window. The hansom drew sharply up at a summons from the occupant, and Dorian Giles leaped out. He paid the man, and by that time I was within speaking distance.

He came towards me and lifted his hat.

"I thought it was you, Wonder-child," he said. "But what have they done to you? And why have you committed the fatal folly of growing? Your glory has departed with—yes, it is a long frock, isn't it?"

I laughed and coloured, and then said I was quite old enough to discard short ones, all the more because they were outgrown.

"And what brings you here?" he continued.

"I am going to see Miss—I mean 'Electra.'"

"Coincidences are the banalities of real life and the exaggerations of fiction," he said. "So am I. I am writing a play, and I am going to put her in it, and she doesn't know, and what is more she would never recognise herself if she did. That is the supreme art of life, my

child—never to know one's self as others know one. We are all perfect and moral and beautiful in our own eyes. It is only the other members of the family, or our neighbours next door, who are—well, the reverse. But what have they done to your hair? I should hardly have known you."

The door opened before I could answer. The servant wore her afternoon gown and cap on this occasion, and she showed us up to the drawing-room. "Electra," in the same velvet gown, and with her hair twisted high and stabbed through its ruddy coils by a gilt dagger, was sitting by the fire, with a book open on her knee.

She looked surprised when she saw Dorian Giles. She smiled graciously. "Your Excellency! To what do I owe the honour——"

"Don't, please!" He held up an entreating hand. "Be anything, dear lady, except conventional. With Faust I might say 'Not excellent, nor yet an honour, nor do I need'—etc. Oh, by the way, it was Marguerite said that. Divine Gounod! I have just come back from Paris and have revelled in his music. He will never do anything so good as Faust again. I told him so. How has the Puritanical Britisher ever put up with it? I never thought they would stand the apotheosis of Marguerite. But in a foreign language all is moral. Especially is opera moral to the English mind, because the story is a thing quite apart from the music. You can be as immoral as you please to music, but you must observe all the commandments and conventionalities in a play. There is no censor for opera, only for the drama. A wonderful nation, the English!"

"May I ask why you are here?" questioned "Electra" abruptly. "Because I invited this child to play to me. I have a scene in my mind, and I want to do it to music—Chopin's music. You can play Chopin, Sâba Macdonald?"

"A few things—one or two of the 'Nocturnes' and the 'D flat Waltz.'"

"Oh, I have all the waltzes. If you will play me the 'Fifth Nocturne,' or the 'Ballade in G Minor,' and the 'Funeral March' I shall work splendidly. As for you——" She turned to Dorian.

"I have something really important to talk over with you," he said. "I need not detain you long. It is about

a publisher. I think I have found the right man for you."

Her eyes flashed. All the instincts of commercial enterprise showed in her face and her eager acceptance of the information. She turned to me.

"What am I to do with you? Business is so uninteresting to any one outside the discussion. Perhaps you wouldn't mind running downstairs and having a chat with my grandfather. He has often asked about you. You have quite won his heart."

She was smiling very graciously, and moving towards the door. Dorian Giles suddenly stopped her.

"One moment," he said. "I cannot reconcile my Wonder-child of the wild eyes and the dark furious hair with this slender maiden of braided locks and sombre garments. Persuade her to remove that hat (millinery is atrocious anywhere but in Paris) and that coat—cloak—jacket, whatever it is? Perhaps then I may be able to recognise her."

"Electra" looked at me. "Do you mind?"

"Not at all," I said; for though I loved my long full skirts, I hated both the jacket and hat, which were of the "mourning-for-a-relative" pattern. I went up to the mirror and took off the black felt hat with its upstanding crape bows, and unbuttoned the heavy cloth jacket. I turned then and faced them.

Dorian said something in French and "Electra" laughed. "It is your hair," she said. "Why do you do it in that tight prim way?"

"They make me," I said. "Grandpapa never ceased worrying me when my hair was down. And plaiting is the only way to keep it tidy."

"You should wear it loosely twisted and high on your head," said Dorian. "And a few heavy escaping curls should still speak youth. Alas! how am I to instil the arts of beauty and the beauty of art into this stiff-necked generation. You were like a Rossetti portrait when I saw you last—a small, white figure, half hid in shadowy hair. Now you are modelled on 'La mode Elégante,' or some similar atrocity. Fashion plates and art are deadly enemies."

"Electra" began to fidget impatiently. I saw she wanted me to leave them, so I moved across the room to the door. A sudden cry from Dorian Giles again interrupted my departure,

"I have it! I know what makes the difference. Oh, child of genius! You have had the sense to abolish your *hoops!*"

I grew crimson and fled.

* * * * *

In the dingy back room I remembered, I found the old captain nodding and dozing as before. He opened his eyes and peered at me for a moment. Even to him I seemed altered.

"Don't you remember me?" I said gently. "I was here with you a short time ago; one afternoon."

His head suddenly shot out. "Aye, aye, lass, so you were." He gave a wheezy cough. "The little lady who came to chat with Old Boy. The rich little lady who had a gold piece and wanted silver. Heave ho! and pipe all hands, my hearties! And so she's remembered Old Boy and come to see him. A kind lass! But then Old Boy had always the way with the lasses. Ha, ha! so he had! so he had! Susan, Jean, and Bess; Jane and Peg and Lucy, Mariquita and Rosalie—all of 'em beauties, my dear, and all loved Old Boy. Ah, he was a rare devil in his prime, a rare devil! He didn't think then of being shoved aside and hidden in a cupboard like *this*"—he struck the floor with his stick—"an' put to bed like a puking babe when the house is full of life and company. So much for a wonnerful darter, my dear—all taken up with herself. Never a thought for a poor lonely old man, crippled and tied to his chair like an unweaned child."

"Gone eight bells and no grog," shrieked the parrot suddenly.

"Quiet, Poll!" cried the old man. "Naught's done for grumblin', eh, my lass?"

His head drooped and withdrew itself in the usual way. I really felt very sorry for the poor old man. I tried to draw his thoughts from present humiliations to his past life "on the ocean wave." For a little while he brightened up, and entered into a spirited recital in which Nelson and Trafalgar and the Spanish Armada got hopelessly mixed. But I think it pleased him to see me sitting there, stirring the fire to a blaze, and pulling up his cushions to a more comfortable angle, and listening with real interest to his hazy stories.

"If I had a darter like you," he muttered. "But Lucy—she's just selfishness to the bone; core deep. Never a thought nor care for a living creetur' that can't help *her* schemes and *her* plans. And as for money—" His wrinkled hands began to shake piteously. "A horse leech, my dear. That's just it—a horse leech, sucking Old Boy's blood. Must have it—that's what she says. *Must* have it, or there'll be no roof to shelter him, no fire to warm his poor old bones, no grog when all hands are piped to the purser's cabin. And he gives her money. But it's never enough—never enough. And Old Boy can't get aught save weak tea, and dishwater soup, and lumpy porridge. And his grog grudgingly dealt out by niggard hands. No woman on this earth could ever measure a man's grog. D—n 'em! But for 'em, Old Boy would have been hale and hearty now."

I wondered what "Electra" would say if she knew I was the recipient of such confidences as these. Did she also labour under the common impression that the young don't understand, don't think, don't judge?

Presently he asked me what time it was. There was no clock in the room. I could only guess it must be four o'clock, or even later.

"Forgotten again!" he lamented. "That's the way, my dear. No one thinks of Old Boy. Cold and lonely and weak. Look round you, there's a sweet soul. Do you see a cupboard? Is there a key? Tell me if there's a key! Oh, hallelujah! Yes, I see it! She's forgot for once!"

He burst into wheezy chuckles. His shaking hand pointed triumphantly to the cupboard door. "Open it," he whispered, "open it. She keeps it there—a little drop o' comfort for Old Boy—a little drop just to put life in his veins. Go, child, get it; and may the angels of heaven bless you!"

"Hooray!" suddenly cried Poll. "Hooray, my hearties! Pipe all hands! Pipe for grog! pipe for grog!"

I did as the old man besought me. I saw a decanter standing on a shelf, beside it was a wine glass. I brought them to his side. How much ought I to give him? I had no idea. But his eager eyes and face were so touching that I hadn't the heart to refuse when he said, "Fill up, my lass."

There was some spirit in the bottle. I was ignorant what it was, its name or strength. But I "filled up."

"Won't you have some water in it?" I asked.

"Water!" His head shot out of his starched white collar like a Jack-in-the-box. "D—n it, madam, don't you understand that an old salt never waters his grog. Water! Would we have vanquished the Armada on 'water'? Would Nelson have beat the Frenchmen in Trafalgar's Bay on 'water'? Neat, my love, and pipe to action, and here's Old Boy's thanks, and may God bless you, and for heaven's sake put the bottle away before my wonnerful darter comes down."

I obeyed his commands willingly enough. I was half afraid that I had done something wrong. Bottle and glass were replaced, and the old man settled himself back into his chair seemingly all the better for his indulgence.

I thought it was time to ask a question on my own account.

"Would you mind telling me if—if Miss 'Electra' is your daughter, or your grand-daughter?"

He blinked his queer bright eyes, and seemed to consider the point. "Well, my hearty, 'tis like this. She *was* my daughter in the days when she wasn't wonnerful. But as she got on in years she thought 'twould make her seem younger if she called *me* grandfather. So I'm by way of being her father and her grandfather. But she's wonnerful—all the same!"

With this lucid explanation he slid back into his collar and fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER XIV.

A KNOCK at the door. The servant looked in and told me I was wanted in the drawing-room. I rose at once. I thought it might be prudent to say I had given the old gentleman his "grog" as he called it. So I mentioned the fact to her.

"Oh, that'll be all right, miss," she said. "Sometimes the missus is that taken up with 'er work or 'er vissiters, that she clean forgets the old gentleman."

"But he ought not to be forgotten," I exclaimed. "He's so old and feeble he wants to be looked after, and have regular nourishment."

Her mouth took a queer twist. "H'all I know is that I h'ain't ever lived with a writin' person afore, and I don't want h'ever to live with one again. The queer ways, an' the h'upsets, and the h'idea that h'everything in the world, leastways the 'ouse is to give way to their whimsies and fancies. Lor! and sich a temper, too, to them as knows 'er. What I says is, if only them h'adoring friends o' 'ers as keeps comin' and flatterin' 'er up, and callin' 'er a h'angel—well, if they could just look in on-expected and see their h'angel at 'ome, they'd be a bit surprised. She can't keep no servants. Hi'm not a-goin' to stop much longer. I thought she was a duchess when she engaged me. My! if you'd 'eard 'er! Waitin' at table, and vissinging days, and cook and parlour-maid kep'. And I comes, and h'I'm the only soul, and the dinners is scraps and cheap h'ontrys made out of leavin's. All for show and pretendin'. Things 'ad in from the confectioners when 'er grand friends are a-comin', and screw and pinch arterwards to make it h'up. That's gospel truth, every word! And I don't care if she 'ears me."

I sincerely hoped "Electra" had not heard her. I also wished that her household were not quite so anxious to take me into their confidence. I was sorry to learn so many unflattering truths about genius at home; yet I felt there had been no reason for the speakers to be anything but truthful—there seemed nothing to gain by their frank admissions.

I went slowly up the stairs. Dorian Giles was still there. He had thrown off his overcoat, and was sitting astride a chair with his arms folded on the top. His heavy face and strange eyes looked heavier and stranger. These past months—or Paris—seemed to have aged him.

"Electra" was not there. The curtains, however, were drawn apart, and I caught sight of her as she stood beside her writing-table. She was turning over some loose sheets of paper.

"Is that Sâba Macdonald?" she called out. "If so, tell her to play."

Dorian Giles looked at me. "You hear?"

I went over to the piano. The lid was open: some music stood scattered about. I looked over it. I was not equal to Chopin from memory, with the exception of the "Valse Lento."

"I wonder what would be most suitable?" I said to Dorian.

He smiled. "Something soft and soothing. I don't think we are equal to the 'Funeral March' yet, unless that little intermediate minor bit. Do you play in fragments, drifting from theme to theme, from melody to melody, now solemn, now sad, now gay? Oh! to have heard Chopin play as George Sands must have heard him! Think of it. Their mad love, their absolute indifference to all else while it lasted! Then those wonderful, wonderful tone-poems recited by his fingers. It wants the education of a lifetime to play Chopin. Only once I heard him interpreted as I felt *he* would have desired. The player was a half-mad Russian, very young, very gifted; full of the wildest, maddest dreams that ever filled a man's heart. But he could play. *Ciel!* but he could play! That 'Ballade in G'—no, you must not attempt it, even though you are a wonder-child! Some day this Russian boy will come to this benighted land and teach you all what Chopin meant. You shall hear that 'Ballade' *sung*. The song of the notes is something quite apart from the notes themselves—a deep, underlying sadness; the call of a soul to its mate!"

"Dorian!" called "Electra" impatiently, "if I had wanted to hear you talk I would not have invited Sâba Macdonald here. Will you be so good as to stop and let her play to me."

He laughed. "Play on, *Kindlein*," he said. "I am nobody when you appear. But I am going to smoke and listen. Only—not the 'Ballade,' as you value your soul.

I began the slow waltz and played it very softly. I could hear the scratching of pen on paper; I could hear an occasional movement from Dorian Giles as he changed his position. I remembered his advice about drifting. I wandered into a nocturne—the lovely, passionate "Nocturne in F Sharp Major." Then my fingers took up chance bits of remembered melodies—fragments of things learnt and put aside, yet unforgotten. No one interrupted me. The afternoon waned, the gathering dusk made everything in the room indistinct. Only a red bar of light stole between the curtains, where the paper rustled and the busy pen moved.

I paused at last. It seemed to me I had been playing

a long time, and a curious thought struck me—a wonder as to how long poor “Old Boy” would have had to wait for his grog if I had not given it to him. The “wonderful daughter” had evidently forgotten him altogether.

“Are you tired?” asked Dorian’s deep voice.

“No,” I said. “But you must be. Don’t you think I have played enough?”

“You have improved,” he said. “There are certain things you play really well. Who teaches you?”

I told him.

“I wish you could have lessons from Jovski,” he murmured. “What a player! Do you know that to hear a great artist interpret a great composer is the only way to understand music.”

“I have never heard a great artist,” I said regretfully. “I long to! My grandfather has promised to take me to the Popular Concerts soon. I am to hear Madam Goddard.”

“Ah! the show piece of the Academy!” he said; “but she is not equal to Schumann or Chopin.* You should ask your grandfather to take you to the Philharmonic. If my Russian friend comes to England, he will play at the Philharmonic or nowhere!”

Just then “Electra” appeared. She looked excited. “It went beautifully,” she said. “Thank you, child. Your music was of the greatest assistance. I wish I did not suffer from moods, but I do; I cannot help it. Let us have some tea. Dorian, ring and stir the fire. We will drink it in the firelight with that single blood-red ray stealing through the curtains, and you may talk as much mad, bad, sad nonsense as you please. Oh! I forgot—one moment!”

She dashed out of the room, closing the door behind her. I knew why she went; what she had forgotten.

The fire, stirred and broken, burst into ruddy flames. The room looked less formal and hideous by its friendly light.

“Sit here, little Puritan,” said Dorian, “and let me talk to you. I wish I could undo those stiff plaits and see your face half light, half shadow, like a Bartolozzi print. But I suppose you are a small prickly pear of British prejudice, and would die sooner than let a man touch your hair. Confess, now.”

* The author is not responsible for Dorian Giles’ criticisms.

"I certainly wouldn't like you to touch it, if that means unplaiting it," said I. "For I should have the trouble of doing it up again, and I assure you that is not a task I care about."

"I love a woman's hair," he said dreamily; "a great warm, soft flood, veiling, dissimulating, clouding, revealing. If you were grown up, Saba, I would not tell you this. You would probably have pads and false coils and other atrocities to aid your *coiffure*, and I should make you uncomfortable. But you are only a little girl, and it doesn't matter. A little girl! Yet some day a man will love you, and you will hear his voice call softly to your heart, and it will ache and thrill for sake of him. Have you ever pictured your first romance, wonder-child? Ever thought of your fairy Prince waiting for you in the garden of Revelation?"

My cheeks were burning. I hardly knew what to say. Was he in jest, or earnest?

Fortunately, tea appeared at that moment, and the girl set the tray and its accompaniments on the round walnut-wood table, and lit some candles. The disturbance changed the current of his thoughts. Then "Electra" returned to us, and I wondered if Old Boy had told her of his previous allowance, and whether it would do him any harm to have two "grogs" on the same afternoon.

She drew up a chair to the table and poured out tea, talking all the time. She said it was such a relief to have that "scene" off her mind. Dorian laughed, and told her not to take herself too seriously. The best work was always the least appreciated.

"And you must make haste," he went on, "for I hear rumours of a possible rival. The reader of Bodley & Co. told me. He thinks she is a woman; the style and treatment of her book is so delicate and wonderful. He recommended it so strongly, they have taken his advice and will publish early in the spring. So look out. Two stars aglow in the literary firmament will mean a conflagration, won't it? Is there room for such a miracle? The 'morning and evening star sang together,' and lo! the earth and the publishers were glad thereof."

"Oh, *do* talk sense, if you can!" she exclaimed pettishly. "Is this true; or one of your *canards*? Why haven't you told me before?"

"Because we had other and graver matters on which

to confer. It is true, really. But I do not think you need feel uneasy. In the first place, your book is so absolutely original; in the next, you will bring it out in a style Bodley can't afford—at least, for a new author."

"Yes," she said, "nothing shall be left undone that may aid its success. If only there were no critics!"

Dorian Giles laughed softly.

"Ah, dear lady, you ask too much of Fate, and not enough of Chance."

He drank his tea and put down his cup. I sat in a low chair in the background and listened eagerly to the conversation.

"You know some of them, Dorian?" she said presently.

"I know the head and chief of the offenders," he said. "The great McStinger—'Sandy,' as they call him at the 'Savage' and the 'Athenæum.' He generally gives the 'lead off'; the pack follow with hue and cry of abuse or praise, as the case may be."

"Well," she cried eagerly, "couldn't you——"

"Impossible," he interrupted. "Not for my nearest and dearest could I beg a favour of the 'One Incorruptible.' That's what we call him. He is the only living authority on literature, and I believe the only man in his profession who cannot be bribed, bought, or silenced."

"And this man—it lies in his power to make or mar one's fame?"

Her voice shook. She was very pale; her eyes shone as a cat's eyes shine in the darkness.

"It does," said Dorian solemnly. "But what of that? You have nothing to fear. True, your book deals with a new religion, and he is a godly Scot; but even godliness cannot shut out the claims of genius and originality. From what I know of your work——"

"Yes, yes; go on!" she cried feverishly, as he paused.

"From what you have told me," he continued, "I should say you will be giving the public the very diet it loves best. A mixture of purity and prurience; the one delicately sandwiched between the other. Over all a fantastic suggestion of spiritual superstition: What an inspiration! and what an achievement for a woman!"

"It is very different to anything that has ever been done before," she said modestly.

(I noticed "Electra" always said "different to.")

"The portions you have read to me are wonderful."

"And the construction? You think that is all right? You see, I value your opinion; you know so much of literature. The French school——"

"Ah, we mustn't reckon with *that*," he said. "Meat is not for babes; and in all matters concerning art the British public is a veritable babe. It can only drink milk—and skim milk at that! Truth is indelicate; the nude is indecent. Plain facts are an affront to Mrs. Grundy. Yet Holywell Street is tolerated as the forcing-house of vice; and the 'Oxford' and the 'Royal' are haunted by gilded youth, eager to know life! Our public streets are a pest and a danger after nightfall; and morality is the lip-service of our Church on Sunday, and the denial of our every action for the six days that follow!"

"Quite true," said "Electra." "Quite true, Dorian. I have said it in my book, only——"

"Only better expressed, no doubt. When deeply moved, I cease to be paradoxical or amusing. And one thing that always moves me deeply is the hypocrisy of the English; their utter inability to deal with plain facts without dragging in their boasted morality. As if any man of them all—political, clerical, commercial, artistic, or 'artisanic'—wasn't tarred with the same brush! To some the bitumen clings; by some it is washed off; by others covered with British broadcloth respectability. But underneath all, be it hair shirt, or cassock, or honest, ugly fustian, there is the *stain*—the ugly black smirch of the devil's touch. Do I shock you? I forget myself when I think of prudery and intoleration. Show them up as they are; show them for the cursed things that choke progress, and breed hypocrites, and you will have done a great and glorious work!"

"But are the public ripe for such plain speaking?" she asked. "I have been greatly daring, I know, but I have allowed exceptions. And remember—my hero is a Canon of the Church."

He gave a short, contemptuous laugh. "True; I forgot. A prickly saint, ready to bristle out in good conventional style at every opportunity."

"But he reforms. You remember the light; the breaking dawn; the new faith born and believed. Oh, he is quite, quite different to any other clergyman! Think of those respectable sticks of George Eliot's; think of

any fictional cleric ; think of Trollope's, or Mrs. Henry Wood's, or even Dickens' ! Then compare *mine* with such impossible fools ! I tell you, Dorian, he is a——"

"Don't say a Christian, by all that's—to be achieved !" interposed Dorian Giles. "On second thoughts, too, it might be a bit risky for a *first* book ; and a facer for Sandy McStinger, such as he'd never get over."

I think they had both forgotten Sâba Macdonald's existence by this time, and she was far too interested to force any remembrance of her insignificance upon them.

"Talking of Sandy," said "Electra." "What about bringing him here—a dinner ?"

"No, my child ! Even that wouldn't affect his integrity. He is one of those who look not on the bowl when the wine is red ; only, for the matter of that, when the punch is fragrant. He is not approachable by any of the common methods that ensnare or appease ; he has a reputation to keep up. All the world of letters looks to him. He has been the destroying angel of aspiring genius so long that he dare not risk his reputation by even 'damning with faint praise.' You may ask him here after your book has passed through his hands, not before. Even then he'll be a tough subject to entertain. He lives only on beef-brose and oatmeal porridge ; hence his unimpeachable integrity. An honest, flesh diet would tame the 'Scots-wha-hae' instinct ; and good British beer would transform him beyond identification. Let us leave McStinger alone. There are a few of the smaller fry to whom a good meal would mean enlightenment ; that's to say if I were there to entertain them. They are kind enough to appreciate my conversational powers."

"I have no doubt they envy them," she said. "I never met anyone quite so amusing as you, Dorian, or quite so—so impossible to understand."

"You are paying me a very great compliment ; but—let me see. Have we again wandered from our—lamb ? The publisher you have agreed to, isn't that so ?"

"Yes, on conditions."

"I know ; I will explain to him. The book is to be boomed on true American principles. How much we owe to that enlightening nation ! Little preliminary 'puffs and pars' in all the leading journals ; those you must write yourself, and pay for. I'll find you the agent.

Then advertisements—a heavy item, my dear lady, but in a good cause all is well spent. That is as much as can be settled until the book is absolutely ready. You think the printers can have it next week?”

“Yes,” she said, a little hesitatingly. “Mind, Dorian, I am guided entirely by you. I should have preferred a leading and established firm like Bodley & Co.”

“Bodley would have had your manuscript read by two or three of his readers; compared their reports, and probably rejected it. In any case, he would not have sanctioned our present—shall we call them—aids. He is of the McStinger persuasion, and actually believes the British public can form its own opinions. Absurd! They like them ready made, sugar-coated, easy to swallow, like the pellets of religious truth their pet preachers throw to them from the pulpit. Which reminds me they are going to do the ‘Stabat Mater’ at the Carmelites’ next Sunday evening. Shall you go? I must. There is a boy in the choir with a voice like an angel’s. Only to hear him sing makes me long for dove’s wings and the wilderness, and the safe solitude of one’s own pale joys. Ah, dear gifted lady, to be young and have the voice of an angel and a heart of secretive sins! Can life offer aught so intoxicating?”

“Oh, please don’t go off on one of your impossible flights!” exclaimed “Electra” crossly. “From *my* book and all that concerns it, to the Carmelite Church!”

“A flight, certainly; but your book is religious, and I think the Carmelites have a religion also.”

“A religion? Why, they’re Roman Catholics, aren’t they?”

“Perhaps,” said Dorian dreamily. Then, after a pause, “Who knows? They pass to and fro, those strange, cowed figures; serge clad, bare-footed. Their church is poor and dismal, but I have heard preaching there that has stirred my soul to—I was going to say—belief. The singing, and the swinging censers breathing incense to the mysterious chanting of glad young voices, or the deep notes of those who have fathomed a man’s despair—these things enchanted me. They bred a strange sadness; a desire for solitude. I was conscious of a passion for ecclesiastical vestments. I read new meanings into cope and stole, and orphrey and chasuble. In Paris I collected stray silken wonders—lace, with a history of

St. Bartholomew attached to it ; altar cloths, and raiment, all gorgeous without, that had hid the emaciated body and scourged form of some canonical saint. That time has passed and my treasures lie hid from secular gaze in a cedar-wood box in my own room. You have never seen that room, have you, "Electra" ? You shall, some day. And Sâba—Good Heavens ! we have forgotten her all this time—Sâba, the *Wunderkind*, she shall come too. You will then understand my passion for art ; my hatred of rep and walnut-wood, and striped damask ; of 'copies' that are misnamed pictures, and hung on hideous wall-papers."

He rose suddenly. "Dear and illustrious lady, I must say farewell. I don't know when I have enjoyed myself so much. It is a moot point with me whether I prefer to hear you talk, or to hear myself. And Sâba has been a charming audience ! By the way, how is she to get home ?"

Sâba rose from her corner and explained arrangements. "Then I will share the cab and see you home in safety," he said. "Bathos, isn't it—after such an afternoon. But the only salt of life is contrast."

CHAPTER XV.

THAT was an enchanting drive homewards through the dusky winter streets, past sights and scenes touched into picturesque reality by the strange tongue of my companion.

He seemed to know so much that I wondered less at the knowledge than his memory of it. He told me a great deal about Brompton. That its signification was Broom Town, and was probably derived from its originally being a common. The quiet little square itself had had many distinguished residents, even before "Electra" had honoured it. George Colman, the dramatist ; Shirley Brooks, editor of *Punch* ; Liston and Frederick Yates had all lived there, and close by, in Michael's Grove, was a residence once owned by Douglas Jerrold, and visited constantly by Dickens. Interspersed with such information were all those quaint, cynical, paradoxical remarks for which Dorian Giles was famous, and to which any audience seemed welcome, as long as listening and wonder gave tribute.

As the hansom turned and drove up Church Street I asked him if we were not passing the Carmelite Church he had spoken of.

"Yes," he said. "It is young in years as yet, but its Order is old as the Seven Hills. The monastery is there behind, in Duke's Lane, at the back of the church, which reminds me topographically that at the junction of that lane and Pitt Street stood Bullingham House, where Sir Isaac Newton lived. Old Kensington is full of interest. I should like to live here, but my mother says there are no decent houses to be found. And although historical associations are deeply impressive, a house has to be lived in; and to entertain—one requires a reception-room. Pembroke Square and Lancaster Gate are horribly modern, but also they have their compensations."

"About the Carmelites?" I persisted. "You said they were going to do the 'Stabat Mater' next Sunday evening?"

"That is so. The good fathers find that their organ and their famous singing are capable of attracting a section of the British public for whom music covers a multitude of sins, even that of crucifix and confession box. So on certain Sundays they give certain choral masses, or services, and the collection bags prove the utility of the idea, however it originated. Have you ever heard Rossini's music sung?"

"No," I said. "I know the 'Stabat' simply from the piano score. I should love to hear it."

"Make your grandfather bring you. Tell him he will be in good company. They have a very select audience as a rule."

"I wish he would," I said. "When I was in Boulogne I used to love to hear the cathedral organ and the singing. I wish we had more music in our churches."

"And less preaching? So do I. But we shall in time. The English cleric is fast emulating his Romish brother. It is a pity though that he at present labours under the delusion that 'intoning' is a natural gift."

I laughed, remembering the adventuring of the Rev. Arthur Rattley into that region of choral disunion.

"You are amused. Perhaps you have suffered like myself. How terribly hard it is to spend a Sunday in England! One wonders there are not fewer suicides and more perverts! Ah, we are almost at your destination.

I will keep the cab and drive on. It is only across the square and into the Bayswater Road. I don't know how you have enjoyed your afternoon, but I certainly have nothing to regret."

"And are you really writing a play?" I asked. "It was a book last time."

"Oh! one suggested the other. A play is a more satisfactory mode of expressing one's opinions, because you *hear* them and know that other people hear them. Your effects are produced before your eyes. In a book you are merely groping for chance appreciation. You *may* meet it. Also, you may not. But it is never brought home to you personally. A publisher's statement is a poor thing—even if your own."

"I wonder how 'Electra's' book will do," I said. "She seems quite bound up in its success. Is it really very wonderful?"

"Very," he said drily. "Even more so than her own faith in its wonder. And here we are, so good-bye. I rather like you, Sâba Macdonald."

He lifted my hand lightly to his lips, then threw open the cab door and jumped out and handed me out. I tried to stammer that the man was to be paid, but he only laughed and told him to drive on, and left me there a little bewildered, a little amused, and with a sensation that I was really "growing up" at last.

* * * * *

Curiosity was rife at the tea-table. What had I done or seen or heard? What sort of house was it? And had Miss Puffin *really* written a book while I played to her?

I gave a graphic description of the strange black room, the red lamp, the carved figures. I did not mention the crucifix for fear of arousing the "red-rag-and-bull" controversy. I told them of the queer old man who had fought with Nelson, and last, not least, of Lady Medora's son, and how he had brought me home in a hansom, and had discussed the history of Kensington. Memories of "pert minx" made me specially demure and specially reticent. My mother looked up in alarm at the mention of the drive.

"Surely," she began, "you might have refused his escort. It was not at all necessary."

"I was afraid of seeming impolite," I said. "And Miss Puffin thought someone ought to see me home."

"Of course," said grandpapa; "very kind, very thoughtful. She is a most—ah!—estimable person. What nonsense you talk, Jane! It's not as if the child were grown up. And you say he wouldn't permit you to pay the fare?"

"No," I said.

"Well, well, it was very polite. But I must call and thank him. I owe Lady Medora a visit. This will form an—I mean——"

But as his tea suddenly went the wrong way, and a violent fit of coughing ensued, I never learnt what it was he meant.

I asked Aunt Theo that night about the Carmelites. She was as eager to go as myself. She promised to try and talk grandpapa into consent. Perhaps when music was concerned he might be induced to set foot even in such an obnoxious edifice as a Catholic church.

To her alone I told a great deal more of the occurrences at Brompton Square. She was not at all favourably impressed by "Electra" nor very convinced of her genius. But she agreed with me that as a type of character she was no doubt interesting. "Though why *you* want to study character, child——" she added, and pinched my cheek.

"Oh, but I *do!*" I exclaimed earnestly. "I think people are deadly interesting. I mean, not so much themselves as what's in them. Oh, of all things in the world, Aunt Theo, I should love to be a writer!"

"A writer!" She looked surprised. "I thought music was your speciality. You are ambitious, I must say. There have never been any writers in our family, or, for the matter of that, any specially gifted members on either side. It seems funny to have a small Bush niece sprung upon one with ambitions."

I laughed. "I suppose it does sound absurd to talk as I do; and when one thinks of Dickens and Brontë and George Eliot, and all the host of wonderful men and wonderful women who have left their names printed on life and in men's memories, well—it's even more than daring to say such a thing. All the same it must be a beautiful life."

"A very hard and toilsome and trying one," she said,

"But that would count for so little compared with one's work—the sense of achievement. You see, music is all very well, but one is only playing what some one else has written, and perhaps not playing it at all as he desired or intended. But with writing, you are your own interpreter. Your own thoughts and feelings and opinions can all be put down as those of your brain people. What a satisfaction! And then when one of them whom you specially love begins to *live*, when he or she seems suddenly real—oh, Aunt Theo! can anything the world can give be as wonderful as that?"

"It all depends on how such things appeal to one. I remember when I was your age, Sâba, I longed to be a singer. I thought *that* the most beautiful life of any. And I worked hard, and then in the end my master told me my voice would never be very great, or of any use in the professional sense. So I gave it up."

We were in her bedroom. She was sitting looking into the fire. I was in my dressing-gown, brushing my hair before the glass. "About my age," she had said. Then girls did begin to dream and plan and think of life's relative meanings at that age. They weren't mere brainless blocks, moved to rule and measure by compelling hands. Cultured up to a certain point, confined to a mere narrow range of personal experience, they yet thought out a wider field for culture, a wider range of experience. And living in blessed hope of the "some day" that should accomplish the one and permit the other, they waited patiently for freedom.

I finished brushing my hair and tied it back, and then came and knelt by her side. She started, and looked down at my face, and then put an arm around me.

"Oh, child, how thin you are!" she exclaimed. "Do you feel stronger than you used to do? I wish——"

"Don't worry, dear," I said lightly. "I feel perfectly strong. Perhaps I am going to be one of the 'lean kine.' But I don't think our forbears incline to stoutness. The Laird is wiry enough, and mamma—well, her waist is only an inch larger than mine."

She smiled. "Oh, if it was only waists! But there's a transparency about you, Sâba. You have lost your sallow tints, and your skin is quite clear for a brunette, and at night you always get a colour, but it's too bright for health. And your hands—look at them, or, rather,

look *through* them. I wonder you have the strength to play."

"I do get very tired sometimes," I said; "but it seems the only thing I can do to—to please people. Mamma is always telling me that I must obey grandpapa's wishes in that respect, whatever may be my own. He has been so good to us."

"You are his own flesh and blood; he could hardly turn you into the streets," she said bitterly. "And certainly you have been of use, Sâba. He used to engage accompanists, but there were always rows, and he was always changing them. And his amateur friends weren't much good. After a time it was always 'with one accord they began to make excuse,' and excuse was fatal. By the way, you remember that nice little woman, Mrs. Jellico?"

"Yes," I said. "The lady grandpapa was so angry with because she broke a Tuesday evening engagement."

"The same. She is dead. The chill she caught coming here one wet night proved fatal. Papa's mandate of 'non-admission' need not have been so strict. She never challenged that refusal."

"I wonder if she has met Aunt Eliza?" I said thoughtfully.

"Met? What odd things you do say, child! They didn't know one another. It was your aunt's arrival that made your grandfather so independent. He thought she could always be at his command, but—fate willed otherwise."

"I often wonder about that time," I said. "It seems a sort of dream now it's over. We were dreadfully uncomfortable. I don't like to think how I hated it and them. I had planned and hoped so differently."

"Always a mistake," she said. "I used to do that. I know better now."

Her tone was chill and despondent. I leant against her silently, not knowing how to take her mood.

"I have planned nothing for my day of freedom," she continued, "and it is approaching fast. It will soon be time to think of bridesmaids' dresses and white satin. Sâba, you and Ada must be my bridesmaids, and Sara. There's luck in odd numbers, so I shall only have three. Have you any ideas about dresses, any special colour?"

"I should like to wear *black!*" I cried tempestuously. "My heart will be in mourning, and——"

"Now, child," she said wearily, "make me no scenes, I entreat you. It is all arranged, and soon it will happen, and then be over. You must help me make the best of it, not look at the worst. If I have to pay a debt——"

She stopped abruptly. "What does it matter? Every woman has to do that," she went on. "In tears and wretchedness; with heart's blood, heart-ache, disillusion—it is the woman's fate, Sâba. None can escape. Some hide their tears and smile till death wipes tears and smiles away. Some suffer and endure and grow desperate, and do mad, wild things, at which the world cries out shocked and horror-struck. Some are patient with the patience that makes them callous even to suffering. Some make fresh idols of the children born to them, and find these idols not one whit better than their predecessors. It is always the same—a price to pay, and what you pay for turns to dust and ashes at your touch."

I took her hands and held them tight. "Why must you do this? Why need you? Oh, Aunt Theo, wouldn't anything be better than giving yourself, *your very self*, your very life, up to some one for whom you don't care, just because——"

She freed her hands. "You don't understand my reasons, Sâba. You don't even understand that if a man's love pursues you, claims you, wraps you round in burning flame, you cannot force it back into cold dead ashes. And a promise binds one, even if given unwillingly. But there—why do I talk like this? I shall be as happy as most women. Far happier than I am at home. This narrow, stifling life——"

She rose suddenly, and threw her arms out wide, then let them fall. "And India is an ideal place for a woman, I am told. Gaiety, excitement, devotion, attention—never a dull hour unless you choose. Isn't that better than living on between these walls of bondage, seeing the same old fogies year after year, hemmed in by the same narrow prejudices, listening to that eternal talk about music, enduring those miserable Tuesday evenings? We have all fled from the parental roof with as decent speed as was possible. I am the only laggard. Who can blame us, knowing our lives? Anglo-Indian children are always sent away from their parents. We were sent away, sent to that cursed institution a girls' boarding-school, to be educated, trained, finished. Not the hungriest soul could

pick up more than a few crumbs of knowledge; real knowledge, that wasn't mere parrot gabble, learnt and repeated with befitting accuracy and lack of comprehension. Into such cramped space was my soul crushed. Only one among many; they were as badly off, but I seemed to feel the compression more and rebel more. Then, school life over, I came home—to this home. Now I have had enough of that. Everything might so easily be better; it couldn't be worse."

She had never spoken like this before—so frankly, so bitterly. She voiced so much of my own feelings that I understood what might be driving her forth. The desire to kill out one pain, even if it took a sharper pain to do it; the sudden snap of an over-strung bow, the sudden craving for change at any cost. Only—if it might have been by any other means.

"I ought not to talk to you like this," she went on suddenly. "But you are not a child any longer, and when I go away I seem to see you filling my place and frittering away youth and self-respect in this hopeless, middle-class bondage; tied by convention, chained by tyranny, never considered a rational being with rights. Womanhood, Sâba, has no rights. It is a fetter, heavy with old sins and old traditions. Unmarried—we are in bondage to our parents (so much wiser than ourselves); married—to our husbands, who in all their pride and love for us never forget to thank God they were born to manhood. It is fate, and we can't escape from it. Only a very few years, Sâba, and you will know as much as I do. Sometimes I wonder if better things will happen for women. If out of our despair and our bondage a new young race will spring to freedom—will be allowed to be young and glad and thoughtless for just those lovely brief years when one's heart *is* young; will be taught wisely the things that are useful, not the things that need only be—forgotten; will be loved openly and proudly, not in the cold, formal fashion that has meant the unspared rod and the spoilt childhood. Oh, if such a time might come! Perhaps our children will live in it, Sâba, or our—grandchildren. Who knows? Perhaps it is for their unknown sakes we have been trained into rebels. If so, evil can breed good; true wisdom doesn't kick at stony walls, it only undermines them."

I rose from my kneeling position. My heart seemed on

fire. I was one blaze of new and burning thoughts. "That may be the meaning of it! That is why we suffer—so that we may learn to save others the same suffering!"

She stood quite still; her wide, beautiful eyes looked sadly back to mine.

"Yes, that may be. But it doesn't make life any the easier for us—the life of women! If we crave fame, or freedom, or achievement, or knowledge we only know of one way to obtain it—the sacrifice of ourselves. A man will grant to beauty what he will brutally refuse to brains. The cleverest woman is the one who pretends to be the inferior of the stupidest man. We are brought up to believe that from our cradles, just as we are brought up to take care of our complexions, and only show our good qualities so that we may catch a husband. But there, child, there! I have talked enough—too much. I forget, Sâba, that you are a child still. I wonder what you will make of your life, my dear? I wonder if you will be happy?"

She kissed me, slowly, softly, almost solemnly. "Now go to bed, and don't *think*."

CHAPTER XVI.

I DID think. How could I help it?

Those words were as live coals from the altar of pain, and they burnt and burnt their way into my very soul. They had voiced so much that I had felt and never dared express. The cramped, stupid life of women; the feeling that they must be subordinate to father, brother, husband, not because of inferiority, but because of tradition. How few escaped from bondage, and then only to face an unsympathising world—the cold wonder of their own sex, the scoffing contempt of the other! Obedience to parents, respect to one's elders, silence, restraint, suppression, such things were well, no doubt, and had their uses; but why must one never speak out what one felt and ask what one wished to know? Why could not one go to the parents and elders and say, "I want more of life than this, where and how can I obtain it?" Why must a girl-child be cramped into a narrow, unintellectual bondage as a Chinese girl's foot is cramped into its shoe? Why must the shaping of one's future be left to chance—to the

partner of a waltz, or the acquaintance at a boarding-house, or the despotic will of a parent bent on marrying us to a subject of their choice regardless of our own ?

I closed my eyes and drifted into dreams. I seemed to see a vast army of women, marching on and on and ever on in vain search for the helper that should release them. Asking of each other and asking of man for room for the exercise of their cramped bodies and their stunted souls ; for some relief from the eternal monotony of their lot. How tired they looked, that army ! How weary and worn ! " We *are* tired," they seemed to cry—" tired of the wheedling and the pretence ; the degradation and the fear ; tired of never being ourselves as we *are*, but man's idea of us as he has tried to mould us. Marriage is easy. There are men and to spare. But we don't want to marry men, for we are not permitted to know them *before* we marry them. And marriage is often a worse bondage than that of home or school, or the ladylike drudgery of the teacher. Think of the thousands of unhappy wives and weeping mothers ! Oh, cursed fate of Eve that made us women !"

Then a voice seemed to answer them from afar : " Peace !" it cried, " peace ! For the time is nigh when your bonds shall be broken and ye yourselves set free. But the task is with you who suffer now. Only through the gates of that suffering may ye pass to a wider life. In your hands the key is placed that shall unlock the door of freedom, and through that door ye shall see the vision of the future. Your children's children shall enter where ye have feared to pass."

* * * * *

Strange and many were my dreams that night. Sometimes I saw my aunt, a bride in bridal white, and I following a train of white-clad girls, found myself to my amazement clothed in black, and above my aunt and the hateful figure beside her flashed Ada, a shadowy figure with outstretched wings.

* * * * *

Again I woke and slept and dreamt A great plain, vast, shadowless ; burning sun and burning land, and crossing it a camel, with a man astride its queer saddle. His head was bent. I could not see his face. And strange figures

moved around and before him. Then from afar swept a little cloud of dust; nearer it came, and nearer. A horse was galloping wildly towards the little caravan. The dust rolled aside. The figure was a woman's, in bridal white again. She drew up her horse sharp and sudden and the man lifted his head, and with a hoarse cry held out his arms. Then the dust rose like a mighty wave and swept over both, but I saw the woman was—myself!

I woke cold and trembling, with a cry on my lips. I remembered the man's face, though the dream was but a phantasy of excited thoughts. "What could have brought him to my mind?" I wondered. It was long indeed since I had heard or thought of my aunt's rejected lover.

As always when I woke, my mind rushed onwards to impossible happenings. It is only the old who live in the present, and find the day's good or ill burden enough. The young are always in flight. Some glad to-morrow, some wonderful next week, or month, or year is always to be theirs; to bring them some new hope or joy not yet in their possession. I took my flight and remembered first that this was Saturday, and that possibly Sunday might bring the permission for that visit to the Carmelites. Then that Monday was to see my introduction to the Monday Popular Concerts and a famous English pianiste. Following on those joys would be the resumed Tuesday evenings and the appearance of "Electra" as audience. "Electra," with mamma and grandmamma! I could not reconcile the trio. Neither did I fancy that Aunt Theo would get on well with the prospective authoress. But it would be interesting to watch the fusing of such antagonistic elements in the crucible of the Pembridge Square drawing-room.

It was almost a pity, I reflected, that all these events happened so close together. Three days of excitement and expectation to weeks of ordinary dulness. In a flash I saw all the past year and its events and remembered even trivial incidents—our arrival at grandpapa's, the getting accustomed to his "rules," the Kirkmanns, my schooling, my friendship with Ada, my illness and the Brighton episode, the arrival of my aunt and cousins; then death and gloom, and the change back to this life of routine. Fourteen months! It seemed years since I had first come to Pembridge Square, first met grandpapa and grand-

mamma, first wondered at the Rajah, and got in and out of disgrace a dozen times a day.

How could I have thought my life uneventful. It had been full of incidents and episodes even up to that memorable one of "Electra's" summons, and Dorian Giles' escort home.

Had these people crossed that fine-spun web of destiny for any special purpose? Were they so interesting and in a way so wonderful, and yet would the interest and the wonder fade into obscurity and leave me adrift on some other channel of side issues? These were things the future must answer, the future that always looked to me in those days big with possibilities—a wonder-land through which I should travel, and in the meaning of the journey read the meaning of the traveller's own existence.

I lay back on the pillows—the same pillows on which I had once lost my conscious self and gone off into blackness and regions of nothingness. I had been summoned back. Was it for any special purpose? I loved to think so. I loved to imagine that some day I should know why my feet had been stayed on the Border Land, that perhaps I should find myself the heroine of a wonderful romance or the agent in some marvellous happening. I had a feeling that I should escape from this present narrow life and be loved and comforted and comprehended as I desired. That—or else some great achievement or some great sacrifice would alone content me. I did not crave martyrdom, but still less did I care for an existence that would mean going out of life leaving nothing done by which one could be remembered, or for which one's memory would be beloved.

I had tried to tell "Electra" of my ambitions and of my mental loneliness, but it seemed to me she was too self-engrossed for sympathy. She needed all her energies and care for the fostering of her own talents, the solace of her own "moods." And Aunt Theo? She had troubles enough of her own and would soon have heavier ones laid upon her. Why should I burden her with all my load of fancies, hopes, desires, and sorrows? My needs were keen and my impulses strong, but possibly her own needs and feelings had once known equal strength and met defeat. She was tired of the dull and narrow home life, as tired as I myself; but seniority seemed in no way to help her. The remedy she had chosen was a desperate

one. It was not one that recommended itself to me. I shrank with horror from the thought of that strange claim which a man may make, and then do what he will with it.

How could it be? Why did not women exercise their right even at the very altar? It was possible. I had read the marriage service (instead of the Litany). I knew that one last chance is given. Why had no one ever seized it? What mattered the world's laughter, the bridegroom's horror, the priest's surprise? What mattered anything so long as one could know one's self still *free*?

Imagination galloped along with me and showed me church aisle and bridal train, and that dark face I hated turned eager and expectant to one white figure. And I must be there and witness it all! I could say nothing, *do* nothing, only grind my teeth and listen hopelessly to a ceremony that was part barter, part obedience, wholly mockery.

I sprang from my bed. I could not lie there inactive and suffer the torture of such thoughts. I dressed, and then seized my school-books and went downstairs. The library was always ready for me by eight o'clock. Perhaps French translation and a good tough irregular verb would drive these fancies out of my head.

* * * * *

Wonders were truly happening. Aunt Theo's request about the Carmelites on the occasion of the "Stabat Mater" was granted without any demur. Grandpapa decided to accompany us. "It would of course be a great thing for Sâba to hear the 'Cujus Animam' rendered as it *ought* to be rendered." Sâba agreed. She felt inclined to add that such had not yet been her fate, but on second thoughts refrained. The habit of "second thoughts" was gaining on her. She no longer burst out with the first impetuous rejoinder that occurred. She reflected, and tempered it with suitable tact. The impulse was not natural, but education and influence alike tended to eliminate the natural and artless in favour of the artificial.

That Sunday evening and the performance of the "Stabat" stood out in Sâba's memory as something to be remembered and treasured. This was music indeed; music set in a befitting scene. The magnificent organ, the

dim church, the strange brown figures with their sandalled feet, the intense silent homage of the listeners, as number followed number, as the "Cujus" and the "Quis est Homo" and the "Inflamatus" burst in full-voiced signification on charmed ears. These were impressions flowing, wave on wave, to one's very soul-centre; things that stirred and delighted and yet *hurt* by their very beauty.

She had noted the entrance of a somewhat strange figure, in flowing velvet gown and a cloak to match, the hood of the cloak drawn round a brilliant aureole of ruddy hair, and a pair of scintillating blue-green eyes. "Electra" was evidently one of Dorian Giles' disciples of the picturesque, and rather enjoyed the sensation created by her peculiar appearance. She was accompanied by the tall, strange-looking Italian lady who had shown herself so enthusiastic at Lady Medora's reception. They sat but a short distance from Sâba and her companions. The girl looked once or twice at that strange face of the authoress; wondered a little why she leant forward with clasped hands and half-closed eyes—wondered if it meant genuine feeling born of the music, or only another *pose*. Her own blunt honesty of disposition made her distrustful of anything tending to affectation or hypocrisy.

Then came the last roll of thunder from the organ, the last splendid notes from the voices. People rose and filed slowly out, giving quiet greeting, or murmuring "How beautiful" to the question that scarcely needed so commonplace an answer.

Mr. Heavysage and his party were caught up in the porch by "Electra" and Dorian Giles—the former taking the great amateur's hands with well-assumed reverence, the latter asking him when he should have the privilege of once more hearing the Tuesday evening music. There was a brief explanation of the implied compliment, followed by a hint that the following Tuesday would be the occasion of a quartet or two, a little chat with good "Papa Haydn." If such an event commended itself in any way, needless to express how pleased the illustrious amateur would be to see the appreciative young man.

"Quite informal, no party. But as Miss Lucia Puffin had been so very anxious to come, an exception had been made to the rule of no listeners. Still, as Mr. Giles was good enough to say——"

Mr. Giles said a great deal more before finally bidding the party good-bye. Then he and his two friends joined "Electra" and her companion.

It transpired afterwards that one of the ascetic-looking youths was the publisher who was to be entrusted with the precious offspring of "Electra's" brain. The other was a sleeping partner in the firm, whose money was to aid the same precious marvel in its first steps towards fame.

* * * * *

"Not bad," said grandpapa, as we proceeded up Church Street in the dark chill evening. "A little too loud; not enough light and shade, especially in the 'Cujus.' It was taken too fast—much too fast. The organ, too, was not subordinate enough."

"Oh, but it was splendid!" I exclaimed. "How lovely to hear it like that, as a whole, and sung instead of played! I had no idea it was so beautiful."

"I prefer it instrumentalised," he answered; "and a good-toned instrument in—ah!—skilful hands—is quite as capable of producing singing effects as a human voice."

I made no reply. It had certainly not been my lot to hear any instrument produce "singing" effects in "Cujus Animam."

Aunt Theo turned the conversation by observing that as he had invited Miss Puffin and Mr. Dorian Giles for the following Tuesday it would be necessary for her mother and herself to remain in the music-room. And surely something must be added to the ordinary sandwich and slice of cake and glass of wine that formed the "quartet's" usual refreshments.

"Nonsense," he said. "Not at all. No necessity to make any difference. They come for my music, not to eat and drink. There is too much gluttony nowadays, Theodora. It ought not to be encouraged. As for you and your mamma being present, it would of course look more polite. Still, as I allow no conversation, it would be a mere matter of form. I think if you receive these people and stay, say, for the first quartet, that would be sufficient. It is well known that a prophet has no honour in his own house. My family have no sympathy with *my* musical tastes."

Aunt Theo squeezed my hand which lay within her arm.

"Yes, papa, it is very sad," she said; "but really I do *not* enjoy quartets. They are so dreary and so long. I shouldn't mind quite so much it you wouldn't play the *repeats*. That seems so stupid. Why did the old composers always mark 'repeats'? Suppose anyone was to read out a chapter in a book and then begin it again because the author had put 'repeat' at the end, how weary the listener would be! I don't see why a chapter of music (representing a movement) should be treated as less wearisome. And surely a quartet is long enough for all ordinary purposes without having the half of every movement played twice."

"Tut-tut," said grandpapa. "You are no judge of the canons of musical art. The proper working out of the theme. The old masters knew what they were about, and that one couldn't have too much of a good thing."

"Perhaps not," said Aunt Theo, "when it is good. I have never been able to appreciate the Hadyn and Mozart methods save as an instruction in exercises."

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed grandpapa. "To think that you should be my child! You are just like your mother!"

When we were upstairs that night Aunt Theo turned to me and said suddenly, "I don't like your 'Electra' at all. She is deceitful and insincere. She has some object in coming here, Sâba, and I wonder——"

I met her eyes. She laughed softly. "No, that would be too preposterous altogether! Perhaps 'Electra' is the attraction. I was going to say I wonder why Dorian Giles invited himself, because I know he can't care for such music as papa gives. It must be simply agony for him to sit still and not talk. Perhaps he is *épris* with 'Electra,' and she likes to have him in her train. What is your opinion, wise mouse?"

"I can't tell," I said. "How does one know when *épris* begins, or continues, or ends?"

Again she laughed. "That's a hard question to determine, and one that need not enter your little head yet awhile. However, I will put them under my microscope on Tuesday evening and let you know what I discover. And now to bed, child; more dissipation to-morrow and Tuesday. I wonder what you will think of Arabella Goddard?"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE famous Popular Concerts, inaugurated by the enterprise of Messrs. Chappell, of Bond Street, had started on their journey to fame in the month of January, 1859.

They heralded the advent of that prince of violinists, Joachim. He burst upon the English public very unobtrusively, but at once succeeded in making an indelible impression upon their minds. Not only as a soloist, but as a leader of concerted music, Herr Joachim was unsurpassed. The fame of those Monday night concerts grew and grew, until they became a recognised musical institution. Subscribers flocked to them season by season, and the balconies and orchestra seats were crowded by all the musical enthusiasts of London, swelled by members of a small German colony, to whom German players and German music strongly appealed.

When I first went to one of these famous concerts I was astonished by the crowd and the enthusiasm.

Grandpapa's stall was in the front row, and on this occasion he had secured another seat adjoining his own. We arrived about ten minutes to eight; the performance commenced at eight to the minute. Grandpapa amused me by folding up his Inverness cape and laying it on the floor a little to the left of the platform; then he deposited his hat on the top of it, unwound a knitted woollen "comforter" from about his neck, purchased a programme, and took his seat. Aunt Theo had seen to my appearance—black skirt, white bodice trimmed with black *ruching*, an ermine cape to act as opera cloak and keep me warm. I was surprised to see such an "evening dress" audience in the stalls, equally surprised at the number of industrious females engaged in knitting or crochet work in the less fashionable seats. I learnt that these industrious persons would come as early as six o'clock and wait patiently until the doors were opened, so eager were they to honour the musical genius of the Fatherland. A

grand pianoforte and four stands set off the loneliness of the platform ; above, in the lofty blue-groined ceiling, twinkled innumerable gas jets. All this I noted while, waiting for the first sight of the famous quartet. On they came—Joachim, Piatti, Ries, Zerbini ; the whole great hall burst into one tumult of applause, and it was quite a time before it quieted down into attention. Then a tap, a nod, and Beethoven's "Quartet in G Major" opened its—to me—familiar subject in the tonic key.

I was a little disappointed that I had to hear again what I had so often heard, but the disappointment soon gave place to keen enjoyment of the perfect *ensemble* and the somewhat novel rendering. The first Allegro and the Scherzo were delightful. It was also a surprise to hear how important a part the 'cello had in the Adagio after that episode in E led by the first violin. The spirited Finale was taken at proper speed, and every one of the four instruments gave spirited interpretation of the devices of contrapuntal treatment. They finished amidst another tumult of applause, in which grandpapa played a modified part, as one who should say, "I am one of you, and I know."

I think Haydn followed Beethoven, and then came the event for which I had been told to prepare—the appearance of Madam Goddard, the great English pianiste. She was to take the pianoforte part in a Trio of Beethoven's.

She swept on to the platform—a handsome, imposing figure, beautifully dressed ; a public favourite, too, judging from the applause that greeted her.

I should have enjoyed that Trio more had it not been marred by grandpapa's nudges and whispers to "mark this" or "that" ; to take a lesson in phrasing ; to note how *slow* and how soft the Andante should be played, as he intended me to perform it very soon. However, Madam Goddard shone a veritable star in my memory, until later years had introduced me to Clara Schumann. Charles Hallé, Agnes Zimmerman, and that host of brilliant celebrities dowering with splendid gifts the seventies and the eighties.

When the final Quartet was played I felt a little wearied. It had been too great an intellectual feast for my small brain. It also left me in a state of passionate discontent with the desecrated music of Pembridge Square ; with my own poor abilities and poor technique—that marvellous

quality without which execution or ability count for little. I was very silent on the way home, but I think my lack of enthusiasm rather pleased grandpapa. He took it to mean that I found really very little difference between his quartets and those led by Joachim. Also, that I had been duly humbled by Madam Goddard's proficiency, and would be more inclined to listen to his advice on future occasions.

I remember I spent the whole of the next afternoon over exercises and studies, with a view to making my fingers as subservient to my will as the brilliant Madam Goddard had made hers. Grandpapa was letting me off easily that night; only Weber's "Invitation" arranged as a trio, and the Andante in Rheinberger's "E flat Quartet."

There was great grumbling from grandmamma during tea. She did not wish to be in the music-room, but conventionality demanded it, as an unmarried lady and a stranger would be present. She could not understand what made grandpapa ask such people to the house, still less why they should martyrise themselves listening to such extremely uninteresting music as quartets represented. Upon which grandpapa told her that she lacked the "sixth sense," and quoted Shakespeare to the effect that "the man who hath not music in his soul, let no such man be trusted."

Aunt Theo offered to play propriety, and leave mamma and grandmamma to cards, but that, it appeared, would seem a slight and a rudeness; and however great was the sacrifice, she never had, and never would, shrink from offering it at the shrine of propriety, especially in her own house. Still it was very annoying to have unknown persons thrust upon her in the light of "celebrities," just because her husband and her granddaughter were musical. Soon she would not be able to call her house her own, or receive her own friends. She hoped grandpapa had noticed that *she* had so far observed proprieties as not to invite anyone, even Mrs. Vandrupp, on this occasion, but, of course, *her* wishes and *her* opinions counted for nothing; she had all her life given in to other people (meaning grandpapa). She had been too passive, and now found herself counted as nobody.

All this went on at intervals. Sometimes grandpapa replied; sometimes he only said "Tut-tut, Eliza, don't

be foolish!" Aunt Theo vainly tried to stem the stream of grumbling by suggestions. Grandmamma need not stop in the room "all the time." It would be easy to slip out and have her game of cards or chess with my mother, and then be in the dining-room as usual at ten o'clock.

Grandpapa left them arguing the matter, and went in to arrange the stands and see to the music. I wondered whether "Electra" would be punctual? If grandpapa had impressed his "rule" upon her?

The quartet assembled as usual by the stroke of eight, but it was ten minutes past before "Electra" was announced. She was dressed for this occasion in flowing white, edged and trimmed with swansdown. We were, of course, in our mourning dresses, and looked very sombre beside such a brilliant apparition. Dorian Giles was very late; he entered about the middle of the quartet, but had the grace to slip in unobtrusively and sit down, with merely a silent bow to the silent audience. He was not taken public notice of until Beethoven in G (again!) had stumbled and grumbled to its bitter end, not one whit improved—so far as the 'cello was concerned—by the lesson of the previous evening.

Yet to hear "Electra"! Ye gods! how she did flatter the great amateur! What points and shades and effects she discovered! What style! What breadth of expression! She touched the Stradiuarius with reverent fingers; she spoke of exquisite tone and sobbing depths. She wondered why people troubled themselves to go to St. James's Hall when such a musical treat was to be had nearer home. She begged grandpapa for a solo. Of all instruments she adored the 'cello, and she felt certain he could play something *alone* on it divinely. I happened to catch the astonished eyes of Herr Franz and with difficulty preserved my gravity. They seemed to ask, "Who is this strange person, and what is her purpose?"

Fortunately grandpapa did not feel disposed for a solo. He had a few bars alone in the introduction to Weber's "Invitation to the Waltz." I thought that when "Electra" had heard that introduction she would be less pressing in her request.

Of course Herr Franz and I caught it for taking the brilliant passages too fast. I was accused of skipping

notes and slurring phrases. However, I was far too accustomed to these observations to worry over them: The worse grandpapa played the more fault he found with other players.

The Andante of the Quartet, being slow and easy for the bass instrument, went really well. I noted that there was a whispered undercurrent of talk going on between Dorian Giles and "Electra," but grandpapa was too engrossed to notice it. Grandmamma and my mother had slipped away; Aunt Theo sat by the fire busied with some delicate piece of work. One could hardly blame the other listeners for a little private relaxation.

With the conclusion of that Andante there was a short breathing space; conversation became general. Then Dorian Giles discovered the "Ave Maria" of Gounod's, and begged Herr Franz to play it. As it wanted ten minutes of "closing time," grandpapa gave a somewhat ungracious permission, and I played the accompaniment. I am quite sure that grandpapa did not like either Herr Franz or myself to play solos on these Tuesday evenings. However, he could not very well refuse the request of a guest. He only contrived to spoil the lovely ending by collecting the music and putting away the stands—a proceeding he would not have tolerated had he been the performer. Then he wiped the keys of the piano, as usual, and shut down the lid, after which he marshalled us all into the dining-room, telling "Electra" that he never took late dinners or suppers, as he considered them unwholesome. Having thus paved the way for limited hospitality, he planted himself on the hearthrug, and permitted his guests to help themselves to sandwiches, wine, and cake.

Dorian Giles, having been suppressed long enough, now "took up his parable," and held the room amazed by strange talk of music and musicians in past ages.

"Of course," he concluded, "life itself is the greatest of all the arts. We do not fully recognise that, because into it fall so many lesser and less wonderful types of the artistic. Music is merely the love of sound: When we hear it, or create it, we fully realise that its dominant characteristic should be beauty. Every human soul worships beauty. Man sees it in woman, and woman in man; the artist sees it in all created things; Dante speaks of 'the worship of beauty'; in the

ancient days of Greece and Rome it was the only form of worship—the desire of the soul trying to give its dreams form and shape in the service of the living. Again, music is the most appealing of all the arts. It appeals alike to culture and to ignorance. I have known a humble kitchen-maid creep up her stairs and listen in trembling delight to the subtle music of the drawing-room. I have not the slightest doubt that the favoured domestics in this establishment have done the same thing often enough, drawn by the irresistible attraction of such a performance as we have been privileged to hear to-night.”

He looked at grandpapa, who smiled and looked back at him, and drew up his head with the proud consciousness of one deserving commendation.

“Rarely has it been my lot,” he went on, “to meet amateur talent of so advanced an order. There is too little enterprise amongst the world’s *dilettanti*. They are too humble. Their estimation of art far exceeds their powers of execution. Still they might waive perfection for sake of less critical judges. You, my dear sir, have set a noble example; you possess appreciative and non-executive faculties, and do not hide your light under a bushel. Bayswater should honour you and St. James’s Hall be envious. To be an artist is a great thing no doubt, but to have the artist soul and the amateur’s paucity of expression, *that* is infinitely greater!”

He raised his glass and looked at the circle of puzzled faces. “I drink,” he said, “to amateur art, its splendid conceit and its deathless faith—in itself!”

Grandpapa came forward and poured himself out a glass of wine.

“A great toast,” he said. “Let us drink it—standing.”

We all stood up. We all drank it in—something; all, that is, except Herr Gottfried and Herr Franz. They left their glasses standing on the table untouched.

Grandpapa’s eye fell on them and their empty hands. A frown darkened his august brows.

“You haven’t drunk your wine—or the toast!” he exclaimed.

The old German violinist bowed gravely. “No, *mein Herr*. It is not for us, this toast. We are artists.”

Dorian Giles looked at the old white-haired player, then at his son. He put down his glass.

"You are right," he said. "That was very finely said."

But grandpapa was seriously annoyed. With all his apparent fondness for music and reverence for its great teachers and executants, there mingled a curious delusion that the second-rate ability of the amateur was entitled to rank quite as high. The artist devoted his life to his art; the amateur devoted his leisure to a hobby. Yet both were deserving of equal honour.

I had heard him dilate on this point so often that I was not surprised when he burst forth into one of his pet rhodomontades, saying things that were almost an insult to the professional side of the subject. So very rude and excited did he become that Herr Gottfried lost his self-command.

"Stop—if you please, sir! I haf also one word to say." He leant both hands on the table. I saw his face was very white and that he was shaking with agitation.

"This goot gentleman, whether of purpose or not, has thrown one great insult at my head—*mein*—and that also of my son, who is an artist of qualities too high and too great to be wasted on the spoliation of good music—music of the great komposers—the divine Beethoven, the genial Haydn, the ever memorable Mozart. *Ja wohl!* That in itself is bad enough, but in this kontry you are still so ignorant that you haf one rule for art and one for your artist. You are so full of leetle foolish pedantic sgruples; you pretend to admire and reverence the one and insult the oder. Oh! I haf not lived in England ten, fifteen years and not diskovered zuch things! But my son, he is patient; he say, 'What will you? One must live.' Zat is true, *meine Herren*, I spzeak to all. One must live. But it is hard to follow a profession so great, and be treated as not so moch better than ze crossing-sweeper of ze street! You must not shake ze hand; you must not be introduce to ze ladies, you must always to take ze back seat. But I do not intent any more to take ze back seat, nor do I permit my son any more to be so corrected and interfered with. To haf be-told him he knows not how ze great komposers should be rendered! He is a great artist—my son; and he will play at your Philharmonic koncert in the hall of St. James. And he will azzociate only with ze artists, and not with what you call ze amateurs! And so, *mein Herr*, when you make zat speech and drink zat toast, I feel it

is not possible any more effer again to play your quartets, and lead your music. For if ze amateur is better than ze artist then why do you not engage *him* and let *him* lead, and keep you altogezzer! I and my son, we are sick of it. Oh, you may look angry and bluster-boil; for me, I care not; no, nor Franz, does he eizer care. You get your friends to hear, and you then make ze mock of us to almost our faces. Often have you zat done, *mein Herr*, and you tink zat your guineas are kompensation for what we zuffer. But they are not. And I haf determined one day I should tell you so. I did not mean a disturbance to kick up, and my son, he, I know, is very angry. He has pulled my coat-tail many times to stop; but I will not stop—not until I shall haf zaid all that I haf so long wanted to zay, though I sit in my place, and play my part like one dommy, from ze one week's end to ze other. And now, my ladies, and my gentlemen, I beg you excuse if I haf avronted you. And yet I am not zorry to speak what I haf so long wanted to say. And zo—Good-evening!”

No words of mine could convey the almost paralyzed amazement of my grandfather at this unexpected outburst. He got red, he got white, he got purple. He attempted to splutter out remonstrance; to stay the flood of excited speech that flowed from the old German's lips; but in vain. The torrent had its way, and we had to listen in various stages of confusion, alarm, and indignation.

I felt very sorry for Herr Franz. He had tried to stop his father, but it was impossible. In a measure, I was not surprised at the old gentleman's indignation. Grandpapa had always treated the professional side of his musical evenings with great rudeness. The fact of paying “terms” evidently limited his appreciation of anything but the *use* of the services paid for. He lived in times when commerce turned up its nose very decidedly at mere artists—“fiddlers,” pianists, actors, and such Bohemian riff-raff. Music as a hobby was very well, but music as a profession, *that* was another matter. It meant loss of caste, of social distinction. It was neither a “genteel” business, nor a lucrative one. Though a great artist might teach one's daughters, the said great artist could not be received on a footing of equality with other guests. He was only the “music master,” or the “singing master.”

The Bar, the Army, and the Church, these were deservedly recognised professions, befitting gentlemen—and the sons of gentlemen. But when hosts of foreign musicians swarmed to England in troublous times, or to escape harsh laws and despotic governments, the stolid British householder did not welcome them with open arms, or look upon them as anything but useful adjuncts in educational schemes.

Grandpapa was no more peculiar in his views than many other people in whom commercial instinct and the reverence for class has been sucked in, so to say, with their earliest nutriment; but he had been essentially indifferent as to how and where he expressed those views, and to-night an assertion that amateur art was greater and worthier than the true soul-dedication of the artist, had brought about a not unnatural climax.

Still, when Herr Gottfried, with a polite bow, was moving to the door, and Herr Franz, with a certain proud humility, was following him, the great autocrat roused himself to an assertion of outraged dignity.

"You will both consider yourselves *dismissed*," he shouted angrily. "I'll send you your cheque to-morrow, and I beg you will never approach me, or my house again, on any pretence whatever!"

Then he turned to the amused Dorian, and the interested "Electra." "I must express my regrets for this unpleasant scene. I am rightly served for my—ah!—charity. I took compassion on those two German beggars when they were nearly starving. I engaged them regularly; I got them pupils; I have even procured them concert engagements; and this is my reward! To be insulted openly—before my guests! How can I apologise?"

"Oh, *don't* apologise!" exclaimed "Electra," clasping her hands. "It was so amusing. It will make a most splendid scene when I describe it at the musical party I am doing in my book. Oh, dear Mr. Heavysage, I owe you so many thanks. I wouldn't have missed it for worlds!"

"Nor I," said Dorian Giles. "As a rule social gatherings are painfully slow; rarely, indeed, does the primitive instinct of bored humanity display itself. A scene like this, Mr. Heavysage, is an object-lesson to those who study human instincts. Instead of apologising to *us*, it is we who should thank *you*. For 'Electra'

and I are both artists in our way, and for the artist all real tragedies possess importance. There was tragedy beneath that old man's declamation—the tragedy of a wounded soul; fine instincts crushed by brutal disregard of their claims. How rarely do such things present themselves before us! We hear of them; we read of them; even imagine them—rarely do we behold them. A beggar scorning charity and wrapping his rags around his shivering form is a fine example, if one not exactly worthy of imitation; but, an artist's soul, revealing itself in the unprofessional light of quarrelling with its bread and butter, *that* is, indeed, an edifying spectacle! For my own part, I cannot thank you enough for having so considerably 'turned on the lime-light,' so to speak."

I am not sure whether grandpapa took him seriously, or, indeed, whether he understood him at all. But the party broke up, and Sâba, in dread of fresh disillusionings, slipped away to bed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"You are not asleep, Sâba?"

The cautious whisperer was Aunt Theo. I raised myself on my elbow. I had just heard a clock strike eleven.

"No. Oh, come in!" I said.

She closed the door, then lit a candle and took the chair beside my bed. "Such a scene! I thought papa would never have done storming. And all mamma's sympathy took the form of an assurance that it served him right; that professional musicians were presuming creatures who ought to be kept in their place and not permitted to mix with their social superiors. I am sure she would like to tie a red cord across the room at their parties and keep the 'musicians,' as she calls them, on one side of it. However, the storm was very unexpected. Who would have thought that quiet little German would have burst out into such a tirade. If it had been the son——"

"Herr Franz told me once that his father held a high position in Germany and owned a title and estates. But he got into some political difficulty, sold everything, and came to England. He was a fine musician, and trained

his sons to follow music as a profession. So you see, Aunt Theo, he must have felt grandpapa's treatment very keenly, although he was so quiet."

"He must, indeed. I am very sorry. I don't know either where papa will find two such players for such exceptionally low terms. And the music used to go so well. What an upset, and just as he was starting the Tuesday evenings afresh. Dorian Giles told him that he knew several professional violinists, and would send them round in turn, 'on approbation.' Fancy!"

I laughed. "Do you think, Aunt Theo, that Dorian Giles was making fun of grandpapa all the time? I do; and that speech—I have put it down in my diary. I really couldn't help it."

"Some day, in the next century perhaps, when people are more enlightened, and Bayswater is not considered the 'hub of the universe,' you will publish your diary, and people will wonder how such things could have been tolerated," she said. "Our narrow little lives, our stupid conventions, our ineffable conceit of ourselves! I hope, Saba, you won't be 'preaching down a daughter's heart with a little horde of maxims' as Tennyson has it. I'm very sure that once I feel my wings——"

She broke off impatiently and rose. "It is too late to talk. What a time we shall have, child, till this musical business is settled. I'm afraid it will mean hard work for you."

"I thought three happy days couldn't fall together without some sort of trouble dodging in the background. Of course, too, there'll be no music lessons for me, and I really was getting on with my technique."

"Yes, that's a pity. However, papa seems to think the professional sea holds fish and to spare so long as one baits one's line with a guinea engagement. And of piano-forte teachers there are plenty, my child. Although few things are worse than a perpetual change of instructors. I know that from school experience. A new master always undid all that his predecessor had done. Well, good-night! What a breakfast-time we shall have!"

"One minute," I said eagerly. "Aunt Theo, did you notice that odd remark of 'Electra's' about using this scene in a book? Wasn't it rather impertinent?"

"Very. But the lady's whole personality is vulgar—vulgarity with a faint veneer of artificial pretension. I

should say that if she does make use of her experiences in such a barefaced manner, she will not enjoy a very large circle of acquaintances. It is a funny thing that however faulty we *know* ourselves to be, and know that our friends consider us, we deeply resent their saying it, still more their publishing it. Your adored Dickens got himself into trouble more than once by a too great fidelity to life. I tell you this, Sâba, not to quench your ambition, but as a caution to hold back your memoirs until those concerned with them have quitted this mortal sphere for better or worse."

She laughed, and went away, leaving me to ponder over the truth in her words. Also, to wonder why English people should hold such strange ideas about music. Had grandpapa never considered that these artists whom he patronised and paid were not mere machines, but men, talented, gifted, and with the thoughts, perceptions, and feelings of manhood united to their gifts? If anything more sensitive and cultured than the bank clerk, or the retired merchant, or the pensioner on the Civil List, who engaged their services. The slighting, cruel things I had so often heard came back to my mind. I wondered no longer that Herr Gottfried had risen in his wrath at last, and spoken out his hurt feelings. I thought, too, that with all grandpapa's callousness and indifference to people's sensitive nerves, some of those truths must have struck home. To have been thus treated before his guests in his own house could not be a pleasant reflection. And that it should have taken place before Dorian Giles and the to-be-famous "Electra" was an additional "rubbing in of the salt to the sore." Something never to be forgiven or forgotten, if I knew anything of his disposition.

* * * * *

Aunt Theo's anticipations of the breakfast next morning were not verified. Grandpapa ate his meal in almost total silence, reading his correspondence or the newspaper in intervals of replenishing cup or plate. Mamma was not present, and grandmamma and Aunt Theo kept their observations at a discreet distance from the danger-post. As for me, I was quite getting into the "being-seen-and-not-heard" groove, so long pointed out by admonition. I went off to the Kirkmanns' for my usual lessons and confided to Ada some facts of the previous evening's

scene. We both agreed that grandpapa had brought it on himself, and wondered how the Tuesday evenings would be filled up for the future.

To skip details, I shall merely say that for successive weeks Dorian Giles came to the evenings accompanied by Italian, German, or Russian *virtuosi*. Some of these artists played really magnificently, but none would accept a permanent post as leader to an amateur quartet. They all indulged in soloism to a marvellous extent, whatever their instrument. On one crushing occasion a wondrous 'cellist appeared, and his performance was so magnificent that poor grandpapa hadn't the courage to play a single note, even in a trio. Still, the Tuesdays could not be considered a success from the amateur point of view, and Herr Gottfried's words appeared somewhat prophetic. In my own mind I had a conviction that Dorian Giles had an object in all this. It was an eminently satisfactory method of punishing the autocrat for his overweening belief in himself and his methods. Musicians might be as plentiful as gooseberries, but quartet leaders were not.

No longer could the great amateur boast of comparison with the "Monday Pops." No longer invite envious friends and neighbours with the pride of a "Solomon in all his glory." No longer boast of "*my* music," "*my* string quartets," "*my* trios." He became very irritable as each trial brought fresh disappointment. First-class professionals would not consent to lead amateurs, and second-rate violinists *could* not. If Herr Gottfried had devised a revenge on his haughty patron, he could not have chosen one better adapted to annoy him.

Yet he would not give in. He laboured under a belief that all Bayswater knew of his musical evenings, and envied them—that he had established a reputation as a judge of art and things that appertained unto it. Consequently he spent weeks of labour in trying to replace his recalcitrant professionals and gave us all a correspondingly bad time after each failure.

* * * * *

And now approached a period of which I feel I ought to speak with bated breath. The day of publication of "Electra's" book was advertised!

For weeks mysterious paragraphs and hints had

appeared in all the leading journals telling the public that they were to be prepared for a wonderful revelation in the world of literature. Hints of a new genius had been spread about. Advertisements had awakened public curiosity to an extent that almost led one to believe Mudie's would be bombarded by an anxious and eager crowd, and that the Strand offices of the publisher would be in a state of siege. On occasions I had had to spend hours with the distracted authoress trying to soothe her with music, and listening to Dorian Giles feeding her with "apples of comfort." As the time approached she grew almost frantic. She raged at Dorian for persuading her to give her precious work to a comparatively unknown publisher. At another moment demanded that he should go to Bodley & Co. and *command* them to keep back their new and *also* largely advertised author until her book had experienced a first month's sale.

It astonished me to witness her excitement, nervousness, wrath, fear, and yet self-certainty. Moods she had, indeed, at this time; too many to count or to have patience with. As for Old Boy, I took him under my care as much as possible, and administered consolation in various forms consistent with the possession of keys, and constant intrusion of strange charwomen. For "Electra" so disturbed and terrified her domestics that they rarely stayed over a week. Her Italian friend, Dorian Giles, and myself were alternately objects of adoration or vituperation. I grew seriously alarmed at times for her reason as well as her health. The frightful strain of her work seemed telling upon her unmistakably. I often wondered why I was permitted to go to her house so frequently. But grandpapa never refused, although *one* visit of his own had evidently satisfied his expectations regarding genius.

On the great evening of publication "Electra" was giving a party, and I was invited for "music." So, also, was Aunt Theo. Dorian Giles, of course, was expected, and a number of literary and influential persons on the "staff" of various leading journals of the day.

She called the party "a conversazione and music." It seemed a pity she had not added "conversation strictly limited to one subject."

The drawing-room was nearly full of people when Aunt Theo and I arrived. There were strange, seedy-looking men, and equally strange, seedy-looking women. But

they all "did" something. They painted, or wrote poetry, or acted (when they could get an engagement).

There were musical artists with long hair and long fingers, who hovered round the piano, or walked about clutching a violin or a flute. There was the ascetic young publisher, Reggie Wode, who looked like a repentant monk, and his partner, who bore a striking resemblance to himself. There were Germans and Swedes and Italians. And standing amidst them all, a vision of flushed and somewhat "too solid flesh" and unæsthetic beauty, was the gifted authoress. She was gowned in thick dead white satin, and her rough, ruddy locks were crowned with a wreath of green leaves, probably representative of the "immortal bays" she coveted, though as yet she had not attained them. The two rooms were thrown open and her own sanctuary was curiously arranged. The black draperies of the walls were drawn aside and tied with vivid scarlet. Red lights and red flowers made up its scheme of decoration, and on the writing-table—that sacred, if material emblem of genius—stood a pile of scarlet-bound volumes, numbered I., II., III. These represented "the Book" in its cumbersome three-volume edition as popularised by the needs of circulating libraries.

Each new arrival was shown that wonderful scarlet pile. Occasionally "Electra" reverently took one of the volumes and handed it for inspection. But it must not be supposed that it was handed or handled like any merely ordinary book. It was rather presented like a little sacrament, and the fortunate receiver of that sacrament seemed quite awed by the ceremony. Then the authoress would talk in soft, hushed tones of "my characters," "my scenes," "my theories," "my WORK."

She would explain and expound and exhort. She laid down the lines on which she would prefer criticism to travel. She dwelt fondly on passages of brilliant writing or abstruse thought, which she trusted would not be "overlooked." She had been told that the British public hated to be made to *think*. She hoped that statement was not true, for "the Book" would undoubtedly make them think. It had been written with that intention. It was a book with a high and noble purpose. The life history of a man brought up with orthodox religious views, who had undertaken the charge of a country parish. In that apparently stilted and formal existence he had dropped into various

temptations. His end might have been humiliating, if not tragic, but for the saintly aid of the lady of the manor, a wonderfully lovely and supernaturally gifted person. She had taken the faulty cleric in hand; had invited him to her castle. Had there introduced him to a secret tower, sacred to herself and her communings with wonderful "Beings" only visible to very highly spiritualised mortals. One of those Beings, in the guise of the Archangel Michael, used to instruct the cleric in his duties and responsibilities. He opened his eyes to the errors of his ways—the orthodox ways—and taught him a new religion. One that was enlightening and soul-revolutionising. One that also shocked and alarmed his humdrum country parish. One for whose propagation he was stoned and persecuted and cast out into the wilderness. This career and these incidents embraced the period of the first and second volumes. The third she would not explain. Her hearers must read and learn and digest it for themselves.

Then to a favoured few (of whom Sâba Macdonald was one) the gifted authoress presented a copy of the sacred WORK, bidding them read it carefully and tell her *truthfully* what was their opinion.

This scene was followed by music. Dorian Giles sang, so did the Swedish novelist I had previously met at Lady Medora's. I played the accompaniments for a long-haired, weird violinist whose instrument wailed as if in torture. I also performed Weber's variations on "*Vien' qua Dorina bella.*" Then Dorian Giles recited to music a poem written by Lady Medora. It was called "The Ballad of Splendid Sorrows," and was truly a marvellous piece of work.

At its conclusion "Electra" summoned us all to supper; a confectioner's supper sent in from the Brompton Road—a feast of roast chickens and tongues, and jellies and creams, and pigeon pies and salad. There was claret cup and champagne, and her health was drunk and that of "the Book." Also, the monkish-looking young publisher made a speech descriptive of his emotions at being entrusted with the sacred duty of giving such a WORK to the world. Of how orders had flowed in from all sides; of how the first edition was almost exhausted by preliminary orders, and the printers were working night and day to have a second in readiness. How, that since he had first taken up the arduous business of a publisher, it had never been his lot to come across a work of such genius as was

"Beyond the Uttermost." How he hoped we would all drink to its success, its undying fame, and the great future that lay before its illustrious author.

There were cheers, and "Hochs!" and "Bravas!" The illustrious author rose from her seat and looked around at the excited faces and listened to the ringing cheers, and remembering that all this was for her sake and by reason of her WORK, pressed a lace handkerchief to her eyes, and in a voice of deep emotion murmured, "I cannot thank you all as I ought. My heart is too full, but I assure you——"

It was never our fate to hear of *what* she was going to assure us, for suddenly the dining-room door burst open, and through it rushed, or was propelled by some unseen hand, a wheeled chair. In that chair sat Commander Puffin, of Her Majesty's Navy, otherwise "Old Boy." The impulse given to the chair sent it flying down one side of the room, and it finally brought up close to me. Out shot the old gentleman's head from the old blue velvet collar, and up shot one arm waving feebly but excitedly.

"Tooral-looral-loo!" shouted the familiar wheezy voice. "I heard you all cheering and hip-hooraying! Pipe all hands aboard and serve out double 'lowance of grog for my wonnerful darter!"

"Hi tooral-loo, hi tooral-lay,
Our ship it was lyin'
In Trafalgar's Bay."

"Here—where's my grog? I'll drink her health, too! Old Boy will drink it, my dear, seein' as he's payin' through the nose for all this, and devil a bit does he know what he's payin' for!"

His eyes fell on me at that moment. He seized the back of my chair and came to anchor beside it.

Meanwhile dozens of astonished eyes were on "Electra's" scarlet and furious face. She seemed too paralysed with shame and amazement to do anything except glare at the poor old man. But he was not looking at her; the glare fell harmless.

"How dared—I mean, where is your attendant?" she stammered. Then she addressed the table feebly. "I'm very sorry, my friends, for this intrusion. My poor old grandfather is a little weak in the head, and can't

understand that excitement is bad for him. He should have retired long ere this. I—I am quite at a loss to understand how he came here."

Her eyes fell on me. "Sâba Macdonald, you know how to manage him. Could you——?"

I rose at once and laid my hand on the old gentleman's arm. "Come, Captain," I said softly, "let me wheel you back to your room."

His tortoise-like head shot forth in a moment.

"My room? That d——d black hole! and feasting and merriment going along in here! No, my lass, Old Boy isn't such a fool as that. Right tooral-loo, I'll be jolly too! Old Boy's on his own quarter-deck once more and pleased to welcome his friends and comrades. Fill up and drink, gentlemen; fill up and drink the health of Nelson, our great and glorious Nelson! 'Twas in Trafalgar's Bay——'"

"Sâba!" exclaimed "Electra" furiously.

I was choking with laughter, but I made a vigorous effort to propel the chair down the room again. Fortunately the jerk sent the old commander's head into its shell once more, and though he muttered and grumbled during the passage back to his own "cabin," he was not uproarious as he had been in the room.

I found the latest "charwoman" stifling her mirth with the corner of her apron. I accused her of the *contretemps*.

"Well, miss, I couldn't 'elp it," she said. "The old gent was that contrairy as there wasn't nothin' to be done with 'im, and go to bed 'e wouldn't. Just beggin' and prayin' for one peep in at 'is 'wonderful darter,' as he calls 'er. Wonderfull! My h'eye! I could tell a thing or two about 'er, I could. So at larst, jest for peace an' quietness I wheeled 'im up to the door to 'ear the 'ealths drunk and the speeches, and what does 'e do but give 'is chair a shove like, and it flies into the room like mad. Well, 'twasn't to be expected as h'I was a-goin' in after it, so there, that's the circumstances, an' make what you can of 'em. P'raps you'll see what you can do. A blessed old babby like 'im didn't ought to be left unprotected. I ain't paid wages to be cook and gen'ral, an' nuss as well, and I'm h'orf now. You can tell Miss Puffin what I've said. Wonderfull she *may* be, but I'd like to see 'er a bit less wonderfull and a deal more considerate o' h'empty

bellies, and 'ard workin' females as 'as a family to support on h'eigheten pence a day an' no beer!"

She flounced off down the kitchen stairs, and I wheeled poor Old Boy into his room. Dark and dismal and cold it was, for the fire had died down, and a glimmer of gas from the bracket by the fireplace was the only light.

"Where do you sleep, Captain?" I asked him.

"Sleep?" He roused himself and looked round. "Why, here, my dear, of course. That's my bunk yonder."

I could only see the wooden box in the corner.

"That?" I said.

He nodded. "Pull it out and you'll see. A wonderful invention, my dear; Old Boy thought of it. Pull it out—you'll see—"

" 'Hush-a-bye, baby, on the tree-top,
Hush a-bye . . .'"

He struck his colours again and disappeared. I pulled out the strange-looking coffer and discovered that it was a sort of bed. The top fell back at an angle, and inside it was a small flock mattress, some blankets and a pillow. Also a strange-looking wadded garment with big wide sleeves. I pushed the table aside and brought the coffer forward, and made it up for a bed. There were no sheets. He watched me drowsily; he was evidently getting sleepy.

"A handy lass," he said. "The only one who's kind to Old Boy now. The only one—God bless her!"

But a fresh difficulty presented itself. How was the old gentleman to be undressed, and got from his chair into his "bunk" as he called it? I looked at him doubtfully. In all our acquaintance I had never seen him out of that chair.

He blinked and winked and nodded his poor feeble old head, but offered no suggestion.

"Pipe all hands for grog," he suddenly cried, "and tell Bo'sun Jack the Captain's waiting."

I would willingly have conveyed that message to any possible "Bo'sun Jack," for I could see no way of getting Mahomet to the mountain or the mountain to Mahomet. Fortunately at that moment there came a tap at the door. A red face and a crushed rusty bonnet obtruded themselves.

"I thought as 'ow t'would be!" exclaimed my friend the charwoman. "You're too 'elpless, leave alone too young to h'act as wallet an' nuss as seems expected. So I comes up to say I'll see to the blessed old babby, but all the same, it's a piece o' *my* mind that to-morrow mornin' an' Miss Puffin's ears will know, as sure as my name's Betsy 'Iggins. Come along, sir. You knows me, don't you? 'Tain't the fust time as Betsy's put you in your little bed, Lord love 'ee."

The old face, the old eyes, took on a sudden aspect of alarm. "You're so rough," he muttered. "You shake Old Boy and make him cough."

"There now! there's h'ingratitude!" exclaimed Mrs. Higgins.

She went up to him and unbuttoned the curious old brass-buttoned coat, and removed the black-silk stock.

The revelation of that shrunken form and poor withered neck was so terrible to me that I fled.

CHAPTER XIX.

I WENT back to the dining-room. Evidently the little interruption had been forgotten or politely overlooked. Talk, noise, laughter, the clatter of knives and forks were still going on.

I slipped into my vacant chair beside Aunt Theo. "Electra" threw me an anxious look and I gave her a reassuring nod. But I think Old Boy had effectually disturbed the triumph of her evening. There were no more speeches, though there was plenty of conversation—foreign and otherwise.

Aunt Theo whispered me that she had had quite enough of this, and wondered whether we could escape. But "Electra" gave no sign, and her female satellites all seemed engrossed with listening to the "pearls of price" that fell from her lips. Champagne flowed, and cheeks grew flushed, and eyes looked unnaturally bright, and tongues wagged loosely. In a way it was very Bohemian and very amusing. Dorian Giles seemed in great form, and was wittier and stranger and more paradoxical than I had ever heard him. But at last there was a move, and Aunt Theo took advantage of it. We bade "Electra" good-night, and

secured our cloaks, and I went home with a set of "the Book" under my arm, inscribed and autographed by the illustrious author. She made no allusion to Old Boy's escapade nor did I, but when we were in the cab, Aunt Theo laughed till she cried over that serio-comic entrance. The sudden invasion of the wheeled chair; the hilarity of the queer old figure; the oddity of his speech; and the candour of his comments on his "wonderful daughter."

"You seemed quite accustomed to him, Sâba. How is that?"

I told her how often I spent an hour with him, listening and talking, and that he knew me very well. I also said that he was sadly neglected since this book had come on the scene; that he complained of being starved or intimidated into writing cheques, of whose destiny he was sublimely ignorant.

"I suppose she's paying for its production," said Aunt Theo. "That party to-night was in very bad taste. Posing as a genius in one's own house! Surrounding one's self with flatterers and sycophants! And all for what? A little flash in the pan; a momentary notoriety. However, 'Electra' may not have it all her own way when the reviews come out. Critics have an obstinate knack of revealing one's weak points, and taking the guilt off the gingerbread to prove that it *is* gilt. If the great authors have smarted over faults and shortcomings, what may not a novice expect."

"I'm sure 'Electra' expects nothing but adulation; however obtained," I said.

"I hope she may get it!" laughed my aunt. "Poor soul! How very small she is with all her posing."

"Isn't it a mercy grandpapa wouldn't come to her party," I said. "What would he have thought of that little episode of the old commander?"

"I'm sure I can't imagine. By the way, Sâba, what was she impressing upon you when she gave you her book?"

"That I was to be sure and get grandpapa to read it. But he never does read novels."

"No; books are not in his line. He has never done more than skim a few chapters of Dickens or Thackeray. I once tried him with 'The Mill on the Floss,' but he said it was far too long to waste time over. As for more modern authors, he won't look at them."

"And this book of 'Electra's' is so very strange," I said. "It is religious and yet irreligious. She has read bits out to me sometimes. I thought them awful; the new religion is worse than the old."

"Decidedly I must read it before you do," exclaimed my aunt. "It may upset your mind even more than your Polish friend and the Kirkmanns contrived to upset it."

So that night she walked off with Vol. I., and next day came for the second and third, saying the first was so silly, the style so poor, and the grammar so indifferent, that she wondered "Electra" wasn't ashamed of the fuss she had made over it. However, when the whole work had been perused, my aunt said that she considered the latter portion quite unfit for any young girl to read, and begged me not to go on with it. Affection mastered curiosity; I obeyed her wish.

Then the reviews began to come out. Tooth and nail the leading critics fell upon that immortal WORK; rent it; ridiculed it; quoted and misquoted it. Tore its mysticism to shreds as the hashed-up, plagiarised outcome of Kant, Hegel, and Bulwer Lytton. Called its eloquence hysterical and its pet character a "study of Balaam's ass minus that quadruped's tactful intrepidity." As for McStinger—that redoubtable authority must have simply gloried in his task. "Slashing" is a mild expression for the cruel, caustic methods of the great Scot. Of course, there were a few laudatory criticisms, but they were so feeble and in such very insignificant papers that they could not possibly carry any weight.

I shall never forget receiving a frantic summons to go to the author one day, and finding her in raging hysterics. Betsy Higgins was the only outward and visible sign of a domestic. The floor was a mass of torn and trampled papers, the furniture was upset, vases smashed, and ornaments had been hurled right and left. Up and down the littered room paced and raged and stormed the insulted and outraged figure of misunderstood genius!

Truly, thought Sâba Macdonald, the writing of books has many sides to it. One's own critical opinion doesn't stand for much, nor that of one's friends either.

"Look!" stormed a fury with dishevelled hair and flaring eyes. "Look there—and *there*—and *there*!" She kicked a paper at each enunciation. "These things

have been sent to me anonymously! By *whom*? How *dare* they! Oh, to be a man; to face them with their lies; to thrash them in their miserable little printer's dens; to shoot them like the carrion they are! Think of me! *ME!* Insulted, ridiculed! Told I don't know the commonest rules of grammar; the canons of literary art! And all because I have dared to be original; dared to paint life as I feel it *is*; dared to reveal great and wonderful mysteries unfolded to me, and by me translated for the benefit of a thankless world!"

She burst into frantic sobs. She threw herself down on a couch uttering a succession of wild shrieks, and biting savagely at the silk cushions on which she lay.

"There! did h'anyone ever see the likes!" exclaimed Mrs. Higgins. "What to do, h'I don't know. Cold water h'ain't no use, nor yet vinegar, nor h'odor-coloning, as I found in 'er bedroom and used constant; The gentleman was 'ere, same as h'always comes, and 'e said to send for you, 'cause you could play soothin' music; Myself, I don't know why 'ymn toons or 'Rule Brittanian' should be good for 'isteriks, but when it comes to dealin' with females as is h'always a-writin' and h'excitin' of their brains, why a poor hordinary 'elp is just flummixed."

I had gone up to "Electra" and was shaking her vigorously. "Come, come," I said; "what *is* the use of making yourself ill like this. Do try and be sensible: Haven't you said a hundred times that you didn't value a critic's opinion the snuff of a candle. Show that you don't. Write to the papers and say what you think of *them*, just as they have said what they think of *you!* You can show up their ignorance and stupidity, and needn't pretend to be in the least affected by their remarks."

She sat up and pushed back her dishevelled hair; her sobs suddenly ceased. "Sâba Macdonald, you're a genius!" she exclaimed. "What an idea! How was it I never thought of it? Of course, I can pay them back—expose *them*, ridicule *them!* I'll write to every paper that's had a review and force them to apologise, or else——"

Ah, there was the rub. Else what? If they wouldn't recant; furthermore, if the editors of the different journals wouldn't publish the outraged author's self-vindication—what was to be done?

Fortunately for her reason and the peace of the household, this idea did not occur to "Electra" at that moment; in fact, not until she had calmed down and several days had passed and a great many papers had been purchased. By that time her book had gone into a third edition—at least, it was advertised as such, and excerpts from the favourable reviews had been printed beneath its title and its sales. These things possessed an element of comfort. Besides, they showed that the English public were quite able to form their own judgment of the work, independent of critics. "Electra's" name was on many tongues, and tossed about on the shallow, noisy stream of notoriety. Letters were written to the papers about this strange new creed, and information was desired from many quarters respecting it. Jews and Hindoos wrote; Greeks and Catholics; Unitarians and Baptists swelled the chorus of enquiry. "Electra's" cleric became famous, and she and he were the topics of every dinner-party in London.

"You ought to be satisfied," said Sâba Macdonald.

"You are the most discussed writer of the day," echoed Dorian Giles.

And all her crowd of rag-tag and bob-tail, sycophants and flatterers, Bohemians and geniuses, took up their parable and said the same thing. Gradually "Electra's" hurt pride and wounded feelings were soothed. She became convinced that a certain magnetic attraction existed between the public and herself—the dear, sensible, right-minded public! They did not read her out of curiosity, or extol her because they couldn't understand what her new heaven, or her new religion, or her archangel Michael and her clergyman meant. No; she was convinced that appreciation and praise and unlimited success were deservedly hers; springing from a pure and absolutely unadulterated source; the honest, uncritical, unenlightened mind of an unprejudiced public!

How weary I got of that book; how I loathed the very name of critics; how I dreaded seeing "Electra" rush into print on the smallest provocation, and pour forth vituperative eloquence by the ream. Fortunately, its destination seemed the editor's waste-paper basket, for I never saw her effusions in print. Of course, this was an added grievance. But a fresh blow was in store for her.

The new writer, of whose merits she had heard, produced

her book just as "Electra's" was claiming the chief place in the advertisement columns. Very modestly, very unassumingly did the new author put forth her claim to public attention; but strange to say she was greeted with universal critical approbation. It was gall and wormwood to "Electra" to read or hear the name of this author—gall and wormwood to hear that her personality was being eagerly discussed; that rumour described her as very young, very lovely, very gifted; also very modest and unassuming. Whatever booming was done for her was done by her publishers; whatever praise her book received was the scholarly critical praise of unprejudiced minds. The climax, however, was reached when Dorian Giles announced that she was to be present at his mother's next reception, and that everyone who knew of this was on the tip-toe of expectation to meet her.

"You invite her! You ask her to meet *me!*" shrieked offended genius.

"As a matter of fact," he answered, "it is my mother who has invited her. You know she *must* have every new celebrity, or where would be the use of her *salon*? But, of course, if you would rather not come——"

"Rather *not* come!"

Insult to injury. Was she to be shoved aside for any upstart who had succeeded in blowing her own trumpet; who was undoubtedly wife, daughter, niece, or relative of some of the leading critics, and had therefore been hailed with acclamation! Rather *not*? Of course she would be there. She hoped her fame was sufficiently established to enable her to face *anyone*, no matter who! Dorian listened patiently to the ejaculatory fireworks. I felt sure he was not eager for her appearance on that eventful night. Perhaps he dreaded a scene. However, "Electra" chose to consider herself invited, and hastened to summon her select and adoring *clientèle* with a view to impressing her rival.

Invitations arrived for my grandparents, Aunt Theo, and my small self. I was longing to go, but afraid permission would be refused. Of course, it was very unusual at my age to be invited to grown-up parties, and my grandparents' old-fashioned ideas must have received a severe shock. I often wondered why they permitted me to accept. I could only suppose that youthful musical prodigies (?) were rare, and that the honour and glory of

exploiting one rather pleased grandpapa. At all events, it gave him an opportunity of trotting out all his own pet theories respecting music. So again, on this eventful evening, I found myself in company with Aunt Theo and himself on our way to Lancaster Gate. Grandmamma would not go, and made her recent mourning an excuse. I felt full of an extraordinary excitement; I was anxious to see the new writer. The few criticisms I had read on her book had made a deep impression on my mind. I longed to read it, but, owing to the absurd three-volume system, and the rules of the circulating library, it was hopeless to get any new book unless one subscribed to Mudie's or Smith's, or some local library in connection with them. My grandparents did not subscribe, therefore new books were never to be seen. Occasionally my aunt borrowed one from her friend, Sara Tollemarche, who indulged in a Mudie subscription. It was, of course, possible that by this means I might make acquaintance with "Noah Blake's Romance," but as yet my sole acquaintance was that of reviews.

Grandpapa was far from being in an amiable mood on this evening. His search for a leader was still unsuccessful, and I had a fancy that we owed his company merely to a hope that he might "pick up" somebody who would suit him at Lady Medora's *mixum gatherum*. Owing to his habit of punctuality we were almost the very first arrivals—a thing my aunt hated, and whose only compensation was the temporary undivided attention of Lady Medora. That modern Cleopatra was as wonderful as ever. Gowned in silvery tissues, crowned with daffodils and holding a large sheaf of the same flowers in her hand, she reclined on her couch and received us with great cordiality. She pinched my cheek and exclaimed at my growth, and told me I should cease to be esteemed a "Wonder-child" if I took it into my head to become tall.

Except for a great many strange faces and strange languages, this "salon" was very much like the other, up to a certain point. At that point, however, it diverged widely. The advent of Miss Ann Shottery, the new novelist, was quite unostentatious. She was accompanied by a sweet-faced elderly lady dressed in high black silk and wearing a cap. "Country mouse" was written on both shy, retiring personalities, and the elder lady looked positively scared at sight of "Cleopatra." How-

ever that vivacious person seized upon the daughter with her usual zest as a "society showman."

All the gush and fulsome praise that had been lavished on "Electra" was now poured out upon the new star in the literary firmament.

"Enchanted—delighted—amazed!" all these she had been and still was. The sweet fair face crimsoned and paled, and the girl—for she was nothing else—tried to stem the torrent of exaggeration. But Lady Medora kept her by her side, and introduced her to all the celebrated or curious persons who crowded round. I kept in the background watching her closely. She looked so young; her toilet was so simple; her manner was so graceful and unaffected, that it was hard to believe she was the gifted writer whose book had sprung to fame at first hand. It was only when one saw her eyes, so deep and darkly blue and yet so brilliant, that one felt how living and vivid must be the soul whose gateway they were. Just as the crowd was surging and swaying about that modest, white figure, there came a new commotion; the group opened out, and towards it swept "Electra" and her little court. Ann Shottery turned, and the two rivals faced one another.

It was quite dramatic. "Electra" gowned in pale blue satin and wearing her favourite crown of green leaves, swept slowly up the room. She was like a stage figure, and perhaps Dorian Giles had designed that she should be so, by way of contrast to the dainty fair-haired girl who had dared to challenge her superior right to fame. Lady Medora sat bolt upright for a moment, and dropped her languid affectations.

"Ah!" she cried; "this is indeed fortunate! 'Electra,' I'm sure you'll be delighted to meet a sister of the pen! Let me make you known to each other. This is Miss Ann Shottery, of 'Noah Blake' fame, and this lady, my dear, is the famous 'Electra' about whom everyone is talking just now."

The girl put out both hands impulsively. "Oh, I am so glad to meet you; I have just read your wonderful book. It is, indeed, a pleasure to make the acquaintance of its author."

"Electra's" eyes took in every detail of that slender girlish figure. Its youth and simplicity showed up her own redundant charms and over-elaborate toilette.

So might snowdrop and gaudy tulip look set in garden bed. She did not seem to notice the outstretched hands. Queens do not permit of "first advances." She bowed with great dignity and murmured something indistinctly; then she greeted Lady Medora and Dorian. The poets, artists, and sycophants in her train closed round her—a silent and admiring phalanx, impervious to counter-attractions of ephemeral genius. By some indescribable means Ann Shottery was forced into the background. She was close to Dorian and to me. He bent towards her.

"Your rival has the advantage of a wider acquaintance with the world than you possess," he said. "But take courage; the race is not always to the swift."

Sâba Macdonald thought it a suitable opportunity to slip in her small oar.

"Oh! Miss Shottery, I am so *longing* to read your book! The reviews have only succeeded in doubling my curiosity!"

She smiled delightedly. "I am so pleased when I hear anyone say they really *want* to read my poor 'Noah Blake' that I feel inclined to order copies to be immediately sent to them. Unfortunately, my publishers don't see it in quite the same light. Besides—frankly——" she looked at Dorian's attentive face, then at mine, "I am taking literature very seriously; I want to make some money. I suppose that sounds very dreadful, but it is true. I and my mother——"

She looked quickly round, but the sweet old lady was sitting down and talking quite contentedly to Aunt Theo.

"I and my mother," went on the young authoress, "have met with a great deal of trouble and misfortune; we are almost alone in the world. The—the idea of writing was suggested to me by a relative, who has known me from childhood; he is the partner of Mr. Bodley, who has brought out my book. I feel that I have been let down very easily, for I was under the impression that authorship meant a long career of struggles and difficulties."

"So it does, generally," observed Dorian; "but there are always the fortunate few. Happy Miss Shottery to have fallen into their ranks; and the critics are all on your side."

"Ah!" she said quickly, "that is what frightens me. Things have gone too well; have been made too easy; and it makes me nervous of a second attempt. But I must keep on; I cannot help it."

"You are making friends on all sides," said Dorian; "or, what is better—enemies. All those who envy you are bound to express their envy, and, really, envy is as good an advertisement as praise."

"I hope they don't envy me," she said. She glanced round to where "Electra" stood, smiling and triumphant, her metallic laugh ringing out over the little crowd of worshippers.

"You will find they do," said Dorian. "But come, I mustn't detain you here. There are many celebrated persons anxious to be made known to you; among them a certain grave and reverend signor—Scotsman, I mean—of whom the whole literary world stands in awe. There he is; he has only looked in for half an hour, and I believe it is because he wishes to make your acquaintance. Permit me."

He offered his arm, and Sâba watched him piloting the pretty, graceful creature through the crowd; watched him introduce her to a tall, red-bearded, gruff-looking individual, who seemed amazed when he heard the name of the dainty fairy. He shook hands with her in a warm, eager fashion, quite uncritical, and the two were soon engaged in eager conversation. Dorian Giles strolled back to his usual place as Lord High Chamberlain of "Cleopatra's" court. She turned her head. "What have you done with my fairy?" she called shrilly.

"She is casting her spells around McStinger," said Dorian in his clear, distinct drawl.

"Electra" flashed round. "McStinger! Is he here? Where? Bring him to me at once."

"I'm afraid he's not a man to be 'brought' to anyone," said Dorian. "He expects them to come to him. And at present he is promenading the primrose way, and wouldn't care to exchange it for war-path and scalps!"

"I shall go and speak to him!" she exclaimed.

"Don't!" implored Dorian; "he'll only slate your second book worse than your first. Treat him with contempt—he deserves it—and you'll find it more satisfactory. Besides, Herr Von Wolters, the great German

pianist, is going to play. He is a friend of Wagner's—that great and noble and much-abused genius of the century. Talking of critics—surely, after what the *Times'* musical critic said of him and his work, no one would ever care the snuff of a candle for press opinions !”

A torrent of chords sounded through the room, and effectually silenced the clatter of human tongues. The pianist had but recently come to England, fresh from the Gwendhaus at Leipzig, and with classical music at his finger-tips. His playing was nothing short of magnificent, if a trifle tempestuous for a drawing-room ; but he held everyone awestruck. He played scale passages in octaves as easily and brilliantly as an ordinary pianist would play single notes. He had chosen the “Waldstein Sonata,” and, long as it is, no one seemed to weary or wish it possessed a movement less.

Sâba Macdonald clasped her hands and listened breathlessly. Occasions like these were helpful towards the subduing of pride and ambition. She was rapidly arriving at the conclusion that, however well one did a thing oneself, there was always someone else in the world who did it a great deal better.

This is a truism registered in that memorable diary, and strongly recommended to all ambitious artists, authors, and dramatists.

* * * * *

By the time the stormy pianist had ceased to amaze us, the great McStinger had taken his departure.

“Electra” looked for him in vain. She had to be contented with an introduction to the wonderful pianist, but as he could speak no English and she no German, the conversation was somewhat limited, however mutually eulogistic. Meanwhile, I had again secured a place near the new object of my admiration. The young authoress talked with as much interest and charm to the unfledged girl as she had evinced before the great critic.

She was only twenty, and life had scarcely dawned for her in its more serious aspects. Half in despair I told of my own passionate desires to achieve something. In equal amazement I learnt how supremely unconscious was the young writer of her own talents.

“I rank literature as the highest and greatest of all the arts,” she said. “One cannot think of the world's

geniuses without a sense of awe and reverence. Homer, Shakespeare, Bacon, Milton, Byron, Shelley, are they not like gifts from heaven to assure us of the immortality of genius! Can you picture a world without books, without poets, without writers? I cannot. It would indeed be a place of emptiness and gloom. From the time I was a little child I have loved books as I love nothing else. I used to dream of one day writing one, but I trembled at the daring thought. I tried often and often, only to throw aside each faulty attempt. Then suddenly, one day, the thought of writing just a simple, plain story of life came to me—the life around me, and of the people I knew, with their wise and simple ways and kindly hearts. I remembered Jane Austen and her quiet country life, and yet how much it told her, and what fame she achieved; Charlotte Brontë and her talented sisters; and I resolved to try, but I never dreamt of such success. I am half afraid to believe it means anything."

I assured her that it meant a great deal. Had I not heard so from lips whose praise was significant?

"Were you afraid of the critics?" I asked curiously.

"Terrified! But they have been very merciful; and what I value most is encouragement. If I had been told I had made a mistake, that I ought never to have attempted to write, I don't know what I should have done."

"But the greatest geniuses have had to face adverse criticism," said I.

"I know; but they were not women. I think no woman will ever possess the creative abilities of man. At best she is only following in his footsteps, and comes a long way behind. There could never be a female Scott, a female Dickens, a female Thackeray, a female Balzac. But you are too young to have read much."

"I adore Dickens! My great grief is that I have not been allowed to read half so much as I desire. So few books, but oh! how much they have meant."

"You look very young," she said gently. "You will have plenty of time to make amends."

"I am on the way to fifteen," I said. "I suppose you wonder at seeing me here? But sometimes I have to play; only, thank goodness, they haven't asked me to-night."

"To play the piano do you mean?"

"Yes; I feel considerably smaller after that Sonata. Wasn't it wonderful?"

"Words hardly describe music. It always seems to me like the waves of a great sea—throbbing, rolling, overwhelming. I love it so much that I used to be afraid of hearing it. A beautiful voice or a beautifully interpreted instrument lift me into a new world; my delight is so keen it seems almost wicked. I should like to have gone down on my knees to that magnificent German, and yet I hadn't the courage to be introduced to him."

"You're very different from 'Electra.' Look at her, almost as if she was sharing his triumph!"

Her lovely blue eyes turned to the writer queen. Then a faint smile touched her lips.

"I suppose she is very happy. She is a great and wonderful person, and I—no laurel wreath will ever come my way!"

"I shouldn't be too sure of *that*," I said, remembering that I had been behind the scenes, and knew something concerning the purchases of Fame!

CHAPTER XX.

"LITTLE cat!" hissed "Electra" in my ear. "Like all the rest, you turn your face to the rising sun."

I started. We were in the cloak-room, and she had suddenly come to my side with this greeting.

"What do you mean?" I asked indignantly.

"*Mean!* Didn't I see you making up to that creature! Sitting in her pocket, so to say. Gazing up in her face as if she were an angel!"

"She looks very like one," I said, taking my wraps from the maid and proceeding to put them on.

"That's your opinion! A dolly-faced, insignificant little madam! And it's quite true about her being related to the publisher. She is his niece. Of course he's boomed her; of course the critics sing her praises. 'A book with noble motives and pure ideals!' Pooh! It makes me sick!"

I felt a little ashamed of her outburst. Several people were in the cloak-room, and her excited voice and gestures attracted their attention.

"Mawkish! Family Heraldish! Domestic!" she went

on. "What else could one expect! What can *she* know of life! Let her write for children, for the school-room, the British young person beloved of Mrs. Grundy."

She swathed her azure draperies in a white burnous, from which her fiery hair and fiery face and angry eyes looked out like those of an avenging fury.

Aunt Theo touched my arm. "Come, Sâba, I am quite ready."

I held out my hand to "Electra." But she only gave us a curt nod and turned away. Her friend, the Italian lady, purred something in her ear and took her arm caressingly. I thought it was as well that Ann Shottery and her mother had left. It might have been a serious matter had the two "stars" crossed each other's orbit in that narrow sphere of the cloak-room.

"What an ill-bred person she is!" said Aunt Theo, as we stood in the hall waiting for a cab.

I laughed. "She is in a very bad temper, poor thing. And yet she had it all her own way to-night. Miss Shottery never obtruded herself."

"Oh! it's envy," said Aunt Theo. "Envy of the youth and simplicity and genius and talent she doesn't possess herself. That little Ann Shottery is delightful. I must get her book at once. Sara will manage it from Mudie's."

"And you must let me read *that*," I said. "'Electra' was so angry when I told her I wasn't permitted to read her third volume. She'll never forgive you!"

* * * * *

"A stupid party," grumbled grandpapa as we drove homewards. "And not a violinist present. I quite wasted my time."

"Oh, but Herr Von Wolters!" I exclaimed.

"Thumping and thunder!" he answered. "I should be sorry to let him play on *my* piano. Such a blacksmith's hammer of a touch would ruin any instrument. As for Miss Puffin, I don't know what was the matter with her. When I told her I hadn't read her book yet she was positively rude to me. Is it likely I'm going to waste my time over trashy novels? And there's nothing about amateur music in it after all!"

If he hadn't read the book I wondered how he knew *that*.

"Probably that will come into her next," said Aunt Theo:

"She told me the world was anxiously awaiting it, and that three of the leading publishers of the day had written offering splendid terms for a successor to 'Beyond the Uttermost.'"

"Tut-tut," said grandpapa. "Don't believe it! There's no money to be made out of writing novels. Silly stuff! School books, or history, or travels, they're necessary and must be bought; But who wants a novel! A lot of sentimental nonsense about a lot of silly people who never existed. I've no patience with such waste of time!"

"Did you tell 'Electra' that?" laughed Aunt Theo:

"Not exactly. But I wasn't very encouraging. In fact, I consider she has rather forced herself upon us. You remember her visit? And then always writing for Sâba: I'm not sure I shall let you go there any more," he added, looking at me as I sat opposite.

"Oh, grandpapa! But she'll think it so strange. And just as she is so disappointed and worried too."

"Serves her right. Too much fuss altogether. I'm sick of hearing of that book of hers. As if no one else had ever written one since the world began! There are thousands better worth reading. Look at 'Vanity Fair,' and 'Pickwick,' and—ah!—'Robinson Crusoe.' Those are books! They *live*; they will go down to posterity. All this twaddle about a new religion and an archangel coming down from the skies to preach it—absurd! Absurd!"

He dwelt on the subject so persistently that I was surprised. I wondered what "Electra" had said to arouse his antagonism. I knew by this time, of course, that grandpapa's friendships were apt to be short-lived. They usually owed their existence to something unstable as flattery, and their continuance to the use or profit accruing from such continuation. "Electra" had had a very brief innings. At a later period I learnt the reason. She had endeavoured to institute a loan. The moment any individual, male or female, tried to induce grandpapa to lend them money, they became as "Anathema Maranatha" in his sight. Something to be avoided, something to contemn or abuse. "Electra" as the flattering listener to his quartets, the flattering critic of his own performance was an intelligent and charming being. But "Electra" posing as a celebrity on her own account, with a mind filled with herself, a craze for adulation, and a desire to borrow

money, she was a very different person, and one whom it was not desirable to encourage!

* * * * *

The morning succeeding that second reception at Lady Medora's stands out in my mind as an illustration of the hardships that so constantly tripped up the heels of any of my pleasures. It brought the Indian mail. Also, the usual long monthly budget for Aunt Theo.

I hated those mail days with a jealous hatred. They were a reminder of that chain whose link grew stronger with every day that lessened its length. Nearer and closer crept that fateful time. Less and less likely did it seem that war or pestilence would step in to aid in the removal of a new and undesirable relative.

On this occasion, as I watched Aunt Theo's face, I saw that her news was not agreeable.

"Fancy! Neal is coming home two months sooner than he expected!"

She laid down her letter and looked across at grandmamma. Her face was very pale. The usual sick, cold feeling came over me. I sat in silence listening to an excited discussion of "pros and cons." Grandmamma was of opinion that the date of the wedding could not be hastened, especially as Aunt Eliza's death was so recent. Grandpapa came out strong. He said women were always for poking sentimental obstacles in the way of men's desires. Long engagements were a mistake and postponements fatal. If Dr. Danebury came home in July to be married, why married he should be. Plenty of time to get clothes, though why no girl could ever contemplate a husband without encumbering him with a host of trunks and bandboxes he had never been able to understand!

Aunt Theo listened gravely, her face still white and cold. At last she rose from the table.

"I don't want to be married two months earlier than was arranged," she said. "But, of course, my wishes carry no weight."

"Certainly not," said grandpapa. "You are engaged, and the man is coming home to marry you. *Get* married—the sooner the better!"

"Barker! Barker!" interposed grandmamma tearfully;

"She is our last. The house will be very lonely once she has left it!"

"Contemplating the loneliness for an extra two months won't lessen it!" retorted grandpapa. "It's the way of the world; the way of life. You wanted your daughters to marry, I suppose? A nice thing it would have been to have had a pack of old maids about the house! Look at Margaret and Maria! That comes of waiting, and picking and choosing! One next door to an idiot, and the other like a simpering miss fresh from the school-room. Everyone ought to marry and marry young. Look at me! I was only twenty-four, and you——"

"*Barjow* Barker; that will do," exclaimed grandmamma. "What's the use of talking. If you've made up your mind, there's no more to be said."

Aunt Theo left the room. I and my breakfast were mutually disagreeing with one another. My mother plunged eagerly into the interesting topic.

"There'll be plenty of time," she said. "And besides, mamma dear, it won't interfere with your going out of town." (Or you either, thought Sâba, the rebel.)

"And I want two clear months this year for alterations in the house," said grandpapa. "I am going to build on to the library and turn it into a music-room."

Grandmamma sighed resignedly. "What a lot of money you do spend on the house, Barker," she lamented. "Certainly your hobbies are expensive ones. You have two pianos and three 'cellos, and music enough to stock a shop. Yet you're always buying more."

"Tut-tut, Eliza! What do you know about my instruments or my music. As for the house, it is my own, and the more I improve it the better it will be for——"

He stopped abruptly. He never contemplated a period of non-existence with equanimity.

"Don't say for *me*, pray," said grandmamma. "If I don't go before you, Barker, I should never live here alone. The house is much too large and expensive. And it's a funny idea to enlarge the library and turn it into a music-room just when the quartets have fallen through."

Grandmamma had an exquisite knack of saying the very things that most annoyed her husband; and while she seemed to fall in with his plans, invariably proved those plans to be undesirable.

This last observation, striking hard and sure to that

recent "sore place" of insulted amateurism, sent him red and angry from the room. It also paved the way for a delightful feminine discussion on "trousseau," wedding dresses, bridesmaids, and bridal breakfast, to which I was a disgusted and silent listener. They were still at it when I left for the morning's lessons, and their remarks furnished a suitable text on which to enlarge to Mrs. Kirkmann and Ada, both of whom were sympathetic enough over the coming trouble.

"We have to be bridesmaids, though," said Ada. "Your aunt asked me long ago. And you, of course. Have you ever been to a wedding, Sâba?"

"No."

"Nor seen one?"

"No," I repeated, "only in pictures. And once I saw a girl all in white with a veil over her, sitting in a carriage and crying. I was told she was a bride."

"A wedding is a very pretty sight," said Mrs. Kirkmann. "I must run in and see your grandmamma, Sâba, and learn all about it. You see, my child, it's no use kicking against the pricks. It will have to be."

I knew that. I said it to myself persistently. But facing the truth made it no easier.

They tried to lead my thoughts away from the distasteful subject by questioning me as to the party at Lady Medora's. Ada was intensely interested in "Electra." She looked at her from a peculiar standpoint. She deemed her half pagan, half visionary. A dual soul fighting for the supremacy of great gifts. Yet so physically obsessed by vanity and greed that the gifts were rendered almost valueless. Mrs. Kirkmann had read "Beyond the Uttermost," and actually permitted Ada to read it also. My allusions to the third volume she answered by "To the pure all things are pure." Ada's soul could not be tarnished by reading of sin or sinners. The temptations that beset ordinary physical beings held no tempting for one whose feet were for ever straying to the border land.

"It would have been a great book but for its faults," Mrs. Kirkmann told me. "By which I mean, that there is an ambition breathing through the whole work to reach some very high standard. Unfortunately the standard was too high. The erring human element obtrudes itself. It speaks the desire to be great, and yet the effort to secure

popular favour. Never do the two go together. As well run a racehorse in an omnibus. Genius is the perfect flower of spiritual culture. It cares naught for petty human rules and conventions. Before your friend ever wins the fame she seeks, she will have to throw aside a great deal of her personal ambitions—to suppress, and not exalt self. Only then will she rise above it, and learn that the greatest achievement is as nothing compared with what still waits to be achieved.”

* * * * *

Golden words, golden counsel. Did Sâba Macdonald lay them to heart? Did she treasure them among those lessons she was learning?

For her mind was rapidly developing, and the world of things and people outside her beloved books was becoming a very real world. It was less hard and less unkind. Those on whom she had been wont to sit in judgment were proving interesting, even if narrow-minded. True, it was still a little puzzling to find that they kept their best manners and pleasantest speeches for those who had least claim on their love. That strangers ranked as more important than one's own flesh and blood. To learn that the cry of "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, *hypocrites!*" was a cry to quite another people and quite another period of the world's history, and only read as a lesson of warning without any personal application whatever! That the inward feeling and the outward display of it came into painful collision at unavoidable moments. That the puzzle of existence in no way lessened itself, and that one's elders and superiors could give no better explanation of it than one's self. That between all the wisdom and all the research and all the discoveries of man, and the real meaning of his and their existence, a great gulf was fixed. Beyond it lay the solution of the puzzle to which he held so feeble a clue. The answer to that enquiry that went back so far, and yet stood so near. That had always been asked and never answered.

That never *would* be answered satisfactorily this side eternity.

* * * * *

And other things she was learning through sorrow and self-control. The meaning of love and the meaning of

womanhood, and yet the persistent sacrifice of both to false ideals. The knowledge that the creature she loved best, and worshipped most devotedly, was yet not strong enough to be true to her highest instincts. Apart from first furious indignation and bitter anger rankled the sting of disappointment. "Let all others fail me, but not *you*," had been her cry. And it was unheeded. Strife and misery were once more her portion, and now she could not play the outspoken jealous child. She must conceal and accept and pretend as others did.

Sharp as bodily pain it was to hear discussions, plans, arguments, all concerned with that one important event—the wedding. The dresses, the guests, the breakfast, the constant arrival of presents, these things were the absorbing topic of intervening weeks. When the chestnuts bloomed again, and the square donned its spring garb, and London took on its new life of the season, Sâba was not a bit more reconciled to the coming parting. May would melt into June and June into July, and then—it seemed to Sâba that then life would be comparatively over for her. How poor and trivial its incidents looked beyond the fact that the great grief and the great loss must be endured, lived through, looked back upon. It seemed horrible to the girl that parents, that a *mother*, could make a festal show of so painful "a parting of the ways" as marriage. That a woman should give her child—the little tender nursling, reared, tended, beloved—to a stranger's care and keeping, and yet make merry over it and assemble friends and strangers indiscriminately to rejoice with her, not for "finding what she had lost," but losing what she had found.

Perhaps if her aunt had been making a love match, had shown herself happy and proud and content, Sâba would have accepted romance as the natural outcome of a woman's nature; have looked on blush and smile and tear with wonder yet with belief. But no such reason existed for this marriage as the love that makes all else of life—unimportant. It seemed to promise no happiness; to be the mere arrangement of convenience and indifference. And to Sâba it was a horrible mockery. That she could speak nothing of her feelings because of the shame she felt at their cause was an added trial. It was always easier for her to blurt out a truth, however unpleasant, than to palter with it.

She would sit silent amidst eager discussion, or turn suddenly away from bridal satins and laces, and when asked why she did not evince a girl's natural interest in such things, only close her pale lips on unuttered words. What use to speak? It was too late now to alter anything, and if Aunt Theo was determined to carry it through there was nothing to be said.

All through that lovely springtime she lived a daily agony—grew frail and white and shadowy once more. Lost interest in everything, and being naturally much overlooked in the multitude of other important matters concerning the household, fretted silently and perhaps selfishly for what meant her own forthcoming loss. It was all very foolish, but it was her first *great* sorrow. She had battled with many shadowy enemies, now she faced a real foe. Every time she looked at her aunt's lovely face, or heard her voice with its unflinching tenderness, she longed to fly from the house and hide herself away till all was over. Till this second death and second funeral had passed into things that are no more. She tried to take herself to task for so selfish a love, but she was too young to know the blessedness of sorrow or appreciate its lessons. She only felt it, and hated it the more for the pain of the feeling.

As if to throw her more upon herself and her endured misery, the exciting events of the past months had come to an abrupt standstill.

"Electra" had dropped her altogether. Dorian Giles was in Paris. Ada Kirkmann had been ailing and her grandmother took her away to Brighton. She had invited Sâba, but with that obstinacy which clings to what is painful sooner than lose the object of the pain, nothing would induce her to leave home. There would be long blank months to come when that beloved presence would be no longer seen or heard. Time enough then to talk of change of scene and air. But not now should day or hour be willingly marked as separation. Yet the girl's own suffering had its counterpart in the silent cold endurance facing a far greater ordeal. The two hearts fought their respective battles on their own secret battle-ground. To Theo Heavysage the conflict was no new thing. She had fought out a worse one and conquered, or thought she had conquered. But for Sâba's self-evident misery she would have met the

approaching trial with passive equanimity, but the sight of that white young face was both reproach and pain. It hurt her almost to anger that she should be so loved; should stand for youth's first "idol worship," and yet know herself cowardly and contemptible.

She wished Sâba would go away for a time, but the girl's "No, I cannot; please don't ask me," had silenced Mrs. Kirkmann's persuasions and prevented those of her aunt. Yet she resented the spirit of that refusal, because it made her less and less sure of her own strength. She wore her own hard-won composure as one wears armour unproved and untried, wondering if it will stand the strain of coming battle. She threw herself feverishly into all possible excitements and occupations—parties, visits, shopping, the theatre, the opera.

On one eventful night Dr. Danebury took a box for 'Faust' and invited Sâba to join them. His eldest sister played chaperon. The thought of seeing Gounod's masterpiece almost compensated Sâba for the annoyance of the company with whom the enjoyment must be shared. The *fiancé* and his sister called for her aunt and herself in a brougham. Sâba wore the usual black and white, but her aunt had put on a lovely trousseau gown of filmy net and lace, and a diamond necklace (a gift from the said *fiancé*) circled her white full throat. She looked very lovely—too lovely to please Sâba. She hated to see those greedy male eyes devouring that beauty, or hear those impassioned tones murmuring at her aunt's ear.

But the girl had not reckoned with the treat in store for herself, still less with the passionate awakening of hitherto unstirred emotions. There is that in the Faust story and the Faust music which appeals resistlessly to every human heart. Not even an unmusical, or ignorant, or indifferent ear can listen to that great drama unmoved.

To Sâba Macdonald with her quick impulses, her sensitiveness to impressions and her intense love of music, it was all a living wonder. She sat from the first bar of the overture to the closing duet of the first act, like one entranced. Here at last was life, love, desire, sorrow, suitably interpreted by artist and the dramatist. It was all *real*—painfully so. It no longer jarred on artistic sensibilities as the *Trovatore* had done. She was older. She understood music a thousand times better, and loved it a thousand times more. Faust stood to her as first ideal

of a lover, and Mephistopheles as the splendid daring incarnation of living sin. Margu rite seemed shadowy by comparison, and the other figures in the story were only—figures. She knew nothing of operatic “stars,” nor did she care. The music and its interpreters appealed solely on their own merits. As each act closed she shrank back further into the obscurity of the box, refusing to speak. She suffered intensely, and yet she would not have foregone one note, one scene, one throb of the tumultuous pain and sweetness that racked her heart and nerves. She *lived* for once as she had dreamt of living. The world about her sank into darkness. This was life—this splendour of youth and passion, this torrent of wild emotion, this longing and despair, this splendid sinning and tragic punishment; this remorse and death.

She was physically worn out before the conclusion. The tempest of applause made her feel faint. The sight of those bowing figures hurt her like a blow. To tear them from their splendid tragedy into the cold every-day reality of stage puppets playing for an audience, seemed an artistic affront. She covered her eyes so that Mephisto’s scarlet figure and Margu rite’s white robes and Faust’s velvet mantle should not hurt her by their advertised masquerade.

Oh! for silence and darkness and a fallen curtain, and the soft emptying of the house to hushed footsteps—for anything that should not have jarred upon that last wonderful illusion; upon those last magnificent notes, upon the alternating wail of despair and hope!

A hand touched her—Dr. Danebury’s hot, coarse hand.

“Well, little girl, did you like it?”

“*Like it?*”

S ba lifted outraged eyes and mutinous lips. She shook off his hand almost fiercely.

“One doesn’t *like* a thing like that!” she said. “One *feels* it.”

“S ba is very artistic and emotional,” murmured her aunt. “It is best to leave her to herself.”

CHAPTER XXI.

How I thanked her for that comprehension, and even more for the tender kiss, the soft hand-pressure, the whispered, "I won't come to your room to-night, Sába."

It was well she did not. Well that no other eye could see the tempestuous, storm-wracked fury released from its long clasp on meekness and convention, set free by that maddening music and all the feelings it had aroused.

Only to that poor fury the drama disposed itself in a new form. Marguérite was giving herself to a Mephistopheles of her own choosing, and Faust the lover and beloved was banished for ever. How could she? Oh! how could she? For at last I had had a glimpse of love and its meaning; its splendid possibilities; its tremendous force; its overwhelming passion, risking all, heeding nothing, seeing nothing, but the one creature it craved for its own. Was this what love meant, or was it some selfish form of it glorified by man? For were not the drama and the music so fitly wedding it, both the work of men?

Could a cup of such divine bliss as that from which Marguérite had drunk ever be held to mortal lips? Could words so passionate as those of Faust be ever heard by mortal maid? Could life—even for a brief year, month, day—hold joy so intense as the joy that had palpitated like a living thing through that love scene to-night?

Trembling, weeping, exulting, and then abashed, Sába paced her room in alternate ecstasy and frenzy. At last the fit wore itself out. She thrust back imagining and wonder into her heart's depths. Such emotions were things apart from daily life and its duties. By to-morrow that *ache* would have gone. The throbbing melodies would have ceased to haunt her with this nameless pain. These feelings that had crushed their way triumphantly through a virgin forest as yet untrodden would be banished

to the limbo from whence they had sprung. To-morrow she would be herself once more. This strange raging fever and all its accompanying desperation would have reached its crisis, and passed.

To-morrow!

Oh! how many to-morrows there were in life, and how awful it seemed to know nothing of what they must or might bring! To live in an artificial environment; to do nothing naturally or with the simple spontaneity of primitive forces; to be prisoned, shackled, chained; to want to know so much, and have no time or opportunity for learning!

A few deep sobs, a momentary falling on her knees, and trying in the old dim way to appeal to the old dim—nothingness. Then she grew calmer—forced back the tears, mocked at the emotion.

Truly, if external things affected her so strongly, it was unwise to crave them. Better the ignorance, the silence, the peace of the chimney corner, than these tempestuous visions of the impossible.

Fate plays strange tricks with such temperaments as Sâba Macdonald's. Had she more right to be happy or expect happiness to come to her than any other of the puppets set a-playing on this world's stage? Her inner loneliness, however pathetic to herself, affected no other personality, was not even unusual; for every soul is lonely. Only some never wake up sufficiently to recognise the fact.

* * * * *

She put aside the tormenting visions; the beauty that hurt and haunted; the possible joys to come. Down fell the curtain of sleep upon the tired brain. She woke, nerved once more to a long parting, and a long heart-ache.

* * * * *

"It will be next month; next week."

"It will be to-morrow."

"It *is* to-day."

Sâba's journal told only such brief tales of the passage of time. Perhaps that time was so vivid, or its associations so painful, that she did not care to give them audience in her court of record.

"*It is to-day*," heralded a phase in woman's life usually called "The happy event." Of the long talk

on that momentous wedding eve, of the real "good-bye" then uttered, the girl made no entry. There was no need. Scored deep in her heart, deep as pain and sad as tears lay that memory. Sweeter than all others, because neither made secret of their love, their sorrow, and the bitter sense of loss to come—that loss which to youth looks so irreparable because it ranks first.

It is only when such loss comes again and again, and one finds that the ranks still close up, and life can still hold consolations, that one ceases to agonise over each "good-bye," each "parting of the ways."

Sâba awoke to the memory of an exacted promise. "You will make no scene; you *will* control yourself—for my sake. Don't make things harder than they are already."

She had promised. She meant to keep that promise.

It was easy to efface herself until the time to dress; easy to find interest in the preparations—the busy men fixing the awning extending over the steps, the wedding breakfast, the cake, the flowers, the arrival of bouquets for Ada and herself. It was amusing to watch her grandfather fussing and worrying, and counting champagne bottles, with a careful hint of how many glasses each contained, and her grandmother in a demi-toilette of morning gown and new bonnet, awaiting the moment to don pearl-grey satin and lace mantle. Her aunt was not visible. She had breakfasted in her own room where a new and impressive trunk with a new name on the label haunted Sâba's vision; that room where a figure in snowy bridal robes would look farewell to its old self in the familiar mirror; the room sacred to a hundred memories, confidences, sorrows, and joys, which she would leave behind with the old life.

* * * * *

The dressmaker who had made her wedding gown came to dress Aunt Theo, and Rachel gave her attention to me. The bridesmaids were to wear white grenadine over pink silk slips, wreaths of apple blossom and tulle veils. Their bouquets were white and pink to match the dresses.

"You do look nice, miss," murmured Rachel approvingly, as she stood back after fixing my veil. "You must go into your grandma's room and see yourself."

"I wonder if Miss Ada has arrived?" I answered indifferently.

"It's terrible early to have a wedding," complained Rachel. "Eleven o'clock at the church. I do wish it had been 'alf an hour later. The bookays are downstairs, miss, and 'ere's your gloves. You look quite grown-up in that dress, I declare. I shouldn't wonder if I 'ad to dress you for your own weddin' one of these days."

"I hope not," said I quickly. "Besides, if ever I marry—which I'm sure I never shall—I'll take good care to have the quietest and simplest wedding possible. I call to-day's affair an ordeal."

"Do you, miss," said Rachel, surveying me still with an eye to distant "effects." "Well, that's strange for a young lady to say. Mostly they loves a fussy weddin'. Lots of people to see 'em, and to see the presents and make it lively like. But some'ow you never *do* seem to me like a h'ordinary young lady. You take things too serious for your age, miss. You should try and be a bit younger like."

I made no answer. It seemed absurd to argue; more absurd to be dressed up in this "ball-room" fashion so early in the morning. Then I went downstairs to look at myself, and to be criticised.

As far as the toilette was concerned, it was pronounced satisfactory, but my hair, my pallor, my thinness were loudly lamented. However, Ada's arrival and then that of Sara Tollemarche, changed the subject. We all stood in grandmamma's room waiting the appearance of the bride herself. Sara, a splendid and important vision, worthy of her post as chief bridesmaid, with charge of gloves and bouquet; Ada, lovely as a fairy, with her golden hair and sweet young face; Sâba Macdonald, pale, sullen, tempestuous; a smouldering fire in her dark eyes, a sense of shame and disgust in her heart.

"The carriages are here," observed mamma, who had been sweeping lavender silk skirts to and fro between the window and the long mirror; now surveying us, now herself; now giving me advice as to how to behave and walk and look, and again admiring Sara Tollemarche, or Ada, and wishing in her heart that her own unfortunate daughter resembled either. But at last came the expected rustle, and Aunt Theo swept in, a vision of satin and lace; her lovely face white almost as her gown, and her eyes shadowed and dark with signs of last night's tears. But the lace folds of her veil were mercifully disguising, and

her train and bouquet and the general effect of that enviable thing, a bridal *toilette*, kept personal remarks at a discreet distance. Her mother kissed her effusively, and ejaculated fond and tender phrases, and pulled out the folds of her train, assuring her she made the loveliest bride of the family. A momentary threatening of sentiment was averted by grandpapa dashing in to know what we were all waiting for? The carriages were there, and the usual crowd of butcher boys, nursemaids, and London idlers, to whom any ceremony connected with birth, marriage, or burial seems to appeal irresistibly.

"You had better go, Sara," said my aunt. "I will give you five minutes in advance."

"I will see to your train as we fall in at the porch," said her friend. "Now remember, children, I follow the bride; you both follow me."

"Why don't you start, Eliza?" demanded grandpapa, "and Jane too? It's almost time for me, and you have to send back the carriage."

I touched my aunt's arm as I passed her. "Kiss me," I entreated. "I want your *last*, before—he——"

She bent down. Our lips met. We said nothing. That was my farewell to all that had been.

Into the carriage, into the streets and the sunshine; into the church of the Rev. Arthur Rattley, which was the parish church, and, therefore, sorely against grandpapa's wishes, had to be the one where the marriage took place!

It was full of people, of excited faces, of grand dresses. The organ was playing, and afar off I caught sight of the bridegroom, fidgeting and moving from place to place. And his sisters were there, and the Gloucester Terrace contingent of Anglo-Indians. The familiar faces of Mrs. Vandrupp and Mrs. Kirkmann seemed to flash out of a mist of unreality. Dorian Giles was there, and I fancied I saw "Electra"—spectator, not guest, on this occasion. And so for a space of time that might have been long or short, we stood waiting. I heard some one say it was past eleven o'clock, and I noted the Rev. Arthur and his curate at the altar, and for an instant a wild mad hope rushed to my brain. Something had happened! She had changed her mind. She would not come. There would be no wedding!

Alas! that hope was short lived. A sound of wheels,

an excited whisper from Sara Tollemarche, and then the white-veiled figure came in and stood amongst us a moment, while the organ pealed, and heads turned, and a general hush of admiration and expectation seemed to fill the place. Then mechanically I found myself moving on behind Sara Tollemarche; behind that tall, graceful figure with its bent head; behind grandpapa pompous and important; behind all that had meant my life's pride and joy.

The organ ceased. There was a second or two of dead silence, in which I saw grandpapa fall back and that other hateful figure take his place. Then—slow and solemn as warning of ill, came a voice:

"I require and charge ye both as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed——"

I felt myself shiver, and caught Ada's alarmed glance.

Was this the marriage service? These solemn, awful words, this entreaty for truth, this open declaration that such a union as was now being contracted was a sin and a mockery!

Once again the wild strain beat in my brain. "Oh, how *can* she! How can she go through with it!"

More words. A vow repeated. Hands clasped; the ring, the plighted troth, the solemn declaration: "Those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder."

"Whom God hath joined——"

Was this God's doing? Did He bless and consecrate such sacrifices?

"Let us pray."

We were on our knees with bent heads—a lovely picture, I doubt not, of flowing robes, and floating veils, of sweet abashed maidenhood, and proud triumphant man!

The choir sang. There were more words—parrot phrases of the Rev. Arthur, pompous and ascetic as ever. Then it was all over, and she was on his arm, and we were watching her sign her name in a great book, and people pressed their way in and congratulated and joked, and laughed; and the organ pealed out the "Wedding March." Dr. Danebury gave his wife his arm. His wife!

* * * * *

All that followed is a confused sense of noise, laughter, feasting, health drinking and speech making.

If Sâba Macdonald took any part in it all, it was purely mechanical. The stage was so full and the figures so numerous that one lifeless and silent mummer was surely unnoticeable. But a last trial was awaiting her. The glance that said "come" had perhaps read more of strain and courage than she herself guessed.

"No, Sara; no, mamma—only Sâba."

So it was Sâba who watched deft fingers remove the bridal veil, and unfasten the orange blossoms; Sâba who sat dumb and tearless while they changed bridal satin for the "going-away" gown; Sâba who looked at the old familiar room and the sweet face that would know it no more; Sâba to whom those sad eyes turned, tearless as her own, speaking a dumb farewell.

Sâba who heard someone—was it herself—cry wildly, "I have kept my word. Oh, let me go—let me go!"

* * * * *

For how long I had lain prostrate on that bed, veil and wreath and dress all crushed and broken, as my own heart felt crushed and broken, I can never remember. But I had seen enough, heard enough, endured enough. I was only conscious that the long dreaded had at last happened. She was—gone.

She could never be the same Aunt Theo. We would never share the same room, the same confidences. All was changed. She had gone out of my life into one in which I should have no part or share.

"Gone out of my life."

Grown-up wisdom will smile at the absurdity of all this grief over such a simple thing as a wedding. Smile if I try to put into words any sense of that awful *blank* loneliness I endured—the effort to face the situation with the commonplace resignation shown by those who stood in far closer relationship than my own. But the griefs of youth are very terrible to the young. All the more so for being new and strange, and but half comprehended in the light of life's discipline.

I only know that when Sâba Macdonald is old, and her face lined, and her hair white, she will still be able to go back to that day and hour; to feel once more that girl's agony of hopelessness; to look once more at that shivering figure shaken with dry sobs, conscious only of being *bruised*, and crushed, and helpless; to ache once more with that

old heart-ache, and cry out again on life's remorseless teaching, as if such things were still of yesterday. So there must have been something very real in it all—as real as the girl's own life. For this Sâba Macdonald is no mere creature of fiction; no puppet of imagination whose strings are pulled at will so that she may entertain, or amuse. She lived once as she has tried to show herself living, and was just as foolish and irrational, as impulsive and visionary, as afraid of pain, as eager for happiness, as these pages would have you believe.

* * * * *

The door opened softly, and showed that prostrate figure of finery and wretchedness to other pitying eyes. A light hand touched Sâba's shoulder; a voice called her name. She stirred, and lifted her dazed, swollen eyes to the sweet face above her.

“You, Ada? What is it?”

“They are wondering what has become of you. I said I would go and see. Everyone has gone now, except grandmamma and myself. Shall I help you change your dress?”

I sat up, suddenly conscious of bridesmaid's attire and the recklessness that had spoilt it. My veil was torn, my wreath crushed and out of shape. I felt limp and cold and utterly wretched.

I dragged myself to the side of the bed, and Ada unfastened the filmy tulle, and removed the flowers, and then helped me into my everyday black dress. There were no questions and no remarks until these matters were concluded.

“Now you look more like yourself. Won't you come downstairs? or would you rather come home with us? Grandmamma thought you might prefer it. She told me to ask you.”

“Oh, *yes!*” I exclaimed, clutching eagerly at any possible diversion of thought; anything that would take me out of this circumscribed sphere of loss and loneliness. To-day—to-night—must be lived through, fought with. To-morrow would see the house swept and garnished, and in its right mind. The old routine of meals and music, the old humdrum teas and card parties. The old chatter of the “*burra mem-sahibs*” who came to gossip and congratulate, while their knitting-needles clacked, and their

rusty old heads wagged over tit-bits of scandal past or present. The old life, but with no Aunt Theo in it—her room closed and silent, her belongings removed, her presence only a memory, not an expectation. How to face it, live through it, endure it?

In these last months as child life had glided into that of girlhood, as mind had ripened, and intelligence deepened, and the heart-hunger grown more passionate and more peremptory, we had become close friends and confidantes. The difference of years had seemed less apparent, because my eager soul was ever set in advance of actual time. I had read, thought, and talked myself into a companionship such as love and sympathy made easy. So much greater my loss now!

* * * * *

How kind they were, Mrs. Kirkmann and Ada. How little they said, except what was just right and helpful to say!

“In three years ‘she’ would be back again. Did I know? Oh, yes! That was a promise and quite certain. And grandmamma was going to Scarborough almost immediately. And perhaps they would be there too. Scarborough was lovely—a place of wild seas and bracing air. It would do me all the good in the world. There was talk of a furnished house; of sharing it together and taking Rachel. Ada and I would thus be under the same roof for two months.”

If anything could have meant consolation at that time, the thought of being with these sweet kindly souls meant it. It would have been worse than ungrateful not to respond; not to try and seem glad. To push painful memories into the background and remember that each life has its own claims, and its own duties. How could I have supposed that my exacting love was capable of coercing another fate, simply because it hurt me to be parted from it!

So with the old wise tenderness I knew, came spoken words that healed, and gentle counsel that braced my bruised nerves and energies once more. I was made to feel that in certain sorrow lurks a certain selfishness; that the more it is indulged the more harmful does it become. Life meant a far wider field for action than first youth could give it. Experience was a teacher wiser than itself. A hard schoolmaster, perhaps, but the only one Providence had deemed best fitted for the task.

In the summer dusk, when friendly darkness hid the

tears that at last had ceased to hurt, Sâba and her two friends sat together, and she knew they had done their best to comfort her. That they did not succeed at once was scarcely to be wondered at. She was not demonstrative, but she felt very deeply, and her affections were not lightly given, nor often. It would be a long, long time (she herself called it "never") before she could grow accustomed to this loss and this parting. Yet she knew to-night that it was part of the education of life—her education. Its complexity faced her unaided by helpful maxims, or even repeated experiences of third- or fourth-hand sorrows. No other individual's suffering can ever be as keen as our own, because happily we are debarred from feeling it. Still, the fact that we don't stand alone in an experience is helpful after a time.

The claims of existence are paramount. Daily life, even if attended by hardships, is one of the greatest helps to a philosophical endurance of the ills it brings.

To have to eat and drink and sleep, and rise up, and dress and undress, may seem a heartless mockery. But they are obligations forced upon us by the mere persistence of the life-factors that serve us as knowledge of ourselves. To take off one's clothes and go to bed, and blow out the candle, and lie alone in the darkness confronting a grief that the day has pushed aside may seem pure bathos; but such civilised exactions of life have a saving grace of their own. The needs of the body have not unfrequently proved the salvation of the mind.

So it was a worn-out, passive, but resigned creature who took up the burden of Sâba Macdonald's life, and carried it homewards in the starlit dusk of that eventful day.

To rebel at fate was so useless that the rebel hadn't even the conviction of its own good reasons for setting fate at defiance. An iron hand forced it into submission; an iron heel ground its puny force to powder. "Thou *canst* not," was as sure a declaration as any in the decalogue. However vivid and intense and strong life was, yet far more intense and far stronger was the power that ruled it.

* * * * *

I dragged myself wearily back to the house and gazed at the forlorn aspect of the disorganised rooms.

My mother and grandmother were still talking over

events between stifled yawns and unconcealed fatigue. They called me in to scold me for the careless fashion in which my bridesmaid's attire had been left. I listened passively, hardly hearing them.

"I can't imagine what you've done to yourself. You look quite ill!" complained my mother.

"I'm only tired. I should like to go to bed."

So they bade me good-night in their usual formal manner, and decided I had better not disturb my grandfather. Then I went away to long desired solitude, passing with a shudder that closed door behind which lay the sweetest memories of my life.

For three years I must wait for a renewal of happiness, that even then would only mean a ghost of its former self.

Three years!

I said it over and over again, trying to picture change in myself and in that worshipped idol of girlhood. How would those years pass for both? If one could but know! If even a hint or sign were given! But no. Life meant only barriers and prison doors. Something that always opposed one's desires or shut in one's freedom.

Three years! All that I had heard or seen of marriage set those years to mystery and to change.

Brides became wives, and wives mothers. Suppose Aunt Theo—

I shut away the thought with a spasm of disgust. That lovely, radiant figure could not link itself to such an undesirable catastrophe. To come back to the old girlhood's home, and bring with her sons or daughters that would bear their hateful father's likeness, lay fresh claims on liberty—the idea was horrible!

Before I went to sleep I took up the prayer-book I used on Sundays. I turned to the Marriage Service, and read once more the words I had heard that day. When I closed the book a new terror was added to the old pain.

"It is such a trap—such a close, fast, cruel trap. Life, liberty, all the best and sweetest things caught and held—never to get loose again! And oh! if one isn't *sure*—sure of one's self, of *him*? She wasn't sure; she didn't pretend to love him. Sheer unhappiness drove her to do it, and now it can never be undone. Never—never—never!"

I flung the book aside.

"Oh!" I thought, "if ever I meet that man, who drove

her to do this thing, I shall know what to say to him. At his door lies the sin. But it is *she*—*she* who will pay the penalty, with every day of her life !”

And once again through blinding tears I seemed to gaze at that white figure, the cold stony face, the deep misery of those tender eyes.

“Those whom God hath joined——” But this was no God’s work. It was a compact, unblessed, unhallowed. And yet it was a compact from which there was no possible escape.

Oh ! what would those three years mean !

END OF BOOK II.

CHAPTER I

BOOK III

THE WOMAN'S LESSON

BOOK III
THE WOMAN'S LESSON

CHAPTER I.

It is on looking back at this period of my life and these memories that I feel how unnatural I must appear.

I seem to have no sense of duty ; I seem to give scant affection to those who stood in the closest relation to my rebellious self. All of love I had to bestow was lavished on one person, and it appears to have been lavished on her solely because she alone gave me sympathy and comprehension. I make no mention of her virtues, or lovely qualities of mind ; or gifts ; or graces. I loved her simply because she was herself, and because I could not help it ; yet I have lived long enough to know that very wise and very excellent people have no better reason to give for love than just—my own.

The flower springing from the dark mould of its birth-place turns gladly to welcome the sun. In like manner does the young heart turn to the warmth of human love, and the sweetness of human sympathy.

No doubt there are excellent reasons for loving one's parents, but some parents don't allow themselves to be loved. They keep a stern face of authority and austerity before their children as discipline—and perhaps, in after life, wonder why they are not cherished and beloved by the very natures they have chilled and disciplined. Love seeks some manifestation ; asks some return. Failing to receive either it shows itself a plant of stunted growth—a poor wintry thing, without colour or fragrance or beauty.

This picture at which my mind looks back is the picture of such a plant—and its soil is a human heart. But it

seems never to have grown to beauty or fragrance save under the kindly sun of one brief year; after that, it shrank back into the gloom of the brooding branches around, and life for it became mere endurance of existence.

Yet, for fourteen years "myself," as individual, had evolved from surrounding effects of discipline and coercion. The habit of criticising family and household had not been eradicated. I stated at the commencement of my history that I lived two lives—my own, and that of the self I watched; the self that had dropped into very uncongenial soil and was merging into equally uncongenial environment. It seemed of different pattern from that of the family circle; a fragment whose shape and material refused to fit into their patchwork. Of these two selves I discovered that one was old, while the other was young; one soared above discipline and knew its authorised instructors to be faulty, and imperfect; the other grovelled in fear under the rod of tyranny and tried to believe that obedience was childhood's first law.

But belief was one thing—and action another.

Chance may, or may not, be the ruling goddess of human lives, but in any case she enjoys a merry game with them. She plays pitch and toss with destiny, and turns and twists circumstances to suit her own erratic fancies; she brings about tragedy or comedy with equal disregard to personal convenience, and sometimes acts as conjurer and forces big events out of absurdly small receptacles.

All of which is discursive and has little to do with the Scarborough holiday, unless that is looked upon as the chance beginning of a tragedy.

It was pleasant enough at first promise. The Kirkmanns had chosen the North Sands as quieter and healthier than the more fashionable side of the Yorkshire health resort, and my mother and grandmother and self shared a furnished house with them. Rachel accompanied us, and Mrs. Kirkmann brought one of her own servants. Ada and I had a certain amount of holiday tasks to perform, and the piano and myself had hours apportioned to each other. Apart from these things there was plenty of liberty and enjoyment—bathing and boating, and walks and drives. Ada and I rarely went to the Spa beloved of grandmamma and mamma. We loved our own side of

the town, and our own idling; our talks with the boatmen; our hours on the water or on the sands.

Ada was passionately fond of the sea. We had discovered an old sailor who had a delightful little boat and used to take us for long sails when the weather was favourable; for those North Channel seas are apt to get rough and unpleasant at change of wind or tide. Still, the weather had favoured us so long that we lost all thought of change or danger.

One sultry August afternoon we had made our way down to the landing-stage to discover our old "salt" and go for a sail. Ada had taken it into her head that we must have the boat; it would be cool out at sea—on land the heat was stifling.

Old Jack Batten threw his weather eye at lowering clouds and glassy water; he pronounced the aspect "uncertain"—not to say "threatenin'."

But I had never seen Ada so wilful. There came an after-time when I wondered *why* that special day and hour and mood should have seemed prophetic. She coaxed the old sailor to give in to her fancy, and I naturally followed her whim and herself into the boat, though I saw little prospect of a sail owing to absence of wind. But presently came a little fleeting gust, and the glassy sea rippled and grew frothy. The horizon line was clear, though the inky blue of the sky above looked ominous. But the little boat we loved danced and floated along, and the land was always near as refuge.

Suddenly a flash of lightning shot across the wide space of water. Swift in answer to its summons pealed the thunder. With one wild heave the unquiet sea lifted the boat, and set it tossing amidst frills of whiteness. The wind came up and caught the fluttering sail; the boat was on its side in a moment. Old Jack roared to us to sit still. He loosened the sail rope and the little boat righted itself; but the wind was in a wild mood and caught the loosened sail and set it flying. I saw Ada's hat and Ada's golden hair suddenly flash upwards against it. Disregarding the old boatman's warning, she had sprung to her feet. The next moment her place was empty.

I called out to Jack Batten, but he was busy with the sail. With a frantic shriek I pointed to the water, tossing and heaving all around the tossing boat. For

a second's space something else was tossed amidst froth and foam—a white figure; a mesh of golden hair. Then the full force and fury of the hurricane smote the little craft.

Blinding rain—and pealing thunder—and in the waves—nothing!

* * * * *

I seemed caught up into that whirling confusion of wind and waters; I passed from terror to numbing horror as we waited vainly for the sea to toss its unconscious prey once more into sight. It was all so sudden, that before despair had hushed me into calmness, all help had become impossible. One moment had seen Ada living—laughing—by my side; another—and life claimed her no more.

I sat there stunned and passive; wondering if it was not all some nightmare fancy; wondering what I should feel when I awoke? The rain fell in drenching showers and the spray dashed over the sides of the little vessel. But mental shock had rendered me impervious to physical discomfort. I was never conscious of Jack Batten's efforts to get the boat ashore, or get me out of her on to dry land; never aware of how narrowly we escaped sharing the same fate as the lost girl. My brain refused active service. But at last I was on land—wet, cold, shivering—and *alone*.

The old man's voice sounded in pathetic lamentations over the accident and the "pretty dear"—"drowned over there all of a minnit." With that foolish persistence of senility he kept on wishing he hadn't "let her persuade of him"; wishing he hadn't ever gone; and asking who was to break the news to her "grandma"

I stared at him in dull cold fashion. Was it his fault—or Ada's—or both? What was I to say?

Like one in a dream I turned homewards. In some after-time the scene stood out from that tangled impression; from the sense that one hour, one brief sixty minutes of time had sufficed to change the face of the world for that loving heart waiting in placid expectation for a return that might never be.

She said very little. Of blame, not a word. Had she not always known that the parting *was to be*? Only its nature and period were hidden. After the first shock of hearing, she grew strangely calm.

Nothing could be done. It might be a long or short time before the drowned girl's body drifted ashore; till

then the loss had to be faced as a calamity irreparable. Another of those blows struck surely and cruelly at the defenceless citadel of human affections.

My first wild grief was calmed by such an example of fortitude, and the next day, when a sad little procession wound its way from the shore, and the sweet face looked back at us calm and smiling as if the kiss of death had held no terrors, I shed no more tears. Ada knew the great mystery now. Grief could not recall her; nor pain touch, nor plea prevail. She had left our world for ever. True enough had been her own belief in an early death; only it had borne no sense of tragedy such as this.

For her the peace—for us the sorrow.

* * * * *

The curtain drops on this scene, and I know that the next two years of Sâba's life ought to have been happy in that they held no history. Either she was indifferent or neglectful—or too well disciplined.

Every mail brought a long letter from her aunt and every mail she answered it. One day those letters were destined to come back to her; one day a woman's sad eyes were to read the outpourings and dreams of a girl's heart; to watch its progress from one state of consciousness to another; to gaze through the veil of years at that mystery of awakening; to be hazily conscious that that girl was herself, and yet look upon her as a stranger might have looked.

Into those letters crept many little details and confidences, though from them all one name was distinctly eliminated.

Sâba never mentioned her new uncle, nor asked for word of his welfare.

She told of changes in Bayswater; of the new shop Whiteley had opened in the Grove; of other notable improvements in that notable thoroughfare. She told of the new music-room and the new quartet party with a Frenchman as leader, who was quick-tempered and irascible, and with whom her grandfather had to put up despite persistent squabbles. Time had also brought change into the circle of relationship. Margaret Parbury's oft-lamented extravagance had culminated in the old General's resolve to leave Rutland Gate. He had taken

a small house near Richmond Park, and the district being considered out of touch with London, we rarely saw or heard of them. The Kirkmanns had also left Pembridge Villas and gone to Hampstead; thus putting too great a distance between their present abode and the Square for anything but occasional visits. Sába was often invited for two or three days at a time, and those occasions made her life's chief pleasure.

There are few things more remarkable than the manner in which people drift in and out of acquaintance in London; how the friend of one season is forgotten the next; how different "sets" form, break up, and reform in fresh combinations.

The nineteenth century in its first fifty years was a child of slow and ponderous growth. Railways and telegraphs were still a little "modern" to the sitter in the chimney-corner; and that same chimney-corner was a thing of broad hobs and wide fireplace, and high brass fenders, through which no heat ever seemed to penetrate. Wall papers were hideous; furniture cumbersome and ugly; and fashions as atrocious as they were uncomfortable, by reason of hoops and bustles, and hooks and eyes that fastened *behind*. People who lived in one part of London did not often visit those who lived in another if it was a question of cab or omnibus. There was no underground railway, and the vision of the "Twopenny Tube" had not even begun to haunt the brain of its embryo inventor. Early dinners and six o'clock teas, and coffee and wine at ten were the ordinary rules of living.

The receptions of Lady Medora had been quite out of the common, and as eagerly attended as those of Lady Blessington, on whose model they were founded. Every year an old tide ebbed out and a new one flowed in. New faces, new geniuses, new prodigies made their bow and sunned themselves for their little hour of fame in "Cleopatra's" brilliant presence. But alas! "Cleopatra's" orb of light was suddenly extinguished; the stern summons that no excuse may evade sounded one day in that envied *salon*. Crown and sceptre were laid aside, and in more dignified trappings than life had ever owned, the celebrated Medora went forth from her beautiful home never to return again. With her death a great blank fell; the countless "wonders" and celebrities found themselves facing cold scrutiny and lonely hours. Society

lacked enthusiasm, and no leader of fashion displayed any avidity to take up the *rôle* of patroness of art. Dorian was very rich now, and having sold the lease of Lancaster Gate, had betaken himself to Paris.

"Electra's" second book had been killed by the reviewers. It was magnificently daring, and far cleverer than "Beyond the Uttermost," but it had only a brief career, and almost sent its publishers to bankruptcy. Ann Shottery, however, had sailed into quiet seas of public favour, and was acclaimed the "popular authoress" of the day.

All these things went into Sâba's letters, which had gradually become a weekly budget. Things musical were in closer touch also. She was taken regularly to the Popular Concerts and the Philharmonic. Heard Néruda, the wonderful lady violinist who had set London agog by her mastery of an instrument rarely chosen by feminine performers; had rare and valued glimpses of operatic "stars"—Patti, Nilsson, Titiens, Trebelli; contrasted "monster" orchestras of the Crystal Palace with the quiet perfection of St. James's Hall; grew sadly discontented with her own stunted powers, and yet gave patient hours to those Tuesday programmes. But she had joined a literature class, and balanced its delights against those inevitable disagreeables of which her life had full share. All this was told faithfully, and answered with the ready sympathy of old.

"But you are not living a *young* life, child," said one letter. "I never hear of friendship or companionship; of parties and amusements befitting your age."

Which, indeed, was true. Such things did not come in Sâba Macdonald's way. Her life seemed peculiarly lonely and peculiarly aloof from such things as go with youth and its gay indifference to sober realities.

But to Sâba realities were always paramount. Surface glitter had no charm for her, and the mere frothy acquaintanceships that passed for friendship with most girls of her age were esteemed as waste of time and shunned perseveringly.

She devoured books with even more avidity than of yore; feeding greedily on all sorts and conditions of literature, and nursing in her own mind a secret and fervent ambition that meant the greatly daring efforts of authorship on her own part.

"Some day"—"One day"—so ran the thought. Meanwhile, she analysed reasons for success and for failure. She knew "Electra's" third volume had been the occasion of her stumble on the road to fame; it was coarse and indelicate—an affront to manhood and to womanhood. Besides, "Electra" lacked entirely the supreme art of character delineation. Her people were mere "pegs" on which she hung her own opinions; by whose voice she aired her own grievances. The wide human sphere around neither quickened her imagination, nor touched her mental gifts with the one divine truth that "makes the whole world kin."

She merely suited her creations to her scheme of work. They had no virility, no appreciable existence apart from the little dramas she penned. And when the drama had been acted, the performers simply limped off the stage into forgetfulness. The audience cared neither for their performance nor themselves.

Sâba had felt sincerely sorry for that second failure because she had been called in again and again to hear its wonderful delineation of "men, minds and manners." She had known that money was running short and that the poor old Commander suffered sorely under neglect and indifferent food, and scanty "rations." But "Electra" was too absorbed in her work and schemes for success to think of anything else. The mention of Ann Shottery sent her into hysterics of rage. Nothing would induce her to believe that that unobtrusive little genius was quite incapable of the tricks and artifices to catch public attention so notably her own.

Sâba never dared mention that she met her occasionally. It would have resulted in a "scene" and the girl had a shrinking horror of scenes. They had not been infrequent in her strange unchildish life; they linked it with something very like contempt for those "set in authority" over her.

But "Electra's" second fiasco was a very serious one. She had spent every available penny she could secure or borrow in lavish advertising. When the book refused to "go" and the reviewers poured out contempt and ridicule, she knew that she had reached her "tether's end." The rope would stretch no further. The publishers declined to evince any more of that faith "which worketh miracles," and "Electra" and her poor old father faced absolute poverty.

The house in Brompton Square was given up. They removed to some dreary lodgings in Fulham, and were compelled to live on the poor old Commander's pension, aided by virulent efforts at journalism on the part of his "wonderful darter."

Once again locality meant banishment, and Sâba saw nothing of her quondam friends. If "Electra" had been less bigoted in her own belief in herself and her methods she might still have achieved distinction. But she had never taken kindly to advice, and therefore had to quit the field, beaten and sorely affronted; leaving it to younger—and possibly less deserving—rivals.

So had Time rung its changes. Everything was three years older; three years deeper in its groove; three years more trying in habit, temper and conservativeness.

A great generation of gifted men were flourishing and famous—Charles Reade, Nathaniel Hawthorne; Meredith, Kingsley, Trollope; Tennyson and Swinburne; Matthew Arnold, Darwin, Carlyle, Huxley and Tyndall. All these set against the two gods of Sâba's young idolatry—Dickens and Thackeray. She read of them and read themselves when possible, but lending libraries were not well stocked with deep reading. A score of trashy novels by an enterprising race of new women-writers would be bought and asked for, before one enquiry would be made for a book appertaining to real literature.

The close of '69 and dawn of '70 brought rumours and then declaration of the great war that makes history now; the history of an Empire that fell, and an Empire that rose; the history of hideous crimes and tragedies; of power dethroned and monarchy debased and cast into the dust of obloquy. All the horrors of sacrificed lives, death and destruction came to Sâba Macdonald as daily news, and daily discussion. Once it came set in a strange message and through a strange source.

"I am here, amidst ruin and revolution," it said; "a Nero watching the burning flames of my beloved city, and if not exactly performing a musical elegy to celebrate the event, I am at least committing my emotions to poetry. You will see it, or, rather, receive it one day. Our lives have drifted far apart, *Kindlein*, but I have not forgotten my Wonder-child."

Sâba read and laughed a little, and yet wondered why he should have remembered her at such a time. But it

was like him to tell her so *at* that time! Dorian, too, was posing for celebrity, and every admirer meant a reader.

Days—weeks—months—how like they were to one another, and how monotonous in their likeness. The Kirkmanns were growing old and feeble; their grandchild's tragic end had been a great blow, and in spite of spiritual philosophy the actual miss and want of that sweet young presence had come to mean a great blank in their lives.

Remembering the past talks and theories, remembering, too, a promise solemnly exacted and as solemnly given, Sâba wondered why it had been impossible to receive some sign of remembrance. For long after Ada's death she had looked and hoped for such a sign, but none came.

Against her own better judgment Mrs. Kirkmann had once been induced to attend a professional *séance*. However, the results were lamentable owing to a frivolous sceptic taking it into his head to suddenly strike a match while a sheeted figure was "materialising."

The Davenport Brothers had been proved frauds, and their host of imitators began to drop out of the field. Spiritualism as a faith was degenerating into spiritualism as a "fad." The young generation were getting too wide-awake, and slate-writing, table-turning, and "raps" were fast turning into things to be ridiculed and avoided.

Mrs. Kirkmann felt very much for Sâba's loneliness. Yet she knew enough of the girl's peculiarities of temperament to feel certain that friendship would be no casual thing. Either she must care very deeply, or be totally indifferent. Of the two the indifference was easier and safer. There was no young life at her grandparents', and a choice of companionship lay between the *mem sahibs* and Mrs. Kirkmann.

* * * * *

"Seventeen! Seventeen to-day!"

I said that to myself standing before grandmamma's long glass once more; regarding carefully and earnestly the more finished work of Nature represented by additional height and years.

Every birthday I had looked at myself with the same merciless criticism. Every birthday I had wondered if

any girl had ever been quite so ugly, so thin, so uninteresting-looking as Sâba Macdonald?

Every year I had wondered if anything was going to happen; if my life was ever to mean anything but the routine of grandpapa's house, and the passive acceptance of small duties and smaller interests.

It seemed unlikely. When I spoke to my mother she said it was all my father's fault; that he had kept on spending money in lawsuits or useless speculations, and was unable to give us a home.

When I asked if she did not miss him, she bade me mind my own business. I knew that I missed him; that I wanted him; that life would have been different with his breezy genial presence as part of it. Strict he had been, and quick of temper, but at least he was companionable, and loved books as much as I did myself.

Seventeen! The breakfast-bell disturbed my reverie, and reminded me I was a trespasser. Seeing the open door I had gone in for my natal-day's analysis. That warning bell cut it short.

I seemed to have grown taller; but certainly to have gained no beauty or grace or charm. If anything, I was thinner, and more angular. My hair was too heavy; my eyes too large; my expression too sombre and too grave. I turned away and entered the breakfast-room. I gave the usual morning greeting, received the usual morning "peck" and a brief "happy returns," accompanied by an envelope with "grandpapa's and grandmamma's good wishes." It contained a five-pound note—untold riches for Sâba Macdonald! Her first bank-note! Visions of books to be bought; of a new strong desk to hold the treasured Indian letters floated before her mind. Her thanks and smiles of delight were genuinely glad. Her mother's offering came next, and then—the unexpected delight of her Indian letter. The mail had suited itself to that birthday, and Aunt Theo's greetings were welcoming it.

I put the letter aside and began my breakfast. I always hated to read those precious communications unless I was by myself. Even more, I hated the obligation of sharing what was called "the news." At first my mother had insisted on reading them also, but in a raging rebellion against such intrusion I had written to my aunt and told her. She had then suggested that only a certain

portion of the letter was for "public" use; the remaining portion was Sâba's own, and should be respected as such. I got into sad disgrace, but I gained my point. I maintained that a letter was a sacred confidence, and that no third person had any right to intrude upon it unless the possessor wished. Fortunately, Aunt Theo wrote very regularly to grandmamma or my mother, and by this means I managed to preserve my own correspondence intact.

Grandmamma was engrossed in her own epistle for a few moments, then suddenly she gave a rapturous exclamation: "Oh! Barker! It is all safely over—and it is a little girl!"

I remember staring blankly at her, and feeling suddenly sick. They were all talking, exclaiming at the news. To me it was like a blow.

Aunt Theo was a mother! Aunt Theo had a girl-child. Her own. What should I count now against such a possession?

Then another meaning attached itself to the conversation. Of course, she could not come home in July. "Neal said she must wait a year"—"They were at Allahabad"—"She was going to Simla when she was stronger." All these scraps fell disjointedly from grandmamma's lips; all helped to build up afresh that barrier of separation I had hoped would be overthrown this year.

In two months she should have been home with us all again. Two months; and now they had stretched to twelve, and when that period was over she would return in such changed conditions that I scarcely seemed to want her; and she would not want me. She would have to give her love to her own little child as in duty and in nature bound. Sâba Macdonald was once more thrust into the cold; once more left with that sense of being nobody's particular care or object of affection.

They were talking to me.

"Are you ill? What is the matter?"

I started. "No—o—— At least, I have a headache—and I'm not hungry."

I tried to drink my coffee, but my lips trembled, and I could not swallow. I put down the cup.

"May I leave the room, please?"

Grandmamma nodded permission, and I seized my letter and hurried off to my own room.

There I read confirmation of the news for myself.

“ . . . I am glad it is a little girl, because it will remind me of *you*, Sâba, and when I bring her home you will love her for my sake, I am sure ; and we will make her happier, dear, than you and I have been.”

And so on. The regrets for not being able to come home ; the wonder as to how much I had grown or altered ; the answers to questions I had put, or news I had given ; fond messages ; entreaties to believe that my place in her heart was just the same—no new love or ties could ever alter her affection.

I folded the flimsy sheets together and replaced them in the envelope. There was nothing to be said or done. I had looked forward for three years to this meeting and Fate had decreed it was not to take place !

CHAPTER II.

I PUT on my hat and went downstairs.

It was eleven o'clock and a sunny May morning. Grand-mamma had gone round to Mrs. Vandrupp's with the news of her new grandchild. Mamma was at needle-work in the morning-room. I had projects of the Grove, and the purchase of Meredith's "Tragic Comedians." The shops were gay with summer fashions. Gardens and squares were aglow with honey-flame of laburnum, and rose and white of hawthorn boughs. Blue sky and sunshine overhead, and the dancing blood of seventeen in one's veins. Who could be quite unhappy—even if disappointment lay chill on one's heart ?

I turned into the book-shop and asked for Meredith's work. Of course they hadn't it. No self-respecting book-shop in Westbourne Grove ever kept such literature as Sâba Macdonald wanted ! They promised to order it, and while the man was taking down my name and address another customer entered. I glanced up and recognised the fair soft hair and charming face of Ann Shottery.

I greeted her eagerly. "Why it is nearly a year since I saw you !"

"I know," she said ; "I have been abroad. We had great difficulty in getting through Germany on account of the war. For a time we were almost prisoners. And how are you ? You must come and see us. We are

staying in Bayswater—Norfolk Terrace. Mother wants to take a house. But that's a question of time and research. Are you still in Pembridge Square?"

"Yes," I said, "and likely to remain there. I am so glad to see you again."

I was genuinely glad, for apart from Ada Kirkmann there was no one I should have cared for as a friend so much. But our acquaintance had been constantly interrupted since that memorable first meeting.

We left the shop together, made some purchases at Whiteley's, and then I walked back to her lodgings with her. We talked of "Electra," and wondered if she had really given up writing, and Ann told me of her own last work and of her intention to use incidents of German life and the war in her next book. I enjoyed the walk and the conversation doubly, coming as they did on the top of the morning's crushing disappointment.

I felt no longer a child beside her. I had read and thought and studied a great deal since our first meeting. We found we had similar likes and dislikes, and many tastes and feelings in common. Apart from all, she was so natural and unaffected that she exercised an inexpressible charm over me. My beauty-loving faculties rushed into service once more. It seemed impossible for me to care much for anyone who was not beautiful, or gifted. Ordinary personalities, especially ill-favoured ones, filled me with disgust, or left me indifferent. It was a most unfortunate peculiarity, but at this stage of Sâba Macdonaldism I craved only what pleased my æsthetic sense of beauty, and my passion for melody in sound or tone, poem or prose.

Ann Shottery was girl enough to understand girlhood, and woman enough to influence it; besides holding all those wonderful attributes of genius and success which appealed to me so powerfully. Two hours with her, and our talk together made life assume a different aspect. She shook me out of my morbid fancies and feelings. Her sunny optimism shamed my long indulged gloom and her way of putting everyone and everything at their best, as long as any "best" was possible, served me as a profitable example.

One wonders what would happen to certain natures if at some crucial stage of existence example did not influence them.

That seventeenth year was evidently Sâba Macdonald's moulding time. The passive misery and despondence of the three preceding it had left her physically and mentally unhinged—a prey to heart hunger, full of longing for that warm enfolding home atmosphere which had never yet come her way. Her tastes were simple enough, but the longing to be loved just because she was *herself*, to feel her outgoings and incomings interested somebody, had grown with each year of her life.

She had come to the conclusion that the fault must lie with herself. Yet when she met with warm response to her timid overtures, when she found that Ann Shottery was as ready to make friends as she to accept her friendship, she thought it must really be a case of the wrong environment. With the Kirkmanns there had been no difficulty, neither was there any in the present instance. But at home—if Pembridge Square could be called home—there always seemed a formal barrier opposed to any natural display of affection.

Before they parted that morning her new friend promised to bring her mother and call formally on the “powers that be,” so as to pave the way for future meetings. She also suggested that Sâba should share in the house-hunting expeditions.

“We must settle down before August,” she said, “for I have to commence work then. You don't know what trouble it is to find a suitable domicile, and then get it furnished and domesticised. Mother isn't strong enough to go about, but I should love to have you if you'll come. I have great ideas of an artistic interior, not absolutely dependent on 'rep suites' and walnut wood.”

“What a pity Dorian Giles isn't here! He was always lecturing people on their artistic ignorance. He used to talk to me about the beauty of sage green and Venetian reds—of the exquisite Japanese art that left a thing of beauty standing alone and unobtrusive, instead of crowding it up with a host of vulgar trifles.”

“Oh! Dorian Giles! I haven't seen him since his mother died. He went to Paris.”

“Yes, and is there still. He wrote to me the other day that he was going to publish a book of poems. When I first knew him he was writing a book—then a play. Now it is poetry. Do you think he is clever?”

“Amazingly clever! But I also think he has not

decided what line his talents are to take. He is a wonderful conversationalist, though inclined to say ridiculous or daring things for the mere sake of shocking straight-laced folk."

"A *poseur*, too, isn't he?"

"That goes without saying. But the world will hear of him some day, or I am much mistaken."

We parted then, and I went homewards in a more cheerful and hopeful frame of mind.

Grandmamma had a carriage that afternoon, and it being my birthday, gave me the treat of a drive to call upon Mrs. Stanley-Chope, of Gloucester Terrace, who was an aunt of Dr. Danebury's, and supposed to have intentions of making him her heir.

The "event" was of course the chief topic of conversation.

The wealthy aunt was a veritable Anglo-Indian—very stout, very curry-coloured, and very full of reminiscences of the glorious days before the Mutiny.

She and mamma and grandmamma talked an indiscriminate mixture of Hindustani and English, and made the usual laments over the bad cooking in England, and the impossibility of finding a cook who could boil rice, or be freed from the delusion that curry meant a yellow stew swimming in a vegetable dish.

From Gloucester Terrace we drove to the Park. The season was in its opening glories, and all the new fashions were flaunting themselves under the trees, and in the carriages that thronged the Row.

It was a brilliant scene, and I felt a not unnatural curiosity respecting a phase of life from which I was socially apart.

Were those gorgeously-dressed people happy? Did feasting and merry-making and entertaining, and all the so-called pleasures of society bring any more satisfaction than we humdrum outsiders could know?

The girls looked very prim and stiff sitting beside their mothers or chaperons in attitudes still reminiscent of the back-board. The young men who rode, or lounged, or sat about in the side-walks were quite as conscious of their own appearance, their own pretensions to good looks, their own part in the social pageant of Mayfair as were the maidens and matrons of this privileged *entourage*.

It seemed strange to me to look at the two opposing

forces and remember that the season's true and proper use was an amalgamation of suitable—or unsuitable—couples. Probably many now “on view” or under approval would be “arranged for” and united ere that season was over. Meanwhile the entangling force looked pretty enough, despite fashion, and sweet and meek and prim as was proper for the mid-Victorian girl to look.

Up and down, up and down went the parade. Once a small flutter of excitement and the command of a mounted policeman announced the coming of the Princess. I was all expectation. I had never seen that sweet and gracious person whose welcome the Laureate had sung in noble verse. Her face was familiar by reason of prints and photographs, but to see her in real flesh and blood was a joy my birthday had not heralded.

At last she came—lovely as a dream, with the sweet smile and gracious bow that has won all hearts. Truly that of Sâba Macdonald went down before her charm, and never swerved in its allegiance from that first hour of meeting. Once more she passed, having made the circuit of the Park, and it seemed to Sâba that her own wondering and admiring gaze caught that of a gracious semi-sovereignty, and that her involuntary homage met response that was really individual. But doubtless many other favoured mortals thought the same amidst that waiting rank of carriages. In any case, a sense of loyalty and enthusiasm hitherto a stranger to the little “Bush girl's” heart sprang to life, never to be extinguished in years that came after—long after—this seventeenth birthday.

We drove on, grandmamma fondly reminiscent of the “*Bund*” in Calcutta, where she had driven up and down with her own retinue of Indian servants, and received bows from the Governor-General, and various high official dignitaries who honoured the military and civil services by accepting high pay for unimportant duties.

For the last time the tired horse trotted languidly past the barracks and towards the Knightsbridge Gate. I was looking at the sauntering figures with a wondering sense of the numbers of people in the world who knew nothing of each other, or the crowd they help to swell. Quite suddenly a face flashed out of the many unknown faces with that odd sense of being familiar, and yet not clearly catalogued in memory, that marks the effects of time and absence.

I leant forward. The man paused beside the railing, and his eyes flashed recognition at the occupants of the carriage. Grandmamma's wandering gaze alighted on him, and she, too, gave a cry of recognition and called to the coachman to stop.

The stranger advanced and lifted his hat. I knew him then—it was Captain Elmore.

Grandmamma fired off a string of exclamations and greetings, and introduced mamma. I was not important enough for the ceremony, and though his eyes spoke remembrance they did not give recognition.

"And when did you return?" I heard grandmamma ask.

"I have only just come home," he said. "I was ill for a time in Egypt, and they insisted I should leave. But since then I have resigned the army."

"Oh! Altogether, do you mean?"

"Yes," he said. "I—well, to tell you the truth, Mrs. Heavysage, I have come into a fortune."

There was something in his tone I did not like. Not that it was boastful, but it held a note of triumph over defeat—as if one should say, "You see, I have bettered you after all!"

"A fortune! Really—I congratulate you. How lucky!"

"I suppose I ought to consider myself so." His voice was cold and harsh. "It came about unexpectedly enough, and—but permit me to re-introduce myself."

He took out his card-case, and offered her a card. She read it, and her dark face flushed suddenly.

"Oh! You *have* really come into that title?"

"Yes. The 'fairy-tale of possibilities,' as your good husband once designated my chance, has proved a reality."

"I am sure he—we are very pleased to hear it," she said somewhat confusedly. "Are you making any stay in town? If so, we should be delighted if you would call on us. We are in the same house. You remember—Pembroke Square?"

"I remember perfectly. And Miss Heavysage? I trust she is well."

"My daughter? Oh, she married three years ago! She is in India. We had expected her home this year, but unfortunately her arrival is postponed."

He bore the news unflinchingly, if it *was* news. My eyes were on his thin brown face. It might have been carved in wood for any sign of emotion or feeling.

"I shall be pleased to call if I have time," he said coldly. "But there is a great deal of law business to attend to, and I am anxious to get away from town and try country air and country life. The very sight and smell of an English tree, or an English field, is heavenly after the Sahara, and Cairo streets and scenes."

"Well, we won't detain you any longer," said grandmamma. She gave him her hand. He bowed gravely to mamma and to un-introduced Sâba Macdonald. Then we drove on.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed grandmamma. "Who would have thought of such a thing? But then I always told your papa, Janie, that he was too precipitate. How annoying! To think our darling Theo might have been Lady Elmore! And I always thought he was her choice, only of course papa wouldn't hear of him because he was poor. It only shows how careful we should be in our judgments."

"It was all a chance," said mamma. "And, as papa said, it looked wildly improbable."

"So it did. I do wonder if he'll call? He was really very nice. We met him first at Boulogne, at one of those dances at the *Etablissement*. Dear me, how long ago it all seems, and how he admired Theo! Well, it can't be helped. I suppose it's all for the best!"

Suddenly her eyes fell on me. She chuckled.

"It would be a capital match for Sâba, if only——"

I felt my face flame.

"Thank you!" I said; "Sâba isn't a marketable article. If ever she does marry it will be someone for whom she really cares."

"Of course," said grandmamma, with another of those fat chuckles. "All girls talk like that, but they have to learn to care for the suitable husband their parents select for them."

"Sâba will have a poor chance of marrying," said mamma, with one of her disapproving looks. "No money, no beauty, nothing to attract a man—and such a temper!"

"Why should one wish to *attract* a man? There's something disgusting in the very word," I exclaimed hotly. "Setting out one's self and one's accomplishments

as a trap to catch a husband. And judging from what one sees, half the married couples are utterly wretched, and wishing themselves unmarried. I'd sooner work—cook—do *anything*—than marry just for sake of being married !”

“What shocking and improper things you do say !” said grandmamma. “I'm amazed at you ! So indelicate ! When I was a girl, one wouldn't dare say such things to one's elders. Girls were dutiful and obedient, and did what they were told, and took their parents' advice. I really don't know what the world is coming to.”

“Nor I,” said mamma. “Sâba has always been unnatural and headstrong. What sort of a woman she expects to become, goodness knows !”

“Sâba is a foretaste of the reactionary element in store for the next generation of parents,” observed that recalcitrant person. “When women will cease to be in bondage to hereditary principles and hereditary training, and the world will have something besides marriage to offer as their lives' end and aim.”

They both looked at me as if only half comprehending what I meant, and changed the conversation to Captain Elmore, now by lucky chance and favour of fortune transformed from a “detrimental” into

SIR RICHARD ELMORE, BART.,

Manor Park,
Cross Barrows,
Yorkshire.

That was the card he had given to grandmamma, explanatory of the difference between Aunt Theo's rejected suitor and a young and worthy baronet of the United Kingdom.

With a sudden rush of long-repressed emotion my mind went back to that first meeting with him—to his pleading and reproach and farewell ; to all Aunt Theo had suffered ; to my own mad grief, and my one desire to stand once again face to face, and say—

What *had* I intended to say three years ago ? What could I say that might wound and hurt him as I longed to do, and yet preserve feminine dignity intact ? What—what—what ?

My rage had cooled. I was no longer a child. My aunt was married and a mother. He was three years older—and so was Sâba Macdonald !

CHAPTER III.

ALTHOUGH I spoke my mind occasionally, as, for instance, after the meeting with Sir Richard Elmore, it must not be supposed that I was yet emancipated. True, punishment days were over, and bread and water and solitary confinement ranked as past memories, not present incidents of disgrace. But scoldings and rebukes, a "setting down" and "keeping one in one's place," were still part and parcel of my education. Fortunately, however, both grandmamma and mamma took it into their heads that the reason for my strange opinions and general lack of young "ladyism" lay with my somewhat solitary life and lack of young companionship. When the very day after our meeting Ann Shottery called and brought her mother for formal introduction, it actually dawned upon mamma that here was a suitable friend presenting herself; for Ann was bright and amusing and sympathetic, as well as clever, and took even these critical hearts by storm. Her mother was the sweetest and kindest of beings, and delighted in youth and young creatures and their happiness.

Of Ann's literary abilities and wonderful success my people were somewhat ignorant, but even that deplorable fact did not affect her charming friendliness. She knew that only certain books appealed to certain people, and that her public was not a universal one in no way concerned her.

When she asked permission for my company on the house-hunting expeditions, leave was readily granted, and to my own great delight the said expeditions started the very next day.

What fun they were! or rather, what fun she made of them, having a happy knack of seeing the humorous side of everything, from the house agent's ledger full of "eligible villa residences" down to the queer old snuffy caretakers, who used to show us over empty houses with a keen eye

to enumerating all their bad qualities and suppressing their good. Every caretaker saw in us her natural enemies—injudicious persons who were prepared to oust her from "rent-free" premises. Had we listened to the candid opinions of these responsible individuals our discovery of a suitable domicile would never have been successful.

Ann Shottery's choice of locality was confined to Campden Hill and its neighbourhood of Holland Park. We explored this region perseveringly. Our success was at last rewarded by the discovery of a small detached house possessing a large garden and with what Ann called "possibilities." These possibilities were concerned with the throwing of two rooms into one for purposes of entertainment, and the addition of a conservatory which added both to the size and picturesqueness of the drawing-room.

All this she pointed out as she flitted from place to place under the guidance of the house-agent's clerk. There was no caretaker here.

A further advantage was that the back overlooked a large portion of the grounds of Campden House. One could almost forget one was in London. At this present time the aspect was delightful. The trees were in their first spring freshness—chestnuts, hawthorn, acacia, laburnum mingled with the more sombre dignity of oak and elm. One room above the drawing-room overlooking the garden would be an ideal study, and Ann stood there and with her vivid force of words painted its scheme of colour and furnishing until I almost *saw* the picture realised.

"Oh, I should love this place! It is just what we want," she exclaimed, and the young clerk rattled off a formula of "seven, or fourteen, or twenty-one years"—option of purchase—"leasehold investment," and other matters with which we did not concern ourselves.

"My uncle will arrange all that," said Ann. "I am merely to find a house we like and then tell him our decision."

"It will take some time to do it up and put it in order, won't it?" I asked.

But the clerk made light of obstacles. It would all be ready by quarter day, 24th June, and we went home quite elated with our discovery.

"Such a good neighbourhood, too!" exclaimed Ann. "On the south side we shall have the 'Dukeries,' Airlie Lodge and Little Campden House and Observatory Gardens, where Sir James South, the great astronomer and friend of Herschell's, lived up to a few years ago. And we have Holland Lane and Holland Walk close by! Oh! a great discovery, my dear!"

"It is," I said. "And I quite long to see you settled in. I am so glad it's not far from the Square."

"So am I, for we're going to be great friends, and I must get you out of your groove of melancholy. What a mercy your grandmamma and mamma haven't objected to me, though I am that objectionable thing, a 'writing woman'!"

"But you don't give that impression," I said. "Oh! dear me! how I wish we were going to have a house of our own instead of living with my grandparents. I am so sick of it! Except for a few miserable months when we shared a house with an aunt and some hateful cousins, I have had to put up with two sets of 'authority over us.'"

She laughed. "You certainly are to be pitied. But perhaps your father will come home soon, and you'll begin a fresh and different life. I suppose you *are* very fond of music. You seem to live in an atmosphere of it."

"Oh, I love it—fortunately. But even that I've never learnt properly. My technique is all wrong, I'm sure. I can play all sorts of music, some very difficult, but I never feel as if I was playing it the right way."

"I wonder your grandfather doesn't give you some proper lessons."

"I was learning from Herr Franz Gottfried, but owing to some disagreement about the quartet practices he was dismissed. Then I had a year's teaching from a Mr. Bliss, a pupil of Pauer's. But I don't think he did me much good. You see, grandpapa always interferes, and he wants me to learn such curious music—all the Beethoven Symphonies as solos! Fancy a huge orchestral piece of work arranged for the piano; overtures and operas too! Naturally a teacher doesn't want to give his pupil music like *that*. Oh, if you only come to one of his Tuesday evenings then you'll understand!"

"But, Sâba, what is the use of spending so much time over music unless you mean to take it up as a profession yourself!"

"A profession! I!"

I laughed aloud. "Why, my dear Ann, grandpapa would disinherit or disown me if I became a professional pianist. That is one of his extraordinary ideas. Music as an amateur art is divine and beautiful; music as a profession is something to be ashamed of because your services are paid for. Can you understand the distinction—for I can't?"

"Nor I. It should be the other way about. The art ennobles the artist, and surely we have good authority for saying 'the labourer is worthy of his hire.'"

"We have good authority for a great deal that we never do, or believe, or attempt," said I.

"Might I come next Tuesday evening?" she asked.

"I should be only too delighted," I answered.

"I have a cousin," she went on, "who is just coming back from Leipzig. He has been studying music there. He wants to be a singer, but he plays the violin beautifully. I wonder if I might introduce him to your grandfather?"

"I will tell him," said I. "I know he is always delighted to meet anyone who can play. Of singing he thinks very little."

"He seems to make odd distinctions," she said.

Then we parted, and I promised to let her know if the cousin might be included in the invitation for the following Tuesday.

Those musical evenings still went on with the regularity of their model, the "Popular Concerts." I escaped the quartet as often as possible, but when it was a case of symphony, overture, trio or quintet, I was obliged to put in an appearance.

Grandpapa took me regularly to the Monday Pops' and occasionally to the Philharmonic. I had also seen the *Prophet* and the *Huguenots*; and heard Patti in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *La Gaze Ladra*, and *Somnambula*. She was enchanting in those operas, but I cared for none of them as a whole in the way I cared for *Faust*. In the Italian school there was too much "showing off" of the singer—too much of clap-trap effects, without regard to consistent dramatic art. Meyerbeer's *Prophet* was grand and impressive, but its production owed much to stage-craft, and the principal artist had no conception of the part further than a conscientious rendering of notes.

I longed to hear *Faust* again, but was not permitted,

though Nilsson, the Swedish nightingale, was rivalling Patti and proclaimed the ideal Margu rite of Gounod's dreams:

In certain ways my grandparents were curious examples of that digestive faculty spoken of as "straining at gnats and swallowing camels." When I had first seen *Faust* I was supposed to be too young to understand its moral, or rather, its lack of morality. At seventeen the same opera was pronounced unfit for the "young person," who has been the greatest stumbling-block to art, literature and drama with which England has had to cope.

But perhaps the very refusal to repeat my previous experience set that experience apart from the general disappointment which accompanies an attempted renewal of a sensation; crystallised a dream into a thing of beauty too precious to be spoken of lightly. As each opera season came round I re-lived that memory, and thrilled once more to the exquisite joys and sorrows and passion and remorse of a drama such as life embodied, such as womanhood faced. I spoke to no one of such feelings. I even wondered if there was not something wrong about them—if whirlwinds of emotion were desirable experiences. In books such emotion was insisted upon, dwelt upon at too great length. Love as the keynote of existence was also the keynote of plot or story, and after being developed carefully, sounded a commonplace conclusion of possible happiness upon which the reading public insisted. The prose of life was ignored, yet to me it seemed that by far the larger part of life was prose, and its brief lapses into poetry or romance accounted a phase of folly to be got over as rapidly as possible—a mental sickness common to youth, but capable of cure as were bodily ailments.

Modern novels, such as "Aurora Floyd" or "East Lynne," held me amazed by their heroine's sacrifice of "all for love." I came to the conclusion that no writer of fiction had ever drawn a real woman, and for the very good and sufficient reason that a real woman could never serve as heroine. She would be built of component parts of good and evil, sweetness and strength, passion and renunciation. Most fiction writers seemed possessed of an idea that a heroine must be faultless, also provided with a fitting mate who should play Romeo to her Juliet.

True, Miss Braddon had inaugurated the *r le* of the wicked heroine, and Wilkie Collins could create women

who gripped one's interest by sheer force of their personality. But still popular favour seemed to lie with the noble, virtuous and beautiful heroine, to whom duty was a watchword, and romance a snare.

* * * * *

I have often wondered whether fate had any special object in throwing me into the vortex of literary life and ambitions. First "Electra" and Dorian Giles had amazed and dominated me. Then, after a lapse of time sufficient to regain self-possession, I came into the charmed circle of Ann Shottery's nobler ideals and more gifted personality. 'Charm' best expresses her attraction for all who met her, or to whom she extended her sweet and gracious friendship. Even my grandfather could but sing her praises, though he thought very little of literature as a profession for either man or woman.

On the occasion of her first appearance at one of the Tuesday evenings, her cousin did not accompany her. His arrival had been delayed, so I did not see him. But that loss was made up by the self-invited appearance of Dorian Giles, who had managed to escape from his "Nero-like" occupation of watching Paris in flames and at the mercy of revolutionists.

He had met grandpapa in Regent Street, and been invited to come in that evening and see the new music-room. "But I came, *Wunderkind*, chiefly because I wanted to see you," he told me. "Two years is a long time at your age, and I have not yet completed my novel on female development."

Ann Shottery looked quickly up. She was sitting beside me in the new music-room, which was large and lofty, with a parquet floor, stained-glass windows, and cushioned divans ranged along the walls. The grand piano from the drawing-room had been brought in, also a large American organ, which grandpapa found useful in certain compositions—a sort of glorified harmonium, played by a sickly-looking youth whose name was Albrecht Pfalz. Cabinets of music stood in corners and the room was lit by four splendid lamps on pedestals. Grandpapa had discovered that gas was injurious to ceilings and paint.

Ann and I and Dorian Giles looked a very small audience in the spacious chamber. He had expressed approval of its appearance and decoration, thereby delighting grandpapa, who took all credit to himself. It

was tuning-up time when he sauntered over to where Ann and I were sitting, and made that speech.

"You *do* write then?" she said.

"Surely you have heard——"

"Oh, I've heard you say so, but I have never seen anything published."

"No," he said, "as yet I have not published. All my enjoyment in what I do would vanish once the profane light of public opinion was let in upon its sacred mysteries. I write and write until I am thrilled to my heart's core with the exceeding beauty of what I have written. And then I ask myself why submit this to the humiliating test of that coarse critic, a publisher—a creature with a commercial soul and commercial instincts; a being incapable of that delicate and artistic appreciation which would alone content me. I have written an exquisite feminine idyll. Sâba here, has all unwittingly served as model. But why should I bare my soul and hers to the vulgar gaze of an applauding crowd—paint her divine blushes and the shy dawn of her young soul for——"

"Oh, please *don't!*" I entreated, painfully conscious of hot cheeks and amused embarrassment. "I'm sure you have done nothing of the sort. You have talked a great deal of that book, but I doubt if a word of it is written."

"Base doubter! Your punishment be on your own head."

He drew back a step or two and examined me critically

"And so, Wonder-child, you are now a Wonder-girl. I wish they would let you dress the part artistically. I should like to see you clothed in soft clinging draperies; dull pink, faint rose or olive-green—white, with one pure touch of scarlet. Never be persuaded to wear blue or mauve, my child, if you have any regard for your possibilities. Miss Shottery should always wear white, or that pale azure which blends itself with the green of the turquoise. It is a strange thing that women have been dressing women for centuries, and have only succeeded in inventing hideous and uncomfortable fashions. I foresee a great future for man when he will wrest the sceptre from their unworthy hands and wield it himself. There is a god in Paris now to whom all the feminine world have bent the knee. He will be king of fashion ere many years are past. That is to say, if a Second Empire rises from the ashes of the first. In the fortunate future Man will design

for the graces of your figures, not for their suppression. He will decide the proper place for your waists, and the width of your shoulders. He will treat you individually, not *en masse*. There will be styles for the short as well as for the tall and elegant. And colours will no longer be crude and violent, but tender and helpful. Nature paints daily, hourly, pictures for our guidance, and we are too blind and too ignorant to accept her hints. I have a prophetic eye, and what I read will surely come to pass. Women are beginning to feel their cramped existence. Before the twentieth century dawns they will have flung off every hereditary fetter—even those of respectability. They will be taking man's place at desk and counter, platform and pulpit. They will rush like a ravaging sea into every channel of art and commerce. They will first plead, then demand, then encroach, until man will be beggared and an outcast, not knowing where to lay his head. Nothing will remain for him except to step into their vacated places and teach them the art of doing feminine things with a man's thoroughness."

A warning tap from grandpapa's 'cello bow put an end to this harangue. I had listened to it with the complete enjoyment I always felt for Dorian Giles' outbursts. I was not yet sure how much was real, how much a *pose*, got up and rattled off for effect. But it was a delight to watch his strange face and mobile lips, to hear the deep mellow tones of a voice that rolled on and on without pause or heed, apparently regardless of shocked sensibilities.

"I am going to America," he told us presently under cover of some tempestuous passages of Haydn. "I want to study a really *free* nation—one to whom all things are lawful and right, and who for pride and assumption stand alone! I expect great surprises and enlightenment. I am sure Dickens has not done them justice. A nation can only really be judged by its aristocracy."

"But America has no aristocracy," said Ann.

He raised his brows.

"That is a popular superstition, but we of course know better. There are four hundred good families—four hundred gentlemen and ladies with opinions unbiassed by dollars. Of course I shall not consider the rabid millions—the scum of other nationalities caught up and whisked into a seething cauldron of unadulterated vulgarity."

"You will have to moderate your language," said Ann

smiling. "If you speak like that your reward will be a bowie knife, or a revolver shot."

"I mean to speak like that," he answered, "if I get the chance, that is to say. But I believe the American tongue is as voluble as it is unpleasant."

We were again silent perforce till an "Andante" came to sorrowful conclusion. Then under cover of a noisy "Finale" I asked him if he had seen or heard anything of "Electra" lately.

"No," he said. "Of course I heard the second book was a failure. She made an awful row about it at Wode's. Accused him of cheating her. She spent £300 in advertising and imagined thousands would flow in. As a matter of fact, poor Reggie Wode is almost ruined. He has only been able to keep his head out of water by large publications of non-copyright works, called 'new and cheap editions.' These and some school books have enabled him to stave off bankruptcy. But another book of 'Electra's' would prove fatal to his business and his self-respect. In her opinion all publishers are cheats, and all reviewers liars. No doubt she is right, but such sword thrusts are not palatable, either as tribute or result."

"I am sorry she is so injudicious," said Ann, "because she is really clever and has wonderful imagination."

"She made the great mistake of ante-dating her triumphs," said Dorian. "It is always wiser to wait for victory than to crown your commanders before the battle has terminated."

"I have often thought that she wearied people beforehand with so much talk of that book," I said. "She was always impressing upon them how they were to regard it, what it meant, and how wonderful it was. Of course it fell flat."

"Ah, you saw a great deal of her in private life," said Dorian. "That dreadful prosaic crude thing—private life! Did she dare to be real? Did she actually eat and drink, and arrange her hair and work with her hands? It seems such a pity genius cannot be above such coarse details—can't do without baths and liver pills, and shoes and stockings. I am sure 'Electra' would have liked the world to believe she was fed on 'manna' like the Israelites, and that angels ministered to her toilette at morn and even."

"I thought you were a friend of hers," said Ann.

"My dear lady, I am no woman's friend. They are incapable of friendship; they only believe in adoration. They cannot conceive that a man is capable of seeing them, talking to them, and being amused by them, without at the same time experiencing an insane desire to make love to them."

I looked up suddenly. It occurred to me that perhaps "Electra" had conveyed to him some such interpretation of his attentions. He was gifted and popular and rich. She might well have looked upon him in the light of a legal aid to ambition.

He met my glance and laughed. That laugh was unfortunate, because it attracted grandpapa's notice while he was counting a seven-bars' rest. He gave an angry "h-ss-sh," floundered in a bar too late, and kept it up to the bitter end. Then he reminded us of his rule against talking during the performance and ordered me off to take part in some novel arrangement of the "Pastoral Symphony," which included piano, four strings and harmonium.

I gave strenuous attention to *f*'s and *ff*'s with a regard for the ordeal the limited audience had to endure. They were good enough to applaud loudly and praise lavishly at the conclusion. But for this I should no doubt have been told I played too *forte* and made too great use of the pedal. However, as grandpapa had arranged (or ordered to be arranged) that rather curious combination of instruments, he was quite delighted at the appreciation it received.

As there was not time for another quartet he yielded to Dorian Giles' urgent request for the Hüntén "Terzetto." When I had finished Ann Shotttery was enthusiastic. "If you really wished, Sâba, you might go into the profession," she said. "I had no idea you could play so beautifully."

She had never heard me before, and I was delighted with her praise—the more so because I felt certain she would not say anything untrue. Praise was as the breath of life to Sâba Macdonald, and of very rare occurrence.

The music over, we adjourned as usual to the dining-room and Dorian entertained us with graphic descriptions of the siege of Paris, the violence of the mob, the awful scenes of bloodshed and general demoralisation. He also spoke again of his intention to visit America and lecture upon art as a beneficent factor in the enlightenment of

the human race. It seemed to me that Dorian Giles was the only person to whom grandpapa ever condescended to listen, or for whose opinion he had any respect. As a rule, *he* was the talker, the layer-down of the law appertaining to privileges or facts. But Dorian had a charm of conversation equalled by few—a knack of happily chosen phrases, odd opinions, paradoxical perplexities that held an indescribable fascination for the listener.

On the whole this evening was quite a social success, and Ann Shottery won golden opinions by reason of her charming manners, her deference to grandpapa's opinions, and her admiration of grandmamma's fancy-work. The "powers that be," as she called them, expressed themselves gratified that Sâba should be fortunate enough to have formed such a charming acquaintance, and the incidents of house-hunting were permitted to drift on to the more important subjects of furniture and arrangement, in which it appeared my aid was equally necessary.

Dorian Giles besought her to be the pioneer of a new era of "colour schemes" and artistic decoration. He promised his aid in selection, and the discovery of British workmen whose ideas *did* soar above a white-and-gold wallpaper for a drawing-room, and a "flock" for dining-room or library. When he heard of family treasures in the shape of Sheraton and Chippendale, he was overcome with joy. Ann's idea of a chintz drawing-room to a background of apple-green and white mouldings, of walls hung with a few rare old prints in black-and-gold frames, touched a responsive chord. Such a drawing-room boasting of French windows leading out to verandah and garden was eminently in keeping with "country-house" fantasies.

We spent delightful engrossing weeks over planning that drawing-room and getting intelligent workpeople to put the plans into visible shape. Dorian Giles was not going to America until the summer heat had expended itself. He came down very often from his bachelor quarters to assist and criticise.

By that time, also, Ann Shottery's cousin had arrived, and I had made his acquaintance.

So far had matters progressed when the move into the new house was accomplished and that important event, entitled a "house-warming," came on the *tapis*.

From being a social gathering to celebrate the occasion,

it degenerated into quite a large evening party, with "music" on the invitation cards. To it I looked forward with real interest and eagerness, for it was to represent my "coming out."

CHAPTER IV.

I MAINTAIN that it was excusable for Sâba Macdonald to feel interested in dress and appearance on so important an occasion. The parties of her childish days had only possessed partial significance. She had owed her invitations to curiosity—to a desire to exploit juvenile talent; but now, at last, she was able to spread wings of individuality. She was asked as other "grown-ups" were asked—on her own merits, and with a prospect of enjoyment hitherto a stranger.

So it was quite excusable that the arrangement of that troublesome hair and the spotless fragility of a real evening-dress should be of interest.

The ever-valuable Rachel gave assistance and advice. Sâba exclaimed mournfully at thinness of arms, and slenderness of figure. She had begged for long sleeves, and with much difficulty persuaded a fashion-plate martinet to bring transparent folds of gauze as far as her elbows. The full-puffed bodice and low berthe were becoming to her slender neck and shoulders, and the warm creaminess of skin set off the scarlet flowers that nestled against one shoulder, and were repeated in the mass of plaits and curls that formed Rachel's *chef d'œuvre* in the art of coiffure.

"When you get a bit of colour, miss, like you generally do when excited, you'll look lovely!" exclaimed Rachel. An opinion which Sâba treated with the incredulity it deserved.

She gathered up her paraphernalia of gloves and flowers and train and went to the familiar mirror for a full-length view of herself. But it was exceedingly difficult to form an opinion. Her head looked too elaborate against the simplicity of her dress. True, the colour was coming up to her face as Rachel had said, and that touch of scarlet pleased her sense of artistic fitness. Yet she knew herself far removed from any pretensions to beauty, save just that beauty of youth and bright eyes and flushed cheeks which Nature sometimes grants.

"But what does it matter," she said to herself as she turned away. "Plain or pretty or passable, I have to live out my life. This is only a phase of it."

But it was a very pleasant phase she acknowledged, when she and Ann Shottery stood side by side before the arrival of the guests and surveyed effects, and agreed that they were very successful.

The long low room looked charming with flowers and plants and pretty shaded lights. The garden was hung with Chinese lanterns, and the verandah spread with rugs and seats for those who preferred the cool outer air. The piano, a semi-grand of Collard's, stood open, and the pretty scheme of rose-coloured chintz and apple-green walls were a proof that rep, and walnut and gilding were not necessary for beauty. Mamma—who had come as my chaperon—seemed somewhat puzzled by its contrast to most drawing-rooms and most houses.

Bayswater and Kensington were of the heavy, solid type. This grace and lightness and space took some understanding.

I don't know whether Dorian Giles' suggestion of the "blue that blends into the green of the turquoise" had anything to do with Ann's choice of a gown, but she looked exquisite in a satiny sheeny fabric made after the mode in an Italian picture, caught up on each snowy shoulder by strange barbaric jewels, flowing in exquisite lines to her feet, and confined at the waist by a girdle of the same quaint stones. It was the design of an artist, not a mere dressmaker's model. She had taken the picture to a little Frenchwoman in Maddox Street, recommended by Dorian, and the result was an exquisite success.

If I had felt any conceit of myself, the first glimpse of that fairy-like figure would have effectually knocked it out of my head; but happily, I soon forgot personality in the vivid interest of seeing Ann play hostess, as well as in the introductions to famous people that marked that evening an epoch in my life.

Arrivals crowded in fast on each other's heels. Dorian was a host in himself; he talked and introduced and started the music and set everything going in a way that took much trouble off Ann and her delicate little mother. I played once or twice before Phil Lorrimer was persuaded to sing; I had been longing to hear him ever since his arrival from Germany. He was an extraordinarily

good-looking boy, and somewhat affected German airs and style. He wore his hair longer than was customary in England and he sang only German songs. But what songs they were in comparison with the twaddling English ballads of that day!

The "Erl-King" and "Bright Star of Eve" from *Tannhäuser*, and others whose names were unknown, and to me unpronounceable. The *Tannhäuser* music was scarcely known in England and the name of the greatest genius of the century was only a synonym for sneers and coarse jokes. But his fame was already ripening to future glory in the chief musical centres of the Continent. It was while young Lorrimer was singing that my attention was attracted to the door. I was a little impatient of the noise of fresh arrivals just when I was hanging ecstatically on every note of Wolfram's *Lied*.

But the hostile glance I shot across the room was checked and turned to sudden confusion, for, standing in the doorway and looking straight at me was—Sir Richard Elmore!

I was so astonished to see him here, of all places in the world, that I made no attempt to bow. Neither was I certain that he recognised me. There was doubt in his glance, and I could but suppose that I looked somewhat different from the child he had once seen, and the girl to whom he had not been introduced in the Park.

Mamma, who was sitting near me, discovered him also. I saw her preparing cordial greeting for when his eye should chance to fall on her; but when that auspicious moment came, his own return of her salute was perfunctory and puzzled. I felt sure he could not recall us, or our meeting. Evening-dress has wonderfully disguising properties.

When the song was over, he made his way to Ann, and I was more than ever puzzled at their apparent intimacy, for I had never heard her mention his name. But I lost sight of him presently in the crowd, and was only aware of Phil Lorrimer's return to my side for what he called "music talk."

We both indulged frankly in that whenever we met. I had learnt a great deal from him about musical student-life; the hard work and strict rules; the high standard necessary for acceptance; the practises and the concerts.

He had told me of Wagner, and his struggles, and of his stormy, wonderful personality. He talked of his operas with wildest enthusiasm, and called scorn on England as a place where genius was always measured by petty standards of accepted traditions; where the "Master" had been pilloried by leading musical authorities for conducting at the Philharmonic concerts *without the book!*

To this boy (he was but twenty-three) music was the one divine and perfect art in all the world. Full of fervour and zeal, he and his glorious voice were destined to carry all before them, or so he thought. And with this idea he dreamt of crushing the balladmongery of English concerts; of supplanting "My Pretty Jane" and the "Death of Nelson" with the German masterpieces of Schubert, Brahms, Wagner and Schumann. I could not help thinking that even to my limited experience the British public was far from being appreciative of really good music, or ever grew enthusiastic over songs in a foreign language. They clung faithfully to Balfe and Benedict, to Arthur Sullivan and Sainton-Dolby and Virginia Gabriel.

I felt sure that no ordinary concert audience could understand a French or German song. They passed Italian on account of familiarity with popular opera, excerpts from which were always received with enthusiasm; but they drew the line at German save at the Monday Pops', where Schumann was permissible owing to the large Teutonic attendance.

Phil Lorrimer seemed, however, to believe in himself as a pioneer, and not even my suggestion that a professional English name should never godfather German ballads had any effect. It was while we were talking somewhat excitedly—as was our wont—that I again became conscious of steady gaze and compelling scrutiny. I looked up and saw that Sir Richard Elmore was standing close beside me; his eyes were distinctly reminiscent of last. As for me, when I looked at him the whole of that scene rushed back to my memory—the cold, frosty sunshine of Regent Street, the gay shop windows, Ada and myself and Aunt Theo, and that strange farewell.

I felt myself grow cold, and began to tremble. My mind was one chaos of painful sensations, each crowding on the other. It seemed as if memory was always to be a battle-

ground of strife. The voices around became a mere indistinct babble; I could not hear a word that Phil Lorrimer was saying.

Then suddenly there came movement—stir—division—and someone was bending over me. “You look as if this heat was too much for you, Miss Macdonald. May I take you into the verandah?”

I rose mechanically, and put my hand on an extended arm; I had no distinct idea of having given any greeting or making any reply. I had so long wished to see this man again; to meet him face to face and tell him what had burned and rankled in my mind since that day.

Yet, even when we were in the cool garden under the trees, I was silent. I could find no words with which to suit the occasion or recall to his memory that first meeting.

At last it was he who spoke. “When I saw you in the Park the other day I could not bring you back to my recollection as the little niece Miss Heavysage once introduced to me. I believe you were a great favourite, were you not? I hope you continue to hear good news of her?”

Oh! the baldness and coldness and stupidity of it all! My heart was burning and my brain on fire and here—at last—was that natural enemy of her life and mine, against whom I had vowed vengeance in many a fit of childish rage. “*Good news of her!*”

I essayed speech at last. Something cold and contemptuous was my intention. Instead, I heard my voice, hoarse, trembling, broken: “Why should you care for any news of her, good or bad?”

I am sure he must have been surprised, for he stopped suddenly. The clear moonlight above our heads showed me his face; white, and very stern and cold.

“I beg your pardon; I imagined you might guess at my interest. It is at least sincere. But, if you have any reason——”

“Reason!” I interrupted, all one scarlet flame of shame and misery. “Of course I have reason for saying that; but I suppose it *was* rude. I should have remembered that people in society never speak as they think. The truth is——”

“Pray go on,” he said, “and don’t be afraid of telling me the truth. It will be an agreeable change to hear it.”

“Well,” I went on doggedly, “I have always associated

you with a great deal that meant trouble and unhappiness—you must know what I mean—and I always longed to have an opportunity to tell you so. You see, Aunt Theo and I were—I mean, we loved each other as—as few aunts and nieces do. To me she stands for everything that is beautiful and pure and good. I hated to know that anyone troubled or vexed her. So, that day—perhaps you don't remember—I must have seemed a mere child of no account—but for all that I saw that you were making her unhappy, and I hated you for it. Then—well, of course, you know. She married and went away to India, and I've never seen her since. To meet you like—like *this*, and hear you ask if I have *good news of her*—I can't explain how horrible it seemed! I suppose I oughtn't to say so—no doubt you will think me rude and ill-bred and all that, but it was just as if one treasured a lovely statue and had built an altar for it and worshipped there, and suddenly someone came by and threw a handful of mud at it!”

I stopped; crimson, panting, breathless, my heart beating with a force that nearly suffocated me. It was evident that the old Sâba Macdonald was in no way expatriated from the tall, well-dressed young lady who was to-night signalling her “coming-out” in society by such unconventional behaviour.

He walked on beside me perfectly silent, and that silence intensified the shame and humiliation of the moment.

“Supposing I, too, had built an altar and placed there the statue of a pure and simple faith that I worshipped,” he said suddenly; “supposing that itself had chosen to dethrone itself, and suffer that affront of ‘mud-throwing’ of which you spoke. What then? You are still childish enough to bear rebuke, Miss Sâba—(you see, I remember your name). And though I respect your championship I should like to convince you that there are two sides to every question. It is not fair to regard only one—and that your own. My acquaintance with Theo—I beg your pardon—I should say, Mrs. Danebury—”

“No, *don't!*” I burst out. “Of all names I hate *that* the worst!”

“You—you confuse me at every point,” he said, stopping and looking down at my angry face. “Did not that marriage meet with your approbation?”

"Approbation!" I cried passionately. "It is the one thing I can never forgive——"

"Not *her*, surely?"

"It was more the fault of others that she was sacrificed."

"Few young ladies call the desirable institution of matrimony by so harsh a name."

"I am not made of the stuff, or cut on the pattern of the 'ordinary young lady'."

"So I see—and hear. It is a most refreshing discovery. Still, I imagine that feminine instinct is strong enough for you to approve of so eminently suitable a marriage as was that of——"

"Aunt Theo's? Oh! but I know—I saw——"

Again I interrupted myself. What right had I to give away her secrets; to allow this man to think that he had held the power to make her happy or unhappy? She would never forgive me if she knew.

He respected my interruption, and did not ask what I knew or had seen.

"However," I went on abruptly, "it's all over and done with. Only I wish I could forget. But I haven't many pleasant things to recall of those years and she stands foremost amongst all."

"How you love her, child!" he said suddenly.

I drew myself up to my full height; I was level with his shoulder. *Child*, indeed!

"Again I beg your pardon, but it seems odd to say 'Miss Macdonald.'"

"Of course I love her," I said unsteadily. "She makes up all the sweet and beautiful memories of my childish days. Oh! how I wish——"

"Don't say you wish them back; but, indeed, save that you are taller, you can scarcely count them as past. And, at least your eyes have not changed. I remember, even then, noticing they were like hers—deep, dark, soft—but, of course, you know that."

"Like *hers*?" My tone was indignant. "I wish she could hear you."

"For once I don't echo that wish. It seems to me that you have a settled animosity against me. I suppose you never heard that I wasn't considered good enough to aspire to that happy position granted to Dr. Danebury, that—but what use to speak of such things. Let them lie:

“ ‘Dead things forgotten,
Dreams that are done.’ ”

“ Are they forgotten ? ”

His face grew strangely still, and we stood for a moment gravely regarding each other under the moonlight. The scents, the scene, seemed vaguely dramatic.

“ They ought to be, of course ; yet many a man carries the romance of his youth about with him, and refuses to think of the fate that killed it.”

He sighed heavily, and turned as if to resume our walk.

“ We have had a very unconventional sort of talk, not a bit like what I expected. Tell me, are you going to live with your grandparents always ? ”

“ I don’t know,” I said. “ Every year I hope will be the last, but my father is in the Antipodes, and though always coming home next year, that ‘next year’ remains still the next.”

For the first time he smiled, and the smile gave him back much of the youth and charm I remembered as the “handsome Captain’s” attributes. He did not look so stern or so careworn when he smiled.

“ And you are a grown-up young lady, and ‘out,’ ” he went on ; “ and I am old and tired, and heart weary. Such is life, Miss Sâba. One set of mortals laid on the shelf and another set taking their place ; each so important to itself—so sure that they are going to make a better thing of their time and opportunities than the set they replace ! And they never do.”

Again he sighed.

I said nothing. In truth, my mind was busy with perplexities ; trying to reconcile itself to interest instead of expected enmity. I was astonished to find that my fierce wrath had burnt out in that one explosion ; that I felt secretly ashamed of my impetuosity and rudeness ; that I was quite able to forgive my aunt for having cared for this man, and quite unable to reconcile such caring with that hurried acceptance of the detestable Anglo-Indian doctor !

Also, I was wondering if he still loved her, and asking myself what would happen if they met again. How did people feel under such circumstances ? Was it possible

that time could change and chill the ardour of that "world-well-lost" episode? Possible that mere cool friendliness could replace the passion of youth.

His voice recalled me to the fact that I was studying his face, and had strayed some hundreds of mental miles from Ann's pretty garden and the world about us.

"I hope you are going to forgive me," he said. "I should be sorry if we could not be friends."

"Oh," I said hurriedly, "that's hardly possible, is it? I mean, we are not likely to meet often. I understand you are going to live in Yorkshire."

"My great house is very lonely," he said.

"You will perhaps——"

His eyes met mine.

"No; don't say it. Everyone else does. I would rather you were as honest as your first speech to-night led me to believe."

"I suppose you thought I was very rude?" I murmured, somewhat abashed.

For a moment he was silent. "Not rude; I thought that no happy fate had ever given me such a champion, and I almost envied Theo."

Her name seemed to come naturally to his lips. I had heard no man call her by that name in quite that way. I wondered if they had been used to employ Christian names when speaking together.

"They are all going in to supper now," I heard him say presently. "May I take you in?"

Again we turned.

"I had no idea you knew Ann—Miss Shottery, I mean?" said I as we neared the house. "I was so astonished when I saw you here."

"I have not known her very long; I was really brought here by a friend who admires her very much."

"Oh! what is his name?"

"He—is a lady," he answered with a smile.

"Oh!" My tone was huffy—scenting disloyalty to the beloved ideal. "May I ask her name?"

"Mrs. Charteris. Do you know it?"

"No," I said, shaking my head.

"She is a very well-known personage in society—rich, young, pretty, and a widow."

"Oh!" I said again, conscious of fresh discontent at the frank information. "And so she brought you

here. Oughtn't you to be taking her in to supper—not me ? ”

“ If one always did the things one ought to do, life would be even less endurable than it is,” he answered lightly.

“ Do you find it so ? I thought men could do what they pleased, go where they wished, and generally escape boredom.”

“ I am afraid no mortal is quite a free agent ; not even kings and queens.”

“ Oh ! *They* can't help themselves. It must be like living under a burning-glass. Plain ‘ Mr. and Mrs. ’ are much better off.”

I suddenly remembered that he had come into a title and wondered if that speech was quite polite. But then I reminded myself my whole conversation—if it could be called that—had verged on impoliteness, so he must have grown used to it.

We stood for a moment in the verandah watching the various couples file off into the supper-room.

“ There are to be two detachments,” I said suddenly.

“ Would you rather go in now, or wait ? ” he asked.

“ Oh, I am only one of the small fry ; I should be expected to wait.”

“ Very well, then I will wait with you. See, there are plenty of empty seats here. Shall we sit down and try to become better friends ? ”

I saw no adequate reason for refusal. He was certainly much pleasanter than I had imagined, and he could not be unforgiving or he would never have excused my rudeness. So we sat down, and watched people strolling in the garden, or listened to an occasional ballad from the room within, and talked ; or rather, I listened, and he talked. I heard much of his life in Egypt, of wars and hardships and deeds of bravery—not his own. He would give no personal reminiscences.

It was very pleasant out there ; the moon shining in the deep blue sky ; the lanterns twinkling jewel-like amongst the trees ; the soft laugh of a girl or the lowered tones of a man's voice, speaking of flirtation, advanced or beginning. For once I felt grown-up and important ; for once I did not envy man or woman. I tried to think I was recalling Aunt Theo to his mind—not painfully or regretfully, since such things would be wrong—but with enough memory of “ days that are over, dreams that are done ”

to prevent her having a rival in any "rich pretty widow" who shone in society.

It was difficult afterwards to reconcile this evening with my long-treasured animosity. I marvelled to find one harsh feeling after another slipping, slipping away. Not only that, but being replaced by something so widely different that I could scarcely recognise it as my possession.

"To think," I exclaimed suddenly, as we at last rose to form the second detachment for supper, "that you might now have been my uncle, if only——"

His eyes showed some faint amusement.

"Yes. It seems odd to think of that lost chance—among others. I wonder if I should have been as cordially detested as the favoured suitor?"

I felt my cheeks burn. The words were bitter, though the glance was kind; so kind, that I wondered if the long, thoughtful gaze I met and found myself returning, meant that my own eyes did remind him in some way of Aunt Theo.

CHAPTER V.

"FOR the mill will never grind again with the water that has passed."

I was sitting in my own room. Moonlight flooded it with waves of silver. The soft air stole in through the open window. Below me the square lay dusk and silent. There was no sound of life or living, only I sat there throbbing with vivid memories each keen as pain.

On the bed lay my dress and flowers, just as I had flung them in the impatience to be rid of exterior restraint, and on the table beside me lay my book of records, dating that miserable time when I had seemed to hate the whole world for the sake of one loss.

How strange it had been to read of that time to-night and to compare it with my meeting of the man on whom I had vowed vengeance! How strange to read of hate nourished and cherished; of the wild rebellion of that childish heart! It all looked so far away, and that heart was a woman's now. It felt pangs of shame and self-reproach hitherto a stranger; also, it was conscious of strange unrest—a tormenting host of memories, apparently insignificant, and yet full of magnifying tendencies. The

events of this night painted themselves as a series of coincidences against a background of bewilderment. Songs, music, voices, faces, words, threw themselves chaotically against the canvas, and flashed and lived and sounded for Sâba Macdonald as if they were still co-existent with herself.

Mrs. Charteris, golden and white, with eyes of deepest blue and a figure that seemed divine in that it possessed all that I lacked; graceful, rounded, exquisitely gowned in lace and pearls. She passed, leaving me with a cold consciousness of my utter want of feminine charm and a keen sense of *gaucherie* and stupidity.

Then came Phil Lorrimer and beckoned, and I was at the piano playing the "Träumerei" of Schumann's, and his violin was sending it forth on the silence, so sweet, so dreamy, so tender that thoughts too deep for tears stirred my soul and set it longing for that unattainable something of which the music spoke.

A recitation. I was alone in a quiet corner listening, and the deep voice and flowing words were echoing in my ears now. They had haunted me ever since.

"For the mill will never grind again with the water that has passed."

And songs came back—the lovely melody of that *Lied* from *Tannhäuser*; the full-throated tenderness of a contralto voice telling the story of "Auld Robin Gray"; the clear sweetness of a soprano singing an *Aria* of Rossini's sacred to Patti fame. And Ann—that picturesque vision with whom it was so difficult to associate literary importance—Ann, flattered, praised, surrounded, yet never self-conscious, never "posing," never anything but the modest embodiment of a divine gift, esteemed less her own possession than the grant of a great trust for which she would have to account.

And last of all, one face grown stern and lined with life's hard warfare, and yet so infinitely more interesting than the mere good-looking youthfulness of other faces. "He was worth them all," I found myself saying half aloud, and then I started, for falling like an echo on my own words came the sound of a sigh; a deep soft sigh. I looked round quickly, expecting to see someone standing behind me, and half in shadow, half in the silver haze of moonlight, I saw—Ada!

She looked so natural, so sweet, so like that old childish,

mystical friend, that I sprang to my feet and called her name. But before I could approach a step nearer she stretched out a warning hand. Cold, shivering, awestruck, I stood there unable to move or speak, and even as I looked at her, she was gone. I confronted only empty space.

For a moment I could only stare blankly at blankness, wondering if I had dreamt or fancied that face and figure; but why should I? My thoughts had been far enough away from her or her tragic end. And to-night of all nights, why should she——

I turned; my eyes fell on the old diary. As they fell I remembered it was the one I had used at Boulogne. It must also be the one containing that promise I had asked her to give me. With an unaccountable impulse of fear I drew down the blind and lit the candles on the dressing-table. Then I seized the book and turned its pages rapidly. As I did so a loose sheet of paper fluttered out and fell to the ground; I picked it up thinking a leaf must have got loosened. As I was about to lay it down I saw it was the Message given me through Ada so long ago; the Message I had read and treasured and yet for three years had forgotten.

Was there some special reason for its recall? Was that why Ada had come back? I had forgotten that promise just as I had forgotten that message, and now to-night the past was with me again.

For days and weeks after Ada's death I had looked and watched and awaited a sign that the barrier was passable; none had come. Now after a lapse of years, now when a visit to Mrs. Kirkmann was a rare event, she had appeared to me. Why? I puzzled vainly over that problem. I was firmly convinced she had come either to warn or remind me of something.

Remind! I took up the paper and began to read those half-forgotten words.

“Do not despair of happiness——”

“They who serve may also have their hour of reward.”

“Keep your eyes fixed on what is above. From thence alone flows Light, and Comfort, and Healing!”

I laid the paper down on the book. A vague dreamy sense stole over me, yet in spite of transcendental perception I was conscious of a natural fear of the Unknown.

I looked with awe at that spot where Ada's form

had stood. Were earth-bound creatures surrounded by an invisible world peopled with ghostly shadows that had once claimed life? Was that world so near yet so removed from our material senses that we could not realise its existence? What sort of greeting had I vouchsafed my childhood's friend? Even now was I quite convinced that she had fulfilled her promise? Had my doubts and my terror banished her, and was a needed warning spent only on that sad sigh of helplessness? These questions rushed through my mind as my searching and perplexed gaze turned from that empty space—turned to meet its own questioning, its own perplexity.

Through that cloud of heavy hair I and *myself* looked back at each other. The material mirror that showed each to the other showed also a soul searching for sure foothold. Back, and back, and yet back, thought pursued thought relentlessly. Always the one self shadowed the other; a faulty, weary creature groping its way to light, to happiness, to love. Crying ever: "Oh! to *know*; to know, to know!"

To-night that soul had faced the dawn of womanhood. On its very threshold a warning spoke. Sorrow and fear had haunted and were yet to haunt each fresh stage of experience. Sadly the eyes looked back at the helpless soul, and the soul only knew it waited still for fulfilment.

* * * * *

I slept soundly. No dream touched my sealed senses, no prophetic warning sounded again in the night stillness. I woke to find myself a person of importance.

Why or wherefore? What had chanced that Sâba Macdonald should be received with favour and made the subject of playful jests? Consulted as to her wishes for some new dresses, since she was really "out," and must be considered a young lady! Sâba could not understand it at all.

Still on a hot July morning the thought of muslin and linen gowns was refreshing, and a visit to the Westbourne Grove *modiste*, who claimed leading authority in such matters, promised a series of afternoon and visiting toilettes to which no maiden of seventeen could be quite indifferent. Besides, strangest of all, Sâba was for once permitted to choose her own colours and styles. Terrible as were the fashions of those days it was just possible to modify them by a memory of Dorian Giles' helpful counsel.

The dressmaker had doubts, of course, and raised many objections, but so suddenly and wonderfully had Sâba risen to favour that her views were accepted in preference. She was allowed to have a certain "style of her own," and it was deemed preferable to suit that style rather than turn her into a mere replica of dozens of Bayswater belles who "did" the Grove every afternoon, and were as much the caricatures of *Le Follet* and *La Mode Parisienne* as was possible to suburban efforts.

The dresses done with, Sâba was asked if she would like a drive in the Park when the afternoon was cooler. Too amazed for expression she timidly hinted of a long-desired visit to Mrs. Kirkmann. Might the carriage go there—first?

Even that was permitted. If they left Hampstead at four there would still be time for the Park. Sâba must wear white muslin and a new hat, and carry a rose-coloured sunshade. Sâba listened in absolute dumb amazement. What had happened? Why this sudden change in the matter of regarding her as an absolutely unimportant person? She could not understand it at all. She was afraid to ask for an explanation—afraid to question the meaning of grandmamma's "appraising" eyes and fat chuckles; afraid to enquire why any allusion to the previous evening's gaiety should be received as a species of delicious joke. Evidently something had pleased the "powers that be" and she had gone up in their estimation. It was not an unpleasant sensation, even if a perplexing one.

Through the long drive to Hampstead the same amiability was manifested. Sâba was cautioned not to let the sun catch her face, not to sit so very upright if it tired her. It was only in the Park one needed to be so particular. She was also told that however unbecoming the heat might be to fair people it was not so to dark. Colour meant so much to a brunette's skin. She felt inclined to laugh more than ever, but finally came to the conclusion that all this was part and parcel of "coming out." She was a full-fledged duckling, even if an ugly one, and as such could demand her rightful share of the spoils and pleasures of the duck-pond.

Mrs. Kirkmann was at home, so we all got out and went into the quaint old shady garden where she and her husband spend most of their time. I thought my sweet old lady looked very frail and aged, but she complained of nothing. Her welcome was so warm that grandmamma

seemed half ashamed of the many excuses for this long-delayed visit. My thoughts were full of that incident of the previous night. I longed to tell her, but dared not hint at a private audience and before my less credulous relatives I was tongue-tied. Perhaps Mrs. Kirkmann noted my disturbed condition of mind; she had always been quick at reading such signs. She managed to detain me when the others were leaving. Mr. Kirkmann was escorting them to the carriage, and pointing out various treasures of his garden *en route*.

Mrs. Kirkmann held my hand. "What is it, Sâba? You have something to tell me."

"Yes," I said breathlessly, "I have seen Ada."

She looked at me silently, not surprised or incredulous, only—so it seemed to me—expectant. "When?"

"Last night. I had come home from my first party—I mean *first* in the sense of being grown up. I was sitting quietly in my own room thinking of it all, when I heard a sigh close beside me. I started and looked round, and she was standing behind me in a corner of the room looking so *real*, so like the Ada we knew that I called her name. Then—she was gone."

"She has not forgotten us, you see. I—I half expected to hear something, Sâba, for she was with me so closely in thought and in dreams last night that I had a feeling she wanted to make her presence known. Yet it is strange you could see her—and I—could not."

I told her of that old promise half-forgotten ere fulfilment came, and as I spoke I noted the strange peace and radiance of her face.

"Oh, I was always sure, but now I am more than ever certain how very near that other world is. Our material senses are too gross, too warped, to recognise the fact, yet for the seeker and the faithful the curtain can be lifted. She has been near us, Sâba, nearer than we imagined. Perhaps she came to you as warning, to me as guide, for I know the call has sounded. I shall not be here very long. Pray heaven, my darling awaits me on the threshold!"

Awestruck I looked at her. I had known Death as an enemy, a thing of dread and doom. I had not heard his advent welcomed in the light of release and perfect joy.

A call from the garden brought me back to realities. I touched her folded hands.

"Ah, you must go, child! God's blessing be with you and your future. Try to look at the best side of everything, not the worst. There is much in life for which to be grateful. No ill we suffer is so great but that a greater might not afflict us. Remember that, my child, for the sun of my counsels is near its setting; already the twilight; soon the night, and then—peace."

Her eyes closed. Softly I turned and left her, with that look upon her face, sitting with folded hands and lips that moved in prayer—left her to all the sweet serenity of that peace her beautiful life had asked for as its last most precious gift.

* * * * * *

I went back to the others. I got into the carriage and drove off in the hot sunshine with a feeling of being wrested from things far better than this plane of pains and pleasures. That look in Mrs. Kirkmann's eyes haunted me. I felt the strongest conviction that I had said "good-bye" to her for the last time, and yet I knew no regret so far as she was concerned. "The better part," the "better life," these were awaiting her; so close, so near that the mere opening of the door would mean participation.

"How quiet you are, Sâba," said grandmamma. "What was Mrs. Kirkmann saying to you?"

I dragged myself back to the prose of my surroundings. I looked vaguely at the substantial elements concerned with my existence and presence in this material sphere.

"She was telling me of a dream she had, a dream about Ada."

"Ah! how she was bound up in that grandchild of hers! She has never been the same since her death," lamented grandmamma. "I saw a great change in her to-day; she looks so old and frail."

Then we relapsed into silence until we were within known suburbs. By that time grandmamma pronounced it too late for the Park, and I remembered a promise to Ann Shottery to go round there and help put her study to rights, so the carriage dropped me at her gate, and I shook myself, mentally and physically into my normal condition.

"I was wondering if you would be allowed to come," said Ann, ushering me into the pretty cool drawing-room.

"Oh! I am in high favour to-day," I said. "Why—I

cannot imagine? Did I behave myself so admirably last night?"

She laughed. "You annexed a baronet as your chosen companion and kept him pretty much to yourself."

I looked at her astonished. "Do you mean Sir Richard Elmore?"

"Do I *mean*? Had I such a plethora of titles and distinguished personages?"

"If by 'annexing' you allude to our conversation in the garden"—I broke off suddenly—"why he might have been my *uncle* now—at this present moment—but for—"

"For your aunt's choosing someone else? Oh, Sâba, Sâba! Was that all you had to talk about for a whole long evening? Was that reason for disregard of *les convenances*?—for the sarcasms of the other 'guide, philosopher and friend'? Are you degenerating into a flirt, my innocent child?"

"Oh, don't tease, Ann," I entreated. "This is very serious. Last night brought me an opportunity for which I had waited nearly four years."

"You made good use of it when it arrived, my dear."

I felt myself colour.

"When it came to explanations things looked so—so different."

"They often do, where the person explaining is a man, the person being explained to a woman; especially a young woman."

"It pleases you to be satirical, Miss Shottery."

"It does, Miss Innocent. Joking apart, Sâba Macdonald, what had you been nursing in your mind as a grievance for four long years?"

I hung a shamefaced head. "I thought he had behaved badly to my aunt."

"Oh! if the Beloved was concerned that accounts for everything. So that idol of your youthful worship was acquainted with Sir Richard. And why your animosity?"

I stammered explanations, feeling surprisingly foolish as I did so.

"How could you have judged of their position, or their reasons?" she exclaimed. "You were a mere child, and of love and its hundred-and-one complications you could have known nothing. Your unreasoning attitude of devotion probably blinded your sense of justice. Believe me,

Sâba, it is a mistake to care too much for one person. It is really a sublime form of selfishness, benefiting neither. The wider the output of your affections the better; the less chance of heartaches and heartbreaks. Either be universal, or else like me throw your whole mind into some engrossing occupation; it will save you from a great deal of unhappiness."

"I wish I had some occupation," I said; "music is so disheartening. Always a case of 'the little more and how much it is.' I cannot accomplish the little more, not under attendant circumstances. If I could go to Germany like your cousin and really study——"

"But you don't want to make it a profession; you said that wouldn't be allowed, even if you had double your present amount of talent and proficiency."

"Oh! dear me, what a cumberer of the earth I promise to be! What shall I do with myself?"

"At present come and help me get my study into order and arrange my books. Next week I shall commence work; there'll be no holiday for me this summer. What with moving and getting settled I have pushed off my *Temple Bar* serial until I tremble at sight of the post."

We went into that charming room over the drawing-room which she had selected as her own. The windows overlooked the garden, and her writing-table was placed so that all its greenery and beauty and perfume were an outlook for any wearied or waiting glance. Low bookshelves ran round the walls, and these we began to arrange from the boxes of volumes hitherto unopened.

How I envied her those treasures! The poets with one shelf to themselves and in noble bindings—Shelley, Keats, Byron, Scott, Burns, Tennyson, the Brownings, Adelaide Proctor, and many others; then volumes of Emerson, Carlyle, Darwin, Ruskin and Herbert Spencer; Hegel, Froude. Fiction she had in plenty, and in whole sets uniformly bound, the gift of her uncle. Thackeray and Dickens and George Eliot, the Brontës and Jane Austen, Bulwer Lytton and Scott, Sheridan and Goldsmith.

"I should love to sit here and go steadily through them all," said I eagerly. "I have never been allowed to read half as much as I want to read. I have a perfect greed for books. I would rather any day have a book and no human society, than any amount of society and no books."

"Well, that's a safe choice," she said, as she dusted

and arranged her enviable collection. "They are good friends and they never fail us. What we appreciate once is at our service a hundred times. There are books one loves the more, the more one reads them. That is the only sure test of worth."

"Where will you put your own?" I asked her as I took out a new edition of the famous "Noah Blake's Romance." Since then she had published a volume of "Essays," one of short stories, and another novel called "The Door of Truth."

"Oh! they go over there by the fireplace; that small shelf ought just to hold them. By the way, Dorian Giles has published his poems. He sent me the book to-day; I expect you will find your copy when you get home."

I dropped the books in my excitement. "Oh! *do* let me see it! Have you read any?"

"Yes. The book is thin and very strangely bound and got up. There are only about a dozen poems altogether. Some are perfect gems; the others—well, I hope he will be sorry for writing them some day."

I was conscious of disappointment. "Why? Because they are so bad?"

"In more senses than one," she said. "If you take my advice you will not read them, but I don't expect you will take it, and unfortunately your home critics don't read or care for poetry, do they?"

"No," I said, "and they cannot understand why I should care about it. But I will take your advice, Ann, if you are serious, and limit myself to the choice you deem fitting. I know there are heaps of horrible and undesirable books that would only do one harm. Frankly, I have no curiosity about the evil side of life. Of course, you being a writer must take the dark and light, the sun and shadow, or where would be your effects?"

"And I am six years older than you—remember that."

"You don't look it, that's the best of being fair. How old should you think Captain—I mean, Sir Richard is?"

"Oh—well—thirty-three or four. He is fair also, in spite of sun-tan."

"I suppose he *is* as old as that," I said thoughtfully. "One never seems to consider a man's age as one does a woman's. Mrs. Charteris now—should you think she was thirty?"

"It was she who brought Sir Richard. I think she is

some third or fourth cousin. Did you think her very pretty?"

"Lovely! But you are answering my question Irish fashion. I want to know what you would say was her age?"

"Certainly thirty; she has been a widow for two years. I met her about that time, then lost sight of her. We drifted across each other again at a dinner party. Your friend was there also, by the way."

"There are many things that strike me about life and people," I said, as I resumed my work on the shelves. "One of them is the speedy way in which widows reconcile themselves to their loss, the cool manner in which they refer to their dead husbands and think of replacing them. It's horrid. They must have cared very much once—there can be no relationship quite so close and intimate as that of marriage—and yet once set 'free,' as they call it, the dead man seems of no account whatever."

"There is one rare exception to your case," said Ann; "our own dear Queen does not seem to forget or ignore her great loss, does she?"

"Oh! but I suppose Prince Albert really was a man to reverence and worship and remember! How much he did; how much care and worry he saved her! Yes, that is a very different case. But look at Mrs. Charteris——"

"She may not have been happy. All marriages are not suitable or romantic."

"True, but only two years, and then to come out dressed like a bride, and be smiling and flirting and making eyes at men! Ugh! I call it disgusting!"

She laughed merrily.

"Oh, Sâba! you quaint girl! It is very evident you don't know much of life—social life; by the time you are twenty you will have moderated your views considerably."

I was looking at a small shabby volume entitled, "The Cosmic Conception of Nature," and my mind seized upon a subject more important than widows or my own age.

"Oh, Ann!" I exclaimed. "Where did you get this? Have you read it?"

She came and looked over my shoulder.

"I picked it up at some secondhand bookstall in Cheapside. Yes, I have read it. The subject is an engrossing one. It deals with the truth of the universe and the origin of man; great subjects——"

"Oh! would you lend it to me? I do so want to know

something about Buddhism. One only gets scraps and hints as a rule, but it really *is* the clue to all religious symbolism, isn't it ?”

“ So this writer says. I don't know whether you ought to read it. Everything goes to prove that the Western Creeds are a mere child's alphabet in comparison with Eastern philosophy. That book tells of a race old in knowledge when Egypt was in its infancy, and the Hebrew leader yet unborn. It is no milk for babes, my child !”

“ I am sick of milk !” I exclaimed. “ Surely, surely it can't be wrong to desire to get at the *root* and real meaning of things instead of accepting surface definitions. We know religion had its root in paganism. It always has been, and I suppose always will be, a thing of symbols. Our Christianity of to-day is founded on the Hebraic laws of sacrifice and atonement. If it were not so, why should the priesthood lay such stress on the service of the Sacrament ? Ann ”—I broke off suddenly—“ tell me, have you ever attended the communion service ?”

“ Yes, but not for some years. Why ?”

“ Then you have been confirmed ?”

“ When I was fourteen. Haven't you, Sâba ?”

“ No.” I suddenly sat down all at white heat of earnestness and keeping the little brown book in my hand. “ Listen, Ann. Of course my mother wished it, and said I was to attend a confirmation class and be prepared and all that. Well, I thought it might be a means of leading me to religion, of showing me the right way, so I went to the classes. They were conducted by a semi-imbecile young curate who contented himself with enquiring if we knew our catechism, the creed and the commandments ; then he used to read out to us about Saint ‘ This ’ and Father ‘ That,’ and impress upon us that our great privilege henceforward would be to attend ‘ early celebrations,’ and inform ourselves as to the true symbols, teachings and ceremonies of the Church—*his* Church, or rather, his vicar's, who was a recent pervert to ritualism and thought only of vestments, candles, decorations, genuflexions. All the pompous importance which attends to the office of ‘ priest.’

“ The climax came when he wanted us to attend *private confession* in the vestry before the confirmation day. Sixteen girls ! aged from thirteen to fifteen ! I told him frankly I should never dream of confessing my sins to a man, probably as great a sinner as myself ! That Christ

had distinctly abolished rites and ceremonies; that he had ordained the Sacrament as a memory of His last supper, not His last *breakfast*; that nowhere had He said it could only be received by a priest *for* the congregation; that the whole meaning of the word had been perverted by *man* in order to make himself of importance in the eyes of men. Then I said I should like to ask him a few questions, and I read out a list I had made after each class. I can't remember them all now, but I know one was the 'real meaning of a vow,' and another, 'Whether any confirmed girl or youth had ever really kept it?' ever 'renounced the devil and all his works, the pomps and glory of the world, and the desires of the flesh? Had obeyed God's will, and kept His commandments and crucified all carnal affections?' If the vow meant all this it should only be taken by *old* people who had done with life and the world, not young ones just commencing to enter upon both. How could we renounce the world? How live in it and be of it, go into society, come 'out' as it was called, and begin the ordinary *débutante's* life of balls, parties, and gaieties with this vow of renunciation on our conscience? He was furious; as for the girls they looked positively terrified. But I know that out of that class only four put in an appearance on the day, and Sâba Macdonald was not one of the four!"

Ann was looking at me half amused, half shocked.

"My dear girl, what a thing to do! What did your people say?"

"My mother was very angry, but my grandfather took my part when he heard of confession. He has a holy horror of ritualism."

"It will be a power to be reckoned with before this century ends," she said. "I have a friend in Germany who was a Roman Catholic priest. He told me that the Tractarian movement had done more for their cause than all the Jesuit Fathers put together; that he was confident England would again turn to Rome and acknowledge her authority; that some high dignitary of the Romish priesthood had actually said that it was bad policy for them to try and convert people, as "*the Ritualists would do it better*, and might in time bring over the whole Established Church."* Rather a knock-down blow for Protestant prejudices, was it not?"

* This is perfectly true.

I sighed. "I wonder if it *really* matters? If we are going to be judged by our creed, or our actions? For after all a creed is only a matter of accident. We are born Protestants or Catholics, or Nonconformists, or Buddhists, or Mohammedans. We have to accept what our parents teach, go to the church they wish, and for years and years appear to think as they do, even if we don't."

"Perfectly true," said Ann. "But if anyone thinks seriously about these matters the conviction surely is that symbol and service will never save one's soul. That is an individual matter; a thing concerning only the individual and the God who gave that soul. For my part I go to church or worship merely as a spiritual rest. The ritual has nothing to do with my *inner* self, nor do I find it ever reaches it. I have one strong belief, and that is that the mysterious power which sent me into this strange world will neither forsake me in it, nor forget me when I leave it. Blindly and unconsciously we enter life, blindly and unconsciously we battle on for some cause or reason that compels the warfare. There is no peace but death, and after death— Who knows?"

I looked at her—so fair and young and gifted, yet in her eyes the same shadow, in her words the same perplexity as lived in mine.

"Oh, Ann!" I cried passionately, "was ever cruelty greater than this sending of man's soul on a voyage so perilous, with only a hundred misguiding charts offered in mockery of his ignorance, with only blind instincts to keep him from peril and from sin? For what one calls right another calls wrong, and who is to judge since God is always silent?"

"Is it He who is silent, or man who is deaf?" said Ann softly; "sometimes—I wonder."

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN I reached home under Phil Lorrimer's escort it was nearly ten o'clock.

At the door Rachel informed me my mother was "very much upset, and I was to go to her at once."

It was so much in the order of things that misfortune should dog the heels of any enjoyment, that I was scarcely

unprepared to find trouble awaiting me. I ran hastily upstairs. I found mamma lying down on her bed surrounded by an atmosphere of eau-de-Cologne and toilet vinegar, and grandmamma fussing and crying in company with her grief.

"Oh, Sâba," she wailed, "something dreadful has happened! Oh! your poor, dear mother—what troubles she has had to bear!"

"But what is it?" I asked.

"Your father—poor unfortunate man——"

"Not—not *dead*?" I gasped, feeling all the room grow suddenly dim as I clutched the bed-post.

"Dead—no——! Perhaps it would have been more merciful. He has had a sunstroke—and he is coming home——"

"The Laird?" I cried joyously. "Oh, what good news; but why are you so upset?"

Mamma dragged herself up on her pillows and looked at me out of red and swollen eyes.

"Can't you understand? A sunstroke! It has affected his head; his mind will never be the same. Some friend of his—a doctor—has written to tell me. They have sold his sheep run, and realised what money they could. He will be home very soon—next week perhaps—and we are paupers!"

She burst into a fresh flood of tears and grandmamma sobbed in sympathy. I felt strangely calm and unmoved as was the annoying Sâba Macdonald way for which I had so often been miscalled unfeeling. It seemed to me that nothing mattered very much so only the dear old Laird was with us once more. We would be together; we could nurse him back to health. As for pauperism—well, naturally I was far enough from realising the actual meaning of such a word amidst present surroundings.

"Perhaps it's not so bad," I ventured to say. "People get over sunstroke. You remember, mamma, there was that Mr. Jackson, of Ballarat—he had had one, but he quite recovered."

"Oh, it's not that," wailed mamma. "What are we to do? Here have I been hoping he would return to us rich and prosperous, able to give us a home, and now——"

"My poor Janie," whimpered grandmamma, "you shall always have a home as long as I live."

"Oh, my darling mother, I know that; but recollect

what papa said—he could not put up with John here. How could we expect it! We must turn out and go into lodgings; and there's Sâba to think of—her prospects! Who will care to look at her?—a mere poverty-stricken drudge; and as for parties—and all those pretty dresses ordered to-day——”

She sobbed afresh, dabbing her eyes with a wet cambric handkerchief. “Over and over again have I warned him not to go out in the blazing sun—and always to wear a *puggeree*. That awful country! I had a presentiment from the first that it would bring us nothing but misfortune, and so it has!”

I gave myself an impatient shake. “Oh, mamma! What is the use of talking of presentiments. If a thing has happened—well, it has happened. We have to reckon with that! Perhaps there is enough money for a small house—or for lodgings; and surely the Scotch lawyers will do something when they hear this!”

“Sâba is right,” chirruped grandmamma. “Let us look at the best side, my Janie, not the worst. In any case your papa would, I am sure, pay the rent of a little house such as Sâba suggests; a furnished one, I suppose. There are plenty to be had in Bayswater; and your husband may have enough to keep you both. There is the Scotch property to be reckoned with.”

“And I could teach music, or be a governess!” I said suddenly.

This suggestion proved only another rock against which the waves of sorrow were to break. Sâba Macdonald a governess! Shades of grandpapa and grandmamma and all the Heavysage ancestry (leave alone the Rajah)—what would be thought of such a thing?

So Sâba withdrew into her shell and made no more brilliant suggestions, but the discussion went on amidst tears and laments for the best part of another hour. At its conclusion she was dismissed, carrying varied plans for the morrow in her small bewildered head, conscious that novelty in any form—even a sad one—possessed an invigorating influence for her.

* * * * *

Are presentiments fulfilled? Is it sometimes permitted for mortals to have some brief glance behind the veil that hides the future from the present?

This is a question *à propos* of the message of that next morning. A telegram:

"My beloved wife passed away in sleep last night.

"GEORGE KIRKMANN."

There were the usual exclamations of shocked horror and surprise. Grandmamma shed tears and said how "providential" it seemed that she had paid that visit yesterday. Grandpapa evaded any discussion on so disagreeable a subject as death and its unmannerly visitations. Mamma, full of her own troubles and prospective house-hunting, scarcely paid any attention to the subject. After all, the Kirkmanns had never been her friends—only Sâba's.

Was Sâba grieved—or conscious of loss? For a few moments she felt that some new great blank faced life on its threshold; that one true, real friend would give her counsel and comfort never more. Then she remembered the patient waiting for reunion—the beautiful faith. It had met its reward; why should one grieve? (Did this explain Ada's visit—and the dream?) Had she advanced to the threshold to meet her beloved, and give her welcome. I hoped so; I believed it. I shut my grief away and only remembered that on the "other side of the closed door" two angels might be awaiting even one so unworthy as myself, when for me, too, the call should come.

In my own room I read my Message over again, and to its meaning added those last gentle words of counsel only a few hours old: "No ill we suffer is so great, but that a greater might not afflict us."

* * * * *

Ring up the curtain once more; show the stage set for dramatic simplicity, and Sâba Macdonald, as household goddess, presiding over the dusting of rooms and cooking of meals, and various economies made necessary by a change in social conditions.

Show her also as happier for them; happier for the very necessity of action, thought, work. Happy above all that someone here loves her dearly—someone who, amidst lapses of memory, and sad mental wanderings, turns always to the "little lassie" of childhood's days for comfort; fancying her still small and helpless; trudging

by his side in scrub or bush-land ; riding the small pony, as he sets forth on long rounds to visit stockman's hut or sheep run.

Everything was changed as by a magic wand. No Cinderella of the ball-room now—but a veritable Cinderella of the chimney-corner.

The small furnished house looked very small and commonplace after Pembridge Square. The ugliness and arrogance of new villas were bad enough, but those dreary terraces and endless rows of stuccoed houses were appalling in their dreariness. The London "semi-detached" has vast histories of semi-gentility ; the effort at keeping up appearances ; of reconciling the state of door-knocker and doorsteps with the slatternly efforts of a maid-of-all-work. We were happy in once more securing our faithful Jean, and dwelling in a sort of domestic strife strongly reminiscent of the Australian days, for Jean was masterful, and had her own ways and methods of work, and disliked being interfered with. Mamma had chosen to recommence housekeeping on the Pembridge Square lines. These Jean Macgregor considered "wasteful and pretentious" ; on the other hand her suggestions as to using up "scraps" and the services of a stock-pot met with little favour. Her plain meals and knowledge of Scotch dishes might suit the Laird, but the Laird's wife had her health to consider and was fastidious.

Fortunately, for sake of peace, she was invited to accompany grandmamma for the annual sea-side exodus. "Scarborough" sounded its welcome summons, and the Laird and I, and faithful Jean, were left to ourselves.

After the first shock of seeing him so changed, and grown so grey and aged, I had become used to his dependence on me, to his occasional fits of childishness and forgetfulness ; his curious dislike of my grandfather, and his two favourite occupations—reading the newspaper, and smoking a briarwood pipe.

My own importance as a housekeeper delighted me. To give the orders, to have stores and keys ; to say what joint or pudding or fish or vegetable should be contributed to the bill of fare. Jean—whatever her failings of temper—was a splendid cook, and I was sufficiently up in household matters to know what to order ; to avoid waste, and to approve of keeping the "stock-pot" going. At first I thought of modelling myself and my conduct on

the notable examples of Esther Summerson and Ruth Pinch, but I soon came to the conclusion that jingling keys here, there, and everywhere, was rather silly; and that beef-steak puddings required suet—not eggs—for the paste, besides being greatly the better for what Jean termed “just a wee bit kidney” by way of improving the gravy.

Time never hung heavy on my hands now. I was always busy, and busy in such novel ways and methods that the days seemed shorter by many hours than they had used to be.

The Laird and I went for occasional walks in the cool of the evening; down Holland Lane and through Holland Park. I had taken him to see Ann Shottery, and when she was busy over her writing she begged us to make use of the garden. There we would sit and talk to old Mrs. Shottery, or the pipe would be brought out and he would smoke contentedly, only putting an occasional question as to time or place, or, perhaps, some unknown personage in that Bush land I had well-nigh forgotten.

When it grew dusk we would saunter home together, and I would try to draw him out of painful thoughts and fear of poverty which always seemed a haunting nightmare. That fear, and his anger at Scotch lawyers, were the only things that troubled him. My mother had taken over his money and the management of his affairs. We were not “well off” exactly, but we were not paupers, and there seemed a prospect of something forthcoming out of the great “Case” which would at least keep a roof over our heads, and give us food and clothes.

Those pretty dresses ordered by grandmamma duly arrived, but I felt they were somewhat too “fine feathers” for a by no means fine bird. There were no carriage drives, nor parties, now; neither would I have accepted invitations during my mother’s absence. I went nowhere except to Ann’s, and she was so busy that we rarely had one of our old conferences; but she lent me books and was always kind and charming to the Laird, and seemed delighted that I at last had discovered an object in life, and by reason of that admirable discovery was actually becoming useful and contented, and a reasonable being.

The opposing elements had ceased to wage war. Now that I was no longer opposed, thwarted, and dominated, I ceased to be a rebel. Added to this, I had a sense of

being useful, of being *wanted*, that pleased my jealous heart immensely. To be looked for, to be warmly greeted, to hear the old fond words—all this was very sweet to Sâba, and made up for many other losses.

But things were not always smooth. The Laird had occasional fits of passion; strange anger at trifles; strange moods when no one could pacify him. These often alarmed Sâba and caused her to remember that warning sent by the Australian doctor respecting his brain. Such happenings were dreaded clouds on the daily sunshine; a hint of tottering, doubtful moments when she faced fear with all a girl's helplessness. Sometimes the reaction was even more painful, for there would be a return of the proud, confident, warm-hearted father of old times; an assertion of intent to defy misfortune; to get the better of "rascals"; to claim and take his own. He would seem puzzled by his shabby poverty-stricken surroundings, the cramped space, the general ugliness of details. These things hurt Sâba doubly when they hurt him. He would tell her of lordly acres of moor and loch; of farm-lands and tenantry; of the new beautiful house he had built and furnished only for other folks' occupation.

Sâba could never understand how such things had come about, or how they were ever to be remedied. Half laughing, she reminded herself of the great Chancery case in "Bleak House"; wondered if the Macdonald Trust was turning into another Jarndyce v. Fitz-Jarndyce suit? If her poor father's brain would dwell persistently on legal wrongs and lost fortunes until they grew to be an unendurable burden, and overthrew reason. He sometimes showed her bundles of documents, red-taped, docketed and dated; letters and deeds that had followed him the world over; long useless duplicated forms, notifications, claims, and statements—everything by which the ingenuity of Scotch law works out annual incomes for Scotch lawyers. Each trivial incident, each point that needed only plain "yea" or "nay" seemed to have been dragged through the mud of dispute and controversy; thrust into foggy channels of counsel's opinions; twisted into unmeant meanings; plunged into technicalities, fenced with, footballed with; made the sport of rejoinders, exonerations, multiple-poining, Scotch barristers, English counsel, and the House of Lords.

Finally, "Victoria, by the Grace of God," seemed to

have something to say in the matter ; at least, her name figured in large capitals on equally large deeds. This fact, coupled with sunstroke, set a final seal upon the poor Laird's capabilities of comprehension, or of asserting his own rights to his own possessions.

To Sâba the whole business was incomprehensible ; probably it was meant to be so. She stared aghast at columns of figures, at estimates, applications for borrowing money, and the like. £70,000 seemed a great deal of money, and it was her father's evidently, and yet he had no power to write a cheque or sign a deed that should benefit himself or his family !

After a time she put the whole business out of her mind as hopeless, and the interest of household details, her books, her music, and the Laird, were quite enough to occupy her attention.

The house was conveniently situated both for Ann Shottery's *locale* and that of Pembridge Square. The street was at once respectable and unfashionable, claiming postal delineation as "Kensington" on the one side and Campden Hill on the other.*

It was very poorly furnished and very ugly, and, needless to say, very early-Victorian. It possessed even more than a fair share of woollen rep and fringed valance ; of Kidderminster and Dutch carpets ; of glass lustres and painted china vases ; of hideous pictures and useless knick-knacks ; of *chiffoniers* and walnut-wood tables. Not all Sâba's efforts could make the drawing-room tolerable, or annihilate its staring wall-paper, its stiff chairs and couch and tables—that incomparable "suite" beloved by all who furnished, or were furnished for, in those benighted days. There had been no piano in the house, but her grandfather sent one in—the old cottage piano which Sâba had used in the first days of her arrival.

"When you want to try over the music for my Tuesday evenings you can come to my house, and use the new boudoir grand in the drawing-room," he had told her.

Fortunately, in July and August the said "evenings" were dispensed with ; the quartet party betook themselves to Margate or Southend, and grandpapa devoted

* Sâba Macdonald declines more distinct localization, for fear that pilgrims interested in her life should trouble themselves to visit the shrine of these memoirs. She has had experience of the well-known enthusiasm of American readers !

his spare time to the further embellishment of his house ; or the *disarranging* of suitable compositions for the autumn and winter campaign.

Grandmamma and mamma had been five weeks in Scarborough, and the Laird and I had settled down to domestic bliss and were perfectly happy together. I often wondered why I had once been so afraid of him or thought him so strict and stern. After all, he had only been true to the ethics of his own childhood, when discipline and subordination did their utmost to crush out the young joy of youth—and suppress anything so unimportant as character ! But now, though he still expected implicit obedience, he treated me as worthy of confidence—as a companion and help, and, best of all, as a comforter in these days of dependence and failing powers.

August was nearing its last days when, one hot afternoon about five, Jean came to my door and informed me that a lady and gentleman were waiting to see me in the drawing-room.

I had been putting on one of the muslin dresses—the salmon-pink, as it happened—for the Laird and I were going to Ann Shottery's to have tea in the garden.

“ Did they give their names ? ” I asked wonderingly.

“ ’Deed, no,” said Jean, “ and I didna’ trouble to ask. The lady’s just awfu’ grand wi’ trailing yards o’ white silk to her gown, and the air o’ a queen wi’ throne and sceptre awaitin’ her gracious acceptance. The likes o’t, indeed ! ”

I was puzzled as to who such visitors could be. I hurried on with my toilet, getting very flushed and hot in consequence ; then I ran downstairs, opened the drawing-room door, and confronted Sir Richard Elmore and—Mrs. Charteris !

CHAPTER VII.

It had never been my fate to receive visitors. Usually my place was in a retired corner, the looker-on at grandmamma’s cordial greetings, or grandpapa’s polite Chesterfieldisms.

For a moment I was too confused to do more than shake hands and say I was sorry my mother was not at home.

"Oh! we know that," said Mrs. Charteris. "We have just come from the Shotters', and Ann told us you were alone. But as I was so near I thought I would leave cards for your mother. I made her acquaintance at Ann's party and I promised to call at Pembridge Square. Then I left town, and only returned last week. I am flying off again for some country visits, but my cousin reminded me of social duties and here we are fulfilling them."

She talked very quickly and had a quick restless way of looking about her that made me more nervous. I had a habit of concentrating my attention on one special thing—or person; she was perpetually startling me. Sir Richard had said nothing after his formal greeting.

When Mrs. Charteris had come to a full stop, leaving me painfully conscious of the ugly room, the shabby furniture and my own *gaucherie*, he asked why I had not gone to the seaside also.

I explained that I had to take charge of the house and the Laird.

"We have been to Boulogne," interrupted Mrs. Charteris in that appropriative manner of which I strongly disapproved. "Dick took it into his head to make a pilgrimage to certain spots and places which apparently held a charm in the past." She gave a little staccato laugh, and I suddenly met Sir Richard's eyes. I thought of that talk in the moonlit garden. So he had not forgotten!

"But Boulogne was detestable," she continued; "hot, smelly; crowded with shoddy English and second-rate French. I was thankful to get out of it. Do you know it at all? I suppose not."

"I have been there once," I said; "more than three years ago. I did not like the low part of the town, but I loved the Haute Ville, and the old ramparts."

"The ramparts——" she said vaguely; "are there any? I never went anywhere except to the Etablissement and the sands."

"No wonder you thought it stuffy and crowded," I said. "It is so funny the way English people all throng to one particular place when they go to the seaside. In England it is the pier—abroad, the Casino. There is lovely country all around Boulogne. And the Forest—didn't you even go there? It is beautiful."

She shrugged graceful shoulders.

"No; not even for a drive. I like to be where there are people. They are more stimulating than—Nature."

"Nature has no appreciation of Paris gowns," put in Sir Richard.

I saw those brilliant blue eyes of hers flash over my frock. I knew it was anything but Parisian; only simple, and not fashioned on Le Follet.

"You are a great friend of Ann's, are you not?" she rattled on. "How sweet she is! and how totally unlike what one expects a writing woman to be. Somehow, I always thought of them as wearing blue spectacles, short dresses, and thick boots, and terribly plain. Look at the pictures of woman geniuses—Jane Austen, Mrs. Beecher Stowe, George Eliot (poor dear thing!), George Sands, too, and Eliza Cook and Charlotte Brontë. Well, I suppose one has to sacrifice one's looks to one's brains. But Ann is a wonder. She possesses both. I absolutely fell in love with her, and, of course, I got her books immediately. Do you like the Henry Wood woman? I detest her books; they're all exactly alike. They say she is popular with the 'million.' Fancy writing for the million; I would a thousand times sooner have a hundred *appreciative* readers! I love Miss Braddon! Isn't the 'Audley's Secret' delicious? So is the 'Woman in White'; sort of gives one the creeps. Such a novel idea to make an ugly woman the interesting one. You can't care a straw for that mawkish, sentimental Lady Glyde, but Marion Halcombe grips your interest at once."

Since the subject had turned on books, I forgot my shyness and ventured on both criticism and remarks. She seemed surprised at the range and extent of my reading. Sir Richard (I thought how much nicer "Dick" sounded without the formal prefix), said very little, but what he did showed me that he, too, had a wide and appreciative knowledge of famous authors, and a passing allusion to his library at Manor Hall gave me a pang of envy.

"I think I should be perfectly happy," I said, "if I had a great library full of books, a place whose very air and atmosphere was musty with old calf and leather! I don't mean someone else's library, where one is only permitted to look in and take a book out and put it back again, but all my own, whose names I knew, and whose

works I had treasured for years and at last was able to sit down and *feast* upon."

"What an extraordinary view of happiness," she drawled, looking at me critically.

"Unusual—certainly," said Sir Richard; "most young ladies sigh for jewels, or fine gowns, or admirers. Do these things leave your desires untouched?"

"Quite," I said coolly. "Jewels look very well in shop windows, but I hate to see a woman covered with bits of glass and stone like a Hindoo idol. Fine gowns are very well for Courts and pageants, but you can't feel really comfortable in them; besides—" I stopped abruptly, conscious of blazing cheeks, and of keen eyes bent on me.

"Well?" said Mrs. Charteris, "what of the admirers? Don't they suggest a possible happiness?"

"No," I said curtly. "All the love affairs I know anything about have turned out disastrous failures. Besides, a lover always expects to become a husband—and husbands are generally odious. They seem to think that once they are married they can be as rude, or indifferent, or selfish, as they please. I read the other day that some American writer has said 'a woman had only one thing for which to thank a husband, and that was—widowhood.'"

There was a dead, cold pause. Then, like a flash, rushed to my mind the memory that this woman was a widow! I was annihilated with confusion at my unfortunate candour.

It hardly surprised me that she rose gracefully—though with somewhat heightened colour—and said that they really must be going, she had other calls to make. But the society smile had slipped off her face for a moment. It looked hard and cruel and I felt sure she hated me. I rang the bell for Jean to show them out, and turning, met Sir Richard's half-amused glance.

"What a treat it is to meet with real candour," he said as he took my hand. "If you are as frank as this always there will be no reckoning the victims of your bow and spear."

"I cannot help saying what I think at the time," I said confusedly, "but oh!—afterwards—I feel so ashamed. Do please tell your cousin I never thought or meant anything. It just slipped out—"

"I shall tell her—nothing," he said. "A little truth is good for us—man or woman. Good-bye; when shall I see you again?"

The white silk was trailing down the narrow, shabby staircase. I looked at it and then at him.

"See *me*? I don't know. Do you want to?"

He laughed outright.

"Miss Sâba, you are delicious! How came so natural a flower to grow in that cold forcing-ground of Pembridge Square?"

"Your cousin is waiting," I said, conscious of a pause below and a backward glance, and of Jean Macgregor standing at the open door.

"I know—but so am I. May I call again?"

"Mamma will be home in a fortnight," I said.

"That's purely conventional and Pembridge Squarish! I want to see you—not your mamma!"

"I am nearly always at home in the afternoon," I said, laughing also, for frankness was much more natural than the "prunes and prism" efforts of my former speech.

"Sundays?" He was three or four steps below me and looked up. Again came an impatient call. I saw an open carriage standing in the street, and recognised a sense of importance and probably the envy of curious neighbours, for carriages were rare events.

"Yes—Sundays," I answered impulsively.

He ran down the few remaining steps and I saw him hand his beautiful cousin into the carriage; but he shut the door, he did not get in himself. Thanks to Jean, I could see that—and wonder. Perhaps Mrs. Charteris wondered also, for she looked very cross, unfurled her parasol sharply and drove away—alone.

There was no reason why Sâba Macdonald should have been glad of that fact; yet she was.

* * * * *

"Books! Books! Books! Oh, why does one write them? I am aware of my little brain!"

It was Ann who spoke, throwing herself back in a deep low wicker chair (an artistic discovery of Dorian's), and fanning her pale, tired face with a large palm-leaf fan that savoured of Japanese art. We were all in the garden; the tea-table stood invitingly under the trees, laden with fruit and cakes and delicacies. The Laird was sitting by

Mrs. Shottery ; Dorian was sprawling on the grass ; I was in another low chair beside Ann, having just heard that the delicate pink of my frock blended delightfully with the faint green of her muslin gown.

"Why this sublime discontent ?" asked Dorian lazily. He tilted back his straw hat and looked at her approvingly as at something that pleased his sense of artistic fitness.

"Oh, I don't know. It comes—often. Surely you know it, too. One sets out with a great ideal and it seems always eluding and escaping. The greatest is never possible of achievement."

"Otherwise one would never be great," said Dorian.

"And after all it seems so useless!" she went on, "trying to paint a picture that no eyes will see as our own see it. To tell a life's history in words—its struggles, visions, sufferings. And worst of all is it to know that what one feels or *has* felt one's self, is the very blood in the veins of one's creations ; the reason of their existence—an existence which the world may mock, scorn or criticise as it pleases."

"Then, why write ?"

"A compelling 'must,' I suppose. The brain is a sort of clockwork mechanism ; once wound up it has to run itself out."

"But, Ann," said I, "do all writers put themselves—their feelings, their own joys and sorrows—into their characters ? Do you think Dickens felt what he makes us feel when we read him ?"

"Most certainly. There never was a book yet that brought a tear or a smile to the reader, that has not behind its apparent artifice the support of the author's own feelings !"

"That must make authorship doubly hard," I said. "Even more exacting in its demands than manual labour."

"Everyone does not take it so seriously as you, Miss Shottery," said Dorian. "I know authors to whom the creation of a plot or a character is as much a pastime as my cigarette. Their brains are a mere playground for fancy ; they sport with words as they imagine sins ; for sins and virtues have the same birthplace."

"Nay, my good sir," interrupted the Laird suddenly. "You'll excuse my interrupting you, but your observation lacks both sense and judgment. For sin is of the

Devil, and he uses it as a weapon of destruction, but virtue is of God's grace and teaching, and a means of purification from the lusts of the flesh."

Dorian sat up and looked at the speaker with surprise.

"Ah! Mr. Macdonald, you still hold the old Puritan simplicity of belief. We are wiser now, we moderns. We don't accept the personality of Good or Evil. Matter is the origin and cause of life; and life—as an individual essence—ceases with the death of the body; or, rather, is submerged into the other matter, which again becomes another form of life. Of spiritual origin we have no proof, and priesthood is merely another name for that ambitious grasp of authority common to all mankind, and foolishly permitted by original ignorance, unconscious of the harm that would arise from its exercise."

"No, young man, no!" interposed the Laird vigorously. "You may think that's all very fine and clever, but it's just the teaching of Antichrist—a snare of Satan, who blind men's eyes with vanity so as to net their souls more surely."

Dorian Giles smiled; that strange chill smile of his.

"Ah! my good sir, how refreshing it is to hear such words of wisdom! For good honest folk life cannot be too short, or eternity too long. Their visions of a future existence are a compound of the worldly alchemy of earthly splendour and the personal right to a special place in one of those mansions of pearl and gold. With regard to the musical abilities associated with harps and choral outbursts, I say nothing; the mind, like the voice, has its limitations."

The Laird frowned, and looked at the audacious speaker with eyes of wrath.

"I'm thinking you're not far short of an atheist, young man," he said sternly; "but maybe you're city-born and bred. If you want to know God you'll not find Him in books and theories, or man's poor rotten bits of science. Go out with Nature into the great primeval world; watch the change and glory of the seasons; the wonders of the heavenly sphere; the magnitude and might of storms beneath which man's little work is as a thread snapped by a child's finger! Go forth from dens of infamy, from the shames, vileness, dishonesty, shams and tricks of the world's cities, and face the Creator alone in His solitudes! If you have a soul at all you will hear

its call—there. If you are vile beyond all mortal hope, a voice will speak to you then !”

We were all silent. That uplifted face, those flashing eyes amazed us, I think ; set arguments and doubts at defiance ; held us wondering, and, perhaps, a little ashamed, as any noble faith or great ideal does shame baser natures.

I was astonished at the old man's energetic defence. It reminded me of the days when I had listened to morning prayers and Sunday readings, and the expounding of what was called “The Word.” That “Word” which had always raised a hundred doubts and enquiries in Sâba's childish mind ; that “Word” she had learnt chapter by chapter, and for so long put aside, or criticised.

The subject dropped now as we took our tea from Mrs. Shottery, but I noticed Ann drew her chair near my father's, and gave him all her attention.

Dorian dropped his tones to confidence, and devoted his remarks to me.

“I can understand why you were a Wonder-child,” he said. “Pagan wilds and Puritan counsels ; the struggle between the revealed and the imagined ; nature warring with old dead weights of superstition ! Of all religious bigots none can excel the Scot. He would argue for the truth of a text as if he had heard it delivered ; seen it written ; had it on the authority of a superior Being to whom man's inspiration counted as infinitely more trustworthy than a printing-press, or a dozen muddled translations. But let us talk of something else. Do you know this is the first time I have seen you since our friend's pleasant house-warming ? I heard of your father's arrival ; of your new domicile. I meant to call, but the end of the season brought me temptations. I went to Wales, climbed mountains, interviewed the Bard in his native wilds ; learnt the meaning of an *Eisteddfod* ; of Cymri ; discovered that the harpist still carried his ‘wild harp,’ that *Bore da i chivi* meant ‘Good-morning’ ; that *Cymerwcheisteddle* was an invitation to be seated ; also that every noble Welshman claims a double name. He is addressed as Evan-Evans, or Robert-Roberts, or Jones-Jones. I was immensely interested ; it had not occurred to me that the ancient Briton of *woad* and wolf-skin still existed in all his primitive glory. That—as far as belonging to England, or as part of the English nation—

the Welsh are a distinct tribal race, like the Jew. Wales boasts of the smallest number of counties, of peers, and, I think, of sheep in the United Kingdom. I am not quite sure about the sheep. Perhaps I have confused size with number. I know I had nothing else to eat, and that a leg of mutton would form a respectable dinner for the average man."

"What do you think of the Laird?" I asked him suddenly, not feeling particularly interested in Welsh mutton or the Welsh race.

"The—do you mean that Highland chieftain yonder, who has the honour of calling you daughter?"

I laughed. "Yes; if it is an honour. I am glad you think he looks a Highland chieftain. Our clan is very old—and great——"

"Is it the clan that boasts of coming over with Noah; or the other that had 'its own boat,' and swore 'my foot is on my native heath and my name——'"

"You are confusing the Macgregor and the MacNab!"

"That's Saxon stupidity. Are we Saxon or Sassenach to the noble Scot? So you call him the Laird! How original. I was so afraid of hearing you say 'Papa.' Sâba Macdonald's papa is of the nursery nurseryish, but 'the Laird'—that has a fine inspiriting flavour about it, like himself. He is a splendid old man; there is an element of fire and strength which is rare and exhilarating."

"Oh, he is splendid," I explained; "at least, he was before that accident. Sometimes he is quite his old self as I remember him in Australia, but at others——"

"I know about the sunstroke. I am so sorry. Poor little Sâba! Do you know you have had your fair share of troubles, child. Your environment has always been unsympathetic, hasn't it?"

"I suppose I'm not alone in that experience."

He leant back again in his old lazy fashion, and examined me with that slow languorous glance, whose meaning I could never fathom.

"Your experience is turning you out rather interesting," he said at last. "Sâba Macdonald, listen to me a moment. I told you I was going to America. I intend giving a series of lectures—travelling right through the States. I expect to net a fortune out of the Yankees; then I shall come home and devote myself to literature—'Build my soul a lordly pleasure house' in which to—sin. You

will be eighteen then, Wonder-child. Will you marry me?"

Marry him! Marry Dorian Giles! I could hardly believe my ears. If I had ever pictured a proposal of marriage (which I hadn't), it certainly was something rather different from this cool, unexpected query. I felt inclined to laugh. Certainly I was as cool and unconcerned as himself.

"I wish you would be serious sometimes," I said. "Do you think marriage is as easy to accept as a new pair of gloves. I know I am not a bit sentimental, but I do hope if ever I—marry——"

"Don't *please* say it will be for love, or because you have become sentimental," he interposed. "It is such a mistake; so horribly middle-class. They always think they marry for love, and that it is a noble thing to do. On the contrary, it is a very stupid thing, and has one only sure and certain result—regret. To be satisfactory marriage should be perfectly rational; not conducted on lines of personal self-deception. Neither should interfere with the other—or expect more than is given. There need be no idealising, no expectation of wonderful impossible happiness; to be blind to virtues and alive to faults is the usual text of marriage, but I should see no faults, and exercise no virtues, and my wife would have permission to do the same."

Again I laughed. It was not possible to take him seriously.

"I really cannot say whether I could undertake marriage on those lines," I said. "I have never thought about it; but I fancy I should expect a little more consideration than you would display in engaging a servant—or a courier for a journey."

"That is the worst of women," he said, "they always expect so much, and men have to try and live up to the standard. It is really you who are responsible for a false condition of sex morality. You adore us indiscriminately, and then insist on a return of adoration. The male creature is not constructed that way; he loves, desires, possesses, and is satisfied. Your sex are never satisfied, and you possess such awful memories; you are always raking up things one did or said in the 'long ago,' and forgetting that moments of aberration are not *Family Herald* stories 'to be continued in our next.'

A man has no 'next'; a woman has hundreds. He draws his thread taut and snaps it to finality. She thinks hers is elastic and stretches it—to attenuation. For a man, the past has only one charm—it is over; but a woman expects him to revel in it as she does. When he ceases to be reminiscent, she calls him changed and false. If she would only learn that he despises the fallacies of sentiment and prefers real comfort to ideal tragedy, there would be fewer divorces and more *mariages de convenance* on the sensible French system."

This seemed rather an odd epilogue to a proposal, but coming from Dorian Giles it was only what one might have expected.

"Do go on," I said. "You see, this is all news to me. I know nothing of sentiment or romance except from books, and they don't seem quite truthful on the subject."

"They are not," he said; "they paint impossible tragedies, and violent contrasts of joy and sorrow. Life has more shade than contrast. Love's dawn may be sudden, but it has a possible twilight before it touches the midnight darkness novels speak of."

"It always does fade, I suppose?"

"Always. It may renew itself, of course, but only with a new subject as Nature with a new season. I suppose, Wonder-child, you have not even dreamt your first dream yet?"

"No," I said thoughtfully, "and if it is to turn out only a disappointment it is just as well to postpone it as long as possible."

"I have watched you grow up," he said with his odd, half-melancholy smile, "and now I must leave you at the most fascinating stage of womanhood. That reminds me, you haven't given a final answer to my question. Will you——?"

"What may you be saying to my lassie there?" suddenly shouted the Laird, leaning forward in his chair and shaking a menacing fist at my strange suitor. "I tell ye, man, I will not have her pure mind poisoned with atheistical teachings. She was grounded and brought up in sound spiritual doctrine, and it is not well that her ears should be filled with the dangerous heresies mis-called 'Science.'"

I rose hurriedly. I was always a little alarmed when the dear old man got excited. "We were not talking

religion or science, father," I said. "Mr. Giles is going to America to lecture, and he was telling me about his—his tour."

(Oh! Sâba, Sâba! was this quite truthful? Are you growing out of the childish honesty along with the childish years?)

CHAPTER VIII.

ANN detained me a moment as we rose to go.

"Sâba," she said, "you have often said you would like some work. I wonder if you would care to be my secretary?"

I stared blankly at her tired pale face. "You mean——"

"I mean that my work is getting too much for me. I must have someone to write letters and copy manuscripts. The correspondence would have to be done here, a couple of hours every morning. The copying you could take home—that is to say, if you care to undertake it."

"Care! I should love it! Are you really in earnest?"

"Of course. If not you, I must engage a stranger. I resolved to ask you first. I would give you a salary of course; that would make you more independent. Good work deserves its reward, and I am sure yours would be good. You write a beautifully clear hand. You are also well read and intelligent, so that you would avoid mistakes even where I make them. The question is, can you spare the time?"

"Of course I can! My afternoons hang very heavy on my hands, I could do the copying then. About the correspondence, I am doubtful. Must I come every morning?"

"Except Sundays—yes. Is the Laird the difficulty? We must of course ask him. He loves the garden. I thought on fine days he might like to come with you and sit here while you are at work."

"Ann, you are an angel!" I exclaimed.

She smiled faintly. "Indeed, my dear, I'm not; far from it. I'm glad you like the idea. Shall I put on my hat and walk home with you, and we'll talk to the old gentleman on the way."

"Oh, do!" I cried eagerly. "He is so fond of you he'll

not deny you anything. As for my mother—well, the housekeeping isn't such a serious matter. Jean is so capable. And oh! the delight of having something to do—of being useful."

"Don't get too enthusiastic," she said laughing. "Perhaps I am running my own head into danger. You wouldn't be the first copyist who turned author from force of example!"

"Author—I! Would to Heaven there was the smallest chance! No, Ann, talent is born with one, not self-created."

She went away to get her hat and I joined the Laird to explain the delay. He was having another argument with Dorian Giles—nature its basis and "Robbie Burns," god of the Laird's idolatry, its origin.

"To tell me that because your foolish Southron tongue cannot get round the grand words o' him, that he's no poet!" was what I heard. "Man, let me tell you that long and long after your modern songsters are dead and forgotten, Robbie Burns will live in the heart of the nation."

"His own, perhaps," murmured Dorian.

"No, sir. Not only his own, but in that of the world, wherever nature speaks and humanity is life's passport."

"Still," argued his opponent, "that does not get over the difficulty of a barbarous accumulation of words, half of which are unpronounceable and the other half incomprehensible."

"Only to born fules," said the Laird angrily; "and I'm thinking, young man, ye're not far removed from that state o' being yourself. What with your atheistical doctrines and your string of high-sounding phrases—"

"Father, *dear!*" I remonstrated, slipping a hand into his arm as I frowned warningly at Dorian, "don't excite yourself with arguing. You know we agreed—you and I—that Burns was a little bit difficult for English people. Remember how hard I found it to pronounce some of the words!"

He patted my hand. "Well, well, lassie, perhaps you're right; I shouldn't be too hard on the young man. He tells me he is a poet himself. Maybe he'll send me his rhymes and let me judge o' their worth."

Rhymes! Poor Dorian with his mellifluous phrases, his exquisite rhapsodies. Rhymes!

"I have his poems at home," I said hastily, "you shall see them. Ah! here comes Ann, she is going to walk back with us."

That turned his attention from the offender, and enabled me to whisper to Dorian that the dear old man was apt to get heated and excited over arguments. He must not mind what he said.

"Mind?" he pressed my hand. "I mind nothing that would trouble you, my Wonder-child; even insults from your revered forbears. And so you have read my poems, yet never said one word to me that might mean appreciation?"

"Some of them are lovely," I said, freeing my hand and trying to repress the laughter that any approach to sentimentality brought to my lips.

"Only some? Which?"

"I liked 'Æolin' and 'The Grey Dawn' immensely."

"Not—'By Candle-light'?"

As this was one of the forbidden poems I had not read it.

"Oh, Sâba," he murmured, "read it again; treasure it as you would a jewel! It is one—a thing of glitter and iridescence; the opaline essence of a dream, remembered and crystallised into shape."

But Ann and the Laird were calling me, and I had to bid him a hurried "good-night" and join them. I wondered as I did so if any girl had ever received a first proposal in quite such a novel fashion and under such public circumstances.

Sauntering home in the lovely August moonlight we told the Laird of the new project. He seemed rather puzzled at first. It had always been a matter of wonder that Ann Shottery should be an authoress, but that she should now have so much work as to need a secretary surprised him infinitely more.

"Well, well, the world's going too fast for my old brains to follow it," he said. "I never thought to hear o' mere lassies like ye two working for a living when there are men and to spare to work for ye. It does not seem right. Yon poet, as he calls himself, what's he about that he does na marry you, Ann, my dear? I cannot understand him hanging about for years in mere friendliness as he calls it. It's not natural."

She laughed gaily. "Oh! Dorian Giles is quite different

from ordinary young men. He is too full of himself and his artistic projects to care about girls or falling in love. It needs a gallant Highlander to do that, Laird."

She patted his arm and he drew himself up, well-pleased. He loved to be called "Laird," and Ann had fallen in with the fancy all the more readily in that he had so much of the true Scot and gallant chieftain about him.

"Ah, weel, lassie," he said, dropping into colloquialism as was his wont. "Gin I were a few years younger and a free man, bonnie creatures like yersel' would no be toiling and working. I would think it shame to permit it."

"But what if I like it? What if something within me tells me I must?" she asked him.

"That would be genius you're meaning. Ay, that's a thing beyond me, lassie. To Him that gives may praise be given. If He has put great thoughts into your brain and filled your mind with pictures of His painting, there is no mortal man or woman can stay ye from the fulfilling o' that law."

"I knew you would say that, and you don't mind Sába helping me? I don't want a stranger, and she and I are such good friends, she understands exactly what I need."

"Indeed, lassie, you're welcome to make your own bargains," he said. "I'm not a rich man now, and little have I to leave her when I'm called home, and small enough will be her *tocher* when a husband claims her; so maybe a little pocket-money will not be amiss, though it's a sair blow to me to think that my own lassie has to work for a living."

"Oh, father, not *that!*" I exclaimed eagerly. "It's more pleasure than work, and you are always saying there's no greater misfortune for man or woman than idleness."

"Ay, that's true, lassie," he said, "that's very true. When your head's empty and your hands still, the de'il is aye fond o' creepin' in and whispering mischief, even if he does na bring it to your side. Well, here we are! Come awa' in, lassie, and rest a while; the old man needs his pipe and his glass o' comfort."

So Ann came in and chatted away while he got his pipe, and I unlocked the sideboard and Jean brought in cake and biscuits and glasses. We sat by the open window and talked of the days in Australia; of perils and exploits he had known, of the long banishment. I suddenly remembered I had not told Ann of my visitors that afternoon. I

did so during an interlude when the Laird was contemplative and enjoying the briarwood.

"They asked me for your address," she said, and then looked at me, smiling softly. "Do you still feel antagonistic?"

"No," I said frankly. "The truth is I have for years been looking at only one side of the question. He is not entirely to blame."

"The 'Beloved' has surely not dropped off her pedestal?"

"She had nothing to do with it," I said hotly; "it was all grandpapa's fault."

"Ah!" The Laird suddenly roused himself. "Did I hear mention o' a selfish old blockhead that thinks the world o' his achievements, and dins his music (such music!) in the ears o' all his friends and acquaintances? 'Grandpapa!'" (he mimicked me to my face—oh, wicked Laird!). "Well, he *is* that, and mair's the pity. But as for natural affection and consideration, the man hasn't an ounce in his whole body. And there's your mother for aye dinning his perfections into my ears. What he has done; his goodness, his kindness. D——n the old hypocrite! And the Lord will aye pardon an old sinner for saying it. What did he do? Give you a room in yon great useless house, and let his own flesh and blood pay for it just as any lodging-house harpy would ha' taken payment!"

"Payment!" I faced round in surprised indignation. "Have you been *paying* him for letting us stay in his house all this time?"

"What else?" he said, taking out his pipe and staring at me. "You didna suppose your mother and yourself were kept and housed and fed for nothing?"

"I—I certainly understood we were his debtors," I faltered.

"De'il a bit!" said the Laird stormily. "And shame on him to let you think so! Aye, I heard o' your playin' and practising away, my poor lassie, and sair angry was I at the thoughts o' it! But never ye mind, those days are over. The daughter o' John Angus Macdonald is no man's slave, even though her poor auld father has fallen on evil days."

"Oh, dear Laird, we are not poor while we have love—and each other," I cried, and rose suddenly to put my

arms about his neck and lean my cheek against his white dear head. "We have enough to live on, and you know that next year the lawyers are to allow you £300 a year. Why, we shall be quite rich—and oh! I'm so glad to hear this!" I released him and stood up. "Do you know if grandpapa had had a professional accompanist to work as I have worked he would have had to pay a guinea a night, and I slaved on because I understood we were indebted to him for everything! I suppose the only thing was my music lessons really?"

"That was all," said the Laird, "being a hobby o' his ain, I e'en let him pay the piper for that tune."

I laughed. "Well, it's a weight off my mind to know this. At least the labourer is worthy of his hire, and remembering how I have laboured sets me free from future obligation. Besides, it was sacrilege the way the music was performed and altered. I perfectly hated those Tuesdays. Thank goodness I'll not be obliged to go to any more unless I wish!"

"That you shall not," said the Laird emphatically, "and if there's any talk o' imposing on you, my lassie, just you send Mr. Barker Heavysage to me, and maybe I'll gie him a bit o' my mind that'll settle his business for him!"

Again I laughed. I felt as if a weight had rolled off my shoulders. Sâba Macdonald might at last reckon with individuality and independence.

"Oh, my dear Ann!" I said, as I let her out and we stood for a last word on the doorstep, "if you only knew how happy I feel to-night?"

"It is about time," she said smiling.

"Oh, well, I have had good days as well as evil, but I love to think of being able to work—and for you, of all people."

"I forgot to mention," she said, "about salary. I could not find a secretary or amanuensis to do all I require to be done under a hundred a year; so, Sâba, you may reckon on that as your own, and it will make you independent even of the dear old Laird."

"A hundred a year!" I gasped. "Oh, Ann, impossible! That is a great deal too much! I couldn't accept it!"

"Very well," said Ann. "I must reluctantly look out for someone who will."

"You are much too generous," I said huskily; "I can't be worth it. I don't know how to thank you."

"It was my uncle's suggestion to have a secretary, so you need not fancy your tremendous salary comes out of my earnings. I am getting quite rich. It appears I have 'caught on' in America, and this present book will mean at least a thousand to me. When can you commence work?"

"This is Saturday—Monday, if you wish?"

"Excellent. Eleven till one, and you can take the MSS. home. I have to get one copy ready for America. I suppose you can arrange your household duties by eleven?"

"I should think so. And an hour's practise. Oh! I was forgetting. I needn't bother about those trios and quintets any more; still, I ought to keep up my music."

"I should think you ought! It would be wicked to neglect such a talent."

"I would give it away gladly for a tenth part of yours, Ann," I said. "I wonder why it is that the thing we can't do seems so much more desirable than the thing we can."

"I used to think that to be a great singer represented all the world could give of sheer delight, and intoxicating success," said Ann. "But, my dear child, there is a clock striking ten. I must run. Good-bye, little secretary." She pressed my hand (Ann and I were not given to kissing); then I stood and watched her hastening up the street, all my heart in a glow of gratitude and devotion.

"She's a fine lass, yon," said the Laird, when I rejoined him; "a sonsie, sensible, sweet-natured creature, and she has Robbie Burns among her poets, so she told me, and weel she kens the 'Tam o' Shanter' and 'The Cottar's Saturday Night.' But I'm not knowing what to think of that queer-spoken young man I met to-day, and who seemed so mighty friendly wi' yourself, my lassie. Tell me, have you known him long?"

"Oh yes," I said; "some years, I think."

"Ay, then perhaps that's why he's so familiar like. But his ways and manners are not to my fancy—sprawling on the grass and smoking wee bits o' paper with tobacco in their insides, and talking—my! but he talked——"

"He always does," I said. "We don't pay much attention. I think he talks because he can't help it."

The Laird chuckled.

"That's well said, my lassie. He has a strange gift of words, but I'm thinking the meaning o' them would take some explanation. For my own part I'm not so well read up in modern science as might be desirable. The books did not come my way in yon country, and now I'm ower old and brain-weary to get up such matters, and even if I did, I'd no have the memory to argue with that daft laddie. He has the authors at his finger-tips and such a string as fairly knocked my reasoning on the head. But mind you, lassie, he's too clever to be trifled with, and he has dangerous theories. I don't know that I just approve o' too much intimacy."

"Oh! he's going away to America," I said soothingly, "on a lecturing tour. He'll be away at least a year."

"That's good hearing," said the Laird, knocking the ashes out of his pipe preparatory to putting it away. "But I should hardly fancy the Yankee folk would care ower much for his lectures. I hope they will nae be so atheistical as his principles. Meanwhile, lassie, ye might get me Matthew Arnold one o' these days just to look at."

* * * * *

We had been to church, the Laird and I, but the heat and the long prosy sermon (it was a Presbyterian church) had tired us both, despite the dear old man's appreciation of "sound doctrine." It was not the "soundness" that I disapproved of, so much as the length of time occupied in expounding it. The singing was an additional offence to my musical ears, but I endured all for sake of the Laird's company and pleasure. He said the service reminded him of his youthful days.

We dined at two o'clock as usual, and then Jean cleared up and took herself off for her Sunday afternoon walk. The Laird settled himself in the dining-room for a snooze and I betook myself to the drawing-room with a volume of Shelley for company.

I drew down the blinds, altered a few chairs, pushed the table from the centre to the side of the room to see if it looked any better, and then settled down in the one solitary armchair to read.

I had scarcely gone through half a dozen pages when I heard a ring at the front door. I started up, wondering if it meant a visitor? Perhaps grandpapa or—Dorian Giles. I had to open it myself, and faced—Sir Richard Elmore—

with a confident expectation of his being a totally different person.

"*You?*" It was not very polite, but I had never been polite to him yet.

"I am glad you are in," he answered me. "I believe you said I might call on Sunday."

I felt somewhat taken aback. "Did I? Oh, come in! I meant that I didn't as a rule go out on Sundays because we have only one servant and she is allowed that privilege."

"I see." He had closed the door and we stood in the narrow little hall.

"I think I must ask you upstairs," I said; "my father is indulging in a nap and I don't like to disturb him."

"On no account do *that*," he said, and I turned and walked up to the drawing-room.

"Ah, how cool and pleasant this is!" He took a chair by the open window which gave on to an iron balcony as full of flowers as the housekeeping money allowed of. The blinds fastened outwards to the railings and under their shade the mass of scarlet and green looked delightful.

"It's the only thing I can do to make the room less hideous," I said. "This is the second furnished house we have had in London, and I've come to the conclusion that they're as ugly as they are inconvenient. I can't imagine why drawing-rooms are upstairs in this country."

"Architects have much to learn. What do you do with yourself all day, Miss Sâba?"

"Every day, or only Sundays?"

"I meant every day. Are you not rather lonely?"

"No, never. I have plenty to do. Now I shall have more; I'm going to be a secretary—a real secretary. I commence work on Monday."

"Work? But why? Surely you don't need to do anything of that sort!"

"Indeed, yes," I said candidly. "But in any case I hate being idle. I have always wanted to do something; now I have the chance and I'm delighted."

"You look it. What a difference happiness makes in a face! When I saw you first—at least, it wasn't really *first* in one sense, but so far as accepting you, personally, it was that to me—well, you looked far too grave and serious for your years and for the occasion."

"Did I? Of course one never knows what one really

looks like. Isn't it funny to think that though we mean so much to ourselves we never really *see* ourselves, only a reflection. Your own idea of what you looked like in the glass a little while ago may not be my idea of what you look like now."

"I hope it isn't," he said quickly. "I know I saw a very discontented-looking brute; perhaps that's what drove me here. I hadn't a word with you the other day. Marian Charteris engrossed the conversation altogether. I hope you are learning to forgive me by degrees."

"Why should you have looked a 'discontented brute'?" I asked, ignoring the rest of his sentence.

"Why? Oh, because I seem to be such an aimless drifter on life's seas now. I often wish I was back in the desert, my life in my hand, and a tent above my head. There is too much civilisation in England; too much eating and drinking. The first thing a new acquaintance does is to ask you to go somewhere and have a feed with him. Too much idleness, too much scandal and gossip, too much concern about other people's business and too little honesty about one's own."

"It seems a case of 'the times being out of joint' with you," I said as he paused. "Surely you must have plenty to do on your estate—tenants, and all that."

"My steward sees to 'all that,'" he said with a smile, "and everything is in such admirable order that I have no excuse for interference."

"It's rather a pity you are rich now," I said thoughtfully; "if it had only happened a few years ago——"

"The face of all the world would have been changed for me," he quoted softly.

I looked up quickly.

"She was twenty when I first saw her," he went on. "In three years you will be the same age, and you are growing very like her, do you know?"

"That would be too much good luck," I said.

Suddenly I leant forward and clasped my hands. "Do you know *why* I am so glad of something to do? It is because I have twelve more months to wait before I see her. Twelve! I have waited three times twelve all in vain already, but surely this time I shall have my desire. Fate can't be so cruel again!"

"Let us hope not," he said. "Does she come home—alone?"

"Without the doctor? I don't know, but in any case there will be the little child now."

"The—oh, is there? I mean, I hadn't heard——"

"Yes," I said gravely, "that is one drawback to it all. She might not have changed so much as a wife, especially—I mean not so much as now. But a mother is so different. She and I used to talk about the sort of mothers we would be; we had both been so unhappy in our own childhood. I'm sure Aunt Theo will be a lovely mother; don't you think so?"

His face took on a sudden warmth of colour. I wondered if, as usual, I had stumbled on a dangerous topic.

"Have you kept her in your thoughts as constantly and lovingly all these years as your words seem to confess?" he asked abruptly.

"Of course. I told you I loved her better than anyone in the world. When I was a child I used to pray that something would happen by which I could prove it—any grief, any burden, any sacrifice, I should have welcomed them all. Only my chance never came. I suppose it never will—now."

"But don't you think she appreciates your love without any tremendous sacrifice?" he asked; "and returns it—" he added suddenly.

"I could never feel quite sure," I said. "You see," relapsing into confidence, "I was really a very odious child—ugly, ill-mannered, bad-tempered. No one could have loved me for myself, and I couldn't ask her if she did, so I took it into my head that perhaps some day an opportunity would come for me to show her how very, *very* much I *did* care. Of course, that is all past and over now. Her life is settled in its groove, and——"

"And what about your own? Has that no claims on happiness independent of other people?"

"Oh, mine? That will be as it will be. Of course I have my ideals and my wishes, but I don't suppose they will ever be attained or granted."

"Tell me," he said very earnestly, "what are the ideals?"

"Oh, well, first and foremost, I should like to *be* something very great and successful. A great musician, or a great writer, that's the *inner* ME. It has nothing to do with Sâba Macdonald as most people know her, and yet I should like to have sacrificed even the ideals and the inner ME

because I loved someone so deeply and dearly that *only* by such sacrifice could I make them believe in my love."

"You strange girl! And now may I not hear the wishes?"

"I think they were all combined, weren't they? I don't wish to be rich and I don't wish to be beautiful, because beautiful women cause so much more unhappiness than plain ones. Yet I should like to be loved by those I love—the Laird, and Ann, and Aunt Theo, of course—not many people. I couldn't fritter my heart away into little bits and give some here, some there. However"—I broke off, confused by the grave long gaze I met—"this must sound great nonsense to you, Sir Richard; but you should not have encouraged me to talk about myself. When I do start off on that interesting topic I am as hard to stop as a runaway horse."

"It is the natural reaction after a Pembroke Square existence," he said bitterly. "Do you know I have not called there yet?"

"Have you not? I thought you promised——"

"I have not acquired sufficient Christian fortitude to meet your grandfather," he said. "He played me a mean trick once and I don't forgive easily."

I regarded him thoughtfully.

"I often wonder if you would like to meet—her—again?" I said.

"Like?" He gave a short, hard laugh. "That is a tame sort of word to express what I have thought of and looked forward to, and feared. No, Miss Sâba, I should not like it—now."

He rose and stretched out a hand for his hat which he had placed on the table. I rose also and watched him mechanically smoothing it with his sleeve.

"Isn't it Macaulay who says that the 'wounds of vanity bleed much longer than those of affliction,'" he said lightly. "I might have forgiven the heir to a dukedom, but to be replaced by a mere Army doctor——"

"And such a hateful one," I concluded for him. "I suppose it is unforgivable, and yet I was convinced it was all your fault. Oh! if only life was a book that one could alter or arrange——"

"Well, how would you arrange *this* third volume?"

"I should let cholera or fever or some convenient Indian epidemic carry off the '*tertium quid*' (isn't that right?);

then after a decent period for readjusting of ideas I should contrive meeting and reconciliation, and the usual finale."

"Does it occur to you that sometimes the readjusting of old wrongs ceases to be desirable; that years bring alteration as well as awakening?"

I looked quickly up at his grave face.

"You mean that after loving, caring, being disappointed, one can't go back and take up life where it broke off?"

"Exactly. In some cases one can't. Life isn't a book, you see, Miss Sâba."

CHAPTER IX.

"LIFE isn't a book!"

Indeed, no! I was finding that out very quickly, and finding, too, that my egotism was in a fair way to create one out of the Sâba memoirs. There were so many things to chronicle that seemed important to her yet had nothing of interest for anyone else. And so with self-denying effort she takes the scissors of severance in her hand and—snip!—off goes a year.

Yet the snip leaves a few jagged ends to be gathered up in brief. Let the conscientious autobiographist try her hand at condensing.

There was the return of Mrs. Macdonald and a consequent upset of domestic peace and of the old pleasant confidences with the Laird. There was also a period of storm and confusion owing to Sâba's acceptance of work and refusal to take part in more than occasional Tuesday practises. There was the parting with Dorian Giles, rendered memorable by much good advice on the part of the Laird, and an epigrammatic reminder to Sâba that he had put aside the natural hatred of man for woman on her account, and should expect her to give careful consideration to the subject.

"I do not woo or court or sigh like a despairing swain," he said. "If you want love, read my ballads and accept their meaning as personal. You please me by your unlikeness to any girl I have met. I never had the least intention of marrying, it is the next worse thing to becoming a churchwarden; but we shall be excellent friends, I'm sure; and I shall always dress you—I mean, design

your dresses. You are eminently suited for the Rossetti style; brown and slender, with lips like a scarlet thread and eyes deep and dark as mill-pools. You will find all that in my ballad to 'Zardocia.' "

So we had parted. I still treating the whole affair as a joke and confiding it to no one, even Ann.

And what had this year done for her and for me ?

She had acquired a wider and more distinct fame. I had half-consciously, half-guiltily succumbed to the fascination of copying, and became technically imitative.

The study of those manuscripts taught me much—style, phrasing, description ; the trick of saying just enough so as to let the reader supply the rest ; the wonders of the novelist's art by which penned words become living things ; the knack of serial writing, with its suggestions of what is to happen yet is perpetually postponed. This and many other things I learnt, besides the valuable practise of shaping unspoken thoughts into written form. Ardour swept me into a new channel; even my passion for music suffered. Perhaps I let it lapse in order to have excuse for avoiding the too familiar quartets. It was unfortunate that my mother's sense of obedience to her parents and constant attendance on them warred with the Laird's dislike to my grandfather and his refusal ever to go to Pembroke Square. He could not bear me to go there either ; he liked to see me at my work on those long winter evenings, or have me read extracts from Ann's book. He saw no reason why I should be strumming Beethoven and Mozart to accompanying grunts of the 'cello, and altercations with the first violin.

Up to Christmas this had been the state of affairs ; then came the tug-of-war. We were expected to attend that annual two o'clock festival, the more so because cousin Fanny and her eldest brother were in London and grand-mamma had invited them.

" I'll no go," said the Laird. He was fixed and determined and very Scotch.

" And I'll stay with you. It would be a shame to leave you alone, and this your first Christmas in England."

Thus Sába, eager and insubordinate. But she was not destined to carry her point. Her mother insisted that she must accompany her. It would be an insult to the autocrat, a thing unheard of. The Laird might please himself (" Aye, and I will too !" said he irreverently), but

Sâba must remember she was still a child, and must do what she was told.

"Couldn't *you* tell me to obey you?" she suggested to her father. But it appeared he could not in this particular instance; not without scenes. And though given to provoke them with or without cause, he would not voluntarily oppose his wife's wishes on such an occasion.

So we went through the usual ordeal—good wishes, presentations, stodgy food, foolish talk; usual criticisms of the Larkoms, and of Sâba. I thought Fanny much the same, though she had grown taller than myself; sallow skinned, oily locks, green-eyed and surly. Paxton at that most objectionable age of hobble-de-hoyism when one's coat and one's collars demand the full attention of limited mental faculties, *gauche* and stupid, giving information only by dint of strenuous questions on the part of his elders.

Margaret and Maria were there and Mrs. Vandrupp. The Laird was asked for and excused, on plea of his health and the ever useful "sunstroke."

By six o'clock we were all bored and weary and inclined to be quarrelsome. I urged the Laird's loneliness as a plea to escape, and made my way home just as Fanny was adding to the general liveliness by a faithful rendering of "The Maiden's Prayer."

Paxton insisted on escorting me, and gave me an account of schoolboy life and exploits. As far as I could determine these consisted in evading everything scholastic and doing everything that was "against rules." It also accounted for the general ignorance of the ordinary young man, and that peculiar joy in the "discreditable" which they appear to affect. He talked boastfully of the fair sex, and was inclined for offensive familiarities that no cousinship could excuse and for which I soundly boxed his ears.

"You are as hateful as Jonas Chuzzlewit," I said. "I don't suppose you know who he was, but go home and read Dickens and then you'll know how I feel about *you*."

Well, that Christmas was over and dropped into the limbo of the past, leaving me with a sense of wonder as to how long the ceremony was to be repeated. Grandpapa looked just the same as when I had first made his acquaintance—fresh-coloured, hale and hearty; his white locks fringing a somewhat wider expanse of bald pink dome, his whiskers and beard as neatly trimmed and his eyes as brightly blue as ever.

Also his methods and manners were just as bombastical, and he himself as selfish and self-opinionated. I was no longer in his good graces by reason of absenting myself from the famous Tuesdays. No longer was I invited to Monday Popular, or Philharmonic. Neither amusement nor entertainment came my way this Christmas-time, but I threw myself with all the more ardour into work. Ann was delighted at my celerity and zeal. She certainly kept me fully occupied.

Sometimes I wondered at the quiet, unassuming way in which she had distanced her one-time rival "Electra." I wondered more what had chanced to that gifted person and why she never published anything now. She seemed to have dropped out of public recognition and recollection. For all Ann was so famous she went out very little; she said work and pleasure did not agree. Taken separately they were beneficial, but society in the ordinary acceptance of the term—the dining and dancing, and receiving and entertaining and being entertained—possessed no charm. When she was absorbed in her book it distracted and interfered with her, so save for occasional visits to the theatre that winter passed on uneventfully.

I still wrote every mail to Aunt Theo; I still counted the months as one gave place to another. I had told her about my meeting Sir Richard and the change in his fortunes, but she made no remark on either when she answered my letter.

She still held to her intention of coming home this year, possibly in June. She spoke of meeting Sara Tollemarche, who had gone out to India to be married, and was spending her honeymoon at Simla. Both had been delighted at the meeting; both had recognised many changes in each other. She rarely mentioned the baby, little Zoe, a name which had greatly disgusted grandpapa, who still approved only "Mary's" and "Jane's" and suchlike sensible appendages. I wondered at hearing so little of the child. I had expected her to be the theme and text of every letter. Sometimes I had a horrible presentiment that she might be like her father, and that Aunt Theo would not tell me so on account of my unconcealed aversion to that individual.

As she made no mention of Sir Richard I began to expend a certain amount of pity on him. I believed firmly that she still reigned in his heart. I told myself how

interested he had seemed in every detail of her life that I had confided to him. I was sure he was counting the months as eagerly as myself; would be no less glad when she would be here in England once again, no matter how changed in herself or in the conditions that meant reunion.

But after that Sunday I saw no more of him; I heard he had left London suddenly and gone to Yorkshire. He had not called at Pembridge Square, and grandmamma was much annoyed at such neglect. That he should have paid a visit to the humble Macdonald domicile and ignored that of the more important Heavysage, was a source of much bickering and sarcasm. But such things troubled me little. I considered it quite right of Sir Richard to pay back that old score; but for it he and Aunt Theo would now have been happy and undivided. In those days I believed that to love once was to love always. When I copied out scenes in Ann's books and between Ann's lovers, I was always picturing those two whose story I knew; recalling that bitter brief farewell, the look in his eyes, the tone of his voice. Would that look ever come back again?

More than once I found I had laid down my pen and was staring blankly at the page I should have been copying. The "Lord Gerald" and "Sir Arthurs" meant always to me that one lover whom I so pitied; spoke as I fancied he might have spoken, endured what I imagined he endured of despair and hopelessness.

Sometimes I talked to Ann about him. Ann who wrote so beautifully of love and yet had no lover, nor seemed to heed the loss; Ann who laughed at my ideas of the "exalted," "deathless," "ever-faithful" type.

"Love is not like that nor men either," she said; "only in books we must make them so, just as an artist puts all sorts of artificial shading into his picture. Nature is a stubborn thing, and though one is bound to treat her as a model, one does not always paint the model to her standard. Love is very beautiful, I grant, and as a subject for fictional effects it cannot be beaten, but in real life, speaking as a worker, I am inclined to think it would hamper me considerably. I should want a very exceptional sort of husband; one with similar tastes or else highly appreciative; also one who would lift some measure of the literary burden off my shoulders; the sordid cares and worries attending 'terms' and business."

"But then you would not need to write!" I said.

"Oh, I couldn't give it up! It's part of myself, and I'm sorely afraid it would clash with domesticity. Few men consider a writing woman would make a desirable wife. She is too much engrossed in her brain-children, she lives a life quite apart from that of the proverbial household fairy—at least I know I do. I have never met any man who could influence or attract me sufficiently to make me risk marriage. I would rather keep them as friends, than accept them as lovers."

"But you are far too pretty and too charming to do that always," Sâba would assure her; at which she only laughed and bade the speaker think of her own probable love affairs.

But Sâba stoutly denied such a possibility. The Dorian Giles episode was to her only a joke, and no other man had ever come into her life in any sense of friendship or intimacy. Neither did she desire it; less than ever since she had occupation and interest. She knew how the Laird depended on her, and it seemed as if no feeling on earth could be strong enough to draw her away from him. Yet home was not at all an ideal place, for her mother's constant outbursts, and knack of disturbing peace made the life there a heavy trial. Nothing ever pleased her, nothing ever satisfied her. Sâba was all that a daughter should *not* be, and the Laird ranked as the Moloch of her young life—a striking illustration that obedience to parents did not always bring its own reward.

The incessant bickerings and disputes were aggravated by the old man's hostile feelings towards that pattern of all the virtues, Mr. Barker Heavysage; and by Sâba's sudden indifference to music, the music that was of use or in request at Pembridge Square. Of these two grievances much was made, and Sâba's spirit of independence, which had added another hundred a year to their limited income, came in for drastic treatment at times. Still hope has a wonderful revivifying influence on the young, and it seemed to her that anything was preferable to the life of those first years in England. She had wrested herself from that groove at all events, and could never go back to it under any persuasion.

"I would sooner turn housemaid or daily governess," she said, when she thought of that time. But as the months drifted by a new seed of hope shot up in her heart. She

was trying her own 'prentice hand; writing little tales and stories and sending them forth, like Noah's dove, over the waters of chance.

She wrote under an assumed name and told no one of her audacity. Finally one day—one glorious never-to-be-forgotten day—came a letter of acceptance and a cheque for two guineas from the editor of a popular magazine for one of the three-thousand-word stories, also a request to see more of her work if she had any to send. Sâba could scarcely credit her senses.

Surely there is no joy in life so sweet as the first knowledge that achievement is possible; that the dream of authorship is realised and has become a glory of proof and print instead of returned MSS. Still she breathed no word of her dear secret, not even when the story was out. Alas! by that time a fit of despondency had succeeded to previous elation. How poor the stuff was after all! How trivial the incidents that she had actually thought pathetic! How stilted the phrases, and how faulty the style! She suffered agonies of humiliation when, on receiving the Laird's permission to read it out as "something that might interest him," she learnt that it was "poor stuff" and full of faults, which he candidly pointed out to the anonymous author. But though the criticism hurt, the fact of its being perfectly unprejudiced was of inestimable benefit to that dawning self-conceit so harmful to the beginner.

For months after that wholesome check, Sâba wrote nothing. She devoted herself to copying and reading, and playing cribbage, which was a game beloved of the Laird and patiently taught to his daughter. As the warm spring days dawned once again the two resumed their walks. Sâba's mother was constantly at the Square; "spending the day," driving or visiting. She called it devoting herself to her mother and pointed to dutiful example. Sâba shrugged rebellious shoulders. She longed to say that the Heavysage dinners were more to her mother's liking than Jean's "roast and boiled;" that drives and presents and society appealed quite as strongly to some minds as duty, and were even capable of being enrolled under the same banner. But discretion had taught the wisdom of that blessed thing. "a silent tongue," and she no longer gave the rein to sharp speech and impetuous outbursts.

Thought, study, the companionship of minds such as the Laird's and Ann Shottery's, these made now the principal factors in Sâba's life-education. That she was graver, quieter, more self-absorbed than her years demanded never occurred to her. Religious discussions were tabooed between the Laird and herself. He maintained the "strict letter of the law," the simple faith that doubted nothing, the absolute unquestionable truth of every word of Holy Writ. The very suggestion of argument brought down a torrent of wrath, but no explanation. The old stern faith of Presbyter and Calvinist was the very life-blood of John Angus Macdonald. To dare to question, to doubt, to reason, were sins unpardonable.

Sâba, after one timid venture, drew in all her prickles of perplexity and suffered their torments in silence. Yet she revered the old Highlander's staunch belief in the two personalities of good and evil. God was companion and friend to the faithful in heart; the devil a foe for ever laying traps for the heedless and unwary. He said his prayers morning and evening as he had said them from the time he had knelt at his mother's knee. He took no meal before he repeated "the Grace." He read a chapter of the Bible every day and knew countless texts by heart.

Preachers were sacred beings, consecrated by university studies and a special blessing of the Episcopal Church. Papists and martyrs were stern realities, but the keeping of "Saints' days" a mere Romish custom due to the perverting influences of Popery.

It was a curious thing that a faith staunch almost to bigotry should have brought about results the very opposite. Sâba listened, revered and admired in him the very capacity that in her own heart was conspicuous by absence.

Convince—convince; prove—prove! Such was still her cry. Would it ever be answered?

* * * * *

Snip again! A few more months roll off the record. It is June now—June, my favourite month of all the year; June, that this year, alas! was destined to bring with its birth-week a national disaster—one that struck at all English hearts. For on the ninth of that month we knew that the great writer we had so loved and honoured would never pen line or word to delight us again. In the heyday

of fame, while still those public readings were the talk of the town, while "Edwin Drood" was but half written, the pen was struck from his hand, and a mourning nation had but one niche of fame in which to place him—its heart.

There were tears in the Laird's eyes when he read that morning's fatal announcement. As for me I wept unrestrainedly. The loss seemed personal; I knew well that it could never, never be replaced. Another Shakespeare or another Dickens will never dower the English nation with their gifts, or their genius.

Has England repaid them as they deserve ?

* * * * *

My tears were scarcely dry when I learnt of an event at hand that banished other grief. It was impossible to mourn when joy claimed a share of one's thoughts, or rather, monopolised them. Sorrow became chastened and restricted to a less personal background, while all the summer sang to me of the Beloved's return.

She was coming home; she would be here—in England, in London—by a fixed and certain date. Coming alone (save for the little babe), coming for one whole year. How describe that tumult of expectation! Sick throbs of heart as hope and fear alternated with some chance thought; the *ache* of longing, the dread that the week, the day, the hour, would never mean realised hope. That long waiting, the sharp prelude of disappointment, had left Sâba distrustful of joy.

Grave were the discussions at Pembridge Square. She must come there first, but the autocrat held forth loudly on inconvenience; the nuisance of a baby and an *ayah*; the disturbance of his life, rules and arrangements. It must be explained that as soon as possible the "visitor" must domicile herself elsewhere, the task as usual being given to grandmamma. For the first meeting, however, rules and inconveniences were set at naught. The travellers would come straight from Southampton; they might arrive about seven or eight o'clock. "Sâba and her mother must of course be present. Better they should come to tea at seven o'clock."

Sâba thought otherwise. Not thus had she painted reunion. She claimed some special remembrance, not to drift in as one of a crowd. What would that meeting reveal of change and stress of time! She herself was eighteen;

grown-up, self-possessed ; but the same childish passionate heart beat within her breast, the same unalterable fidelity to her girlhood's idol reigned there.

* * * * *

I don't know how I passed the long hours of that June day. I tried to work, but what I copied were surely no words that Ann had ever put into the mouth of any character of hers. I wandered to the piano and tried to play bits of Schumann; andantes of Beethoven's Sonatas. My fingers forgot their notes and followed my thoughts away and away into some impossible region.

I could eat nothing at the mid-day dinner, at which the Laird grumbled, for he hated to see anyone neglectful of good food. It was one of the "maircies o' Providence" for which he daily asked a blessing and gave thanks.

In the afternoon my mother betook herself to the Square. It was a very hot day, and the Laird declared himself unwilling to walk. I thought I would go to Ann's. Her book was out now and she was resting and revelling in the praise of critics and the multiplying of editions. The thought of that cool garden was pleasant in this blazing sun. I put on a white muslin and a shady hat, snatched up a sunshade and set off.

As I turned from the main road to Ann's corner I saw a figure sauntering along a few yards ahead of me. Something about it seemed familiar, even before it paused at the same house for which I was bound. My own step quickened. We were face to face ere the latch of the gate was lifted.

"By all that's wonderful!" said Sir Richard Elmore.

"Wonderful indeed! To think of meeting you here—like this—to-day of all days!" Thus Sâba, all surprise, gladness, and confusion mingled.

"Is there anything very special about to-day?"

"I should think so! But of course you wouldn't know the date exactly——"

"The date?" he repeated vaguely. I felt my whole face broadening into smiles.

"The year is up! Over! Gone! Aunt Theo arrives to-day. I am going to see her in a few hours' time! Isn't that glorious?"

"It makes you look very happy. Of course, I remember

now. It was delayed for a year. And so the time is actually up?"

"At last!" I said. "Oh! how long it has seemed! I scarcely dared to hope too much, I am so unlucky. I am always denied the thing I want most, so I held my heart in fear. But—were you going to call on the Shotters?"

"I was, but——"

"So was I," I interrupted. "I have been longing for the garden all day. Somehow I feel it will rest me, work off the excitement. Have you ever felt like that—wanting a thing so badly that it almost hurts you? Counting hours with a strange sick longing that seems full of whispered warnings not to trust fate? Oh! if it were only evening!"

"I was going to suggest walking for a little while before we—we go in here?" he said hesitatingly. "The lane is delightfully cool and I want to talk to you."

"Very well," I said carelessly. (Sâba was never troubled with conventional scruples.) "But why haven't you been to see us? It must be a year since we met!"

"It is," he said, as we strolled on past the "Dukeries." "You see, I took your advice and went down to Yorkshire to try my hand at the 'country squire' business."

"Didn't you find plenty to do once you set your mind on it?" I asked.

"Yes, and there was hunting and shooting. But for all that I think this is the longest year I have ever known."

I was silent for a moment. Of course it had been long. Had he not also—waited?

"I suppose," he went on presently, "that the epidemic did not come off?"

"No; but she has come back alone—I mean, the doctor remains at Allahabad. Shall you call at Pembroke Square now?" I went on.

He gave me a half-sad, half-humorous glance.

"Miss Sâba, do you know you are absolutely suggesting temptation? Doesn't it strike you that the very best thing I could do would be to obliterate my unworthy self from memory; hers, at all events?"

I felt somewhat puzzled.

"You mean not to see her—not to explain?"

"Explain! Good God! child—I beg your pardon—but what *is* there to explain? She knows why her respected

parents showed me the door, so to say; why she married as she did. At least I wronged no woman for her sake as she has wronged a man——”

He checked himself abruptly; but Sâba could have supplied those two words easily enough.

CHAPTER X.

We strolled on and reached Holland Walk, and then turned back to Ann's. I found it was nearly six o'clock. Of all we had said, heard, and explained, I had a confused memory, yet blended with it was the recollection that he was back in London for the season, that it was not altogether impossible we might meet on occasions, even if he did not choose to call at Pembridge Square. I felt so sure he would want to know all about Aunt Theo—how she looked, if she was much altered, if she was happy? Yet I could not recall any expressed desire of his own touching these points.

Ann and her mother welcomed us warmly, and ordered tea to be sent out. Just as it was ready the Laird himself strolled in leisurely fashion up the garden path, announcing that he had missed me and thought it more than probable I might be here. I introduced him to Sir Richard, and we sat there chatting, joking, “reminiscenting,” as I called it, until another hour had lessened by sixty minutes that waiting on the torments of Time, so hard to youth, and to love.

Occasionally the little stab would come; the feeling of a sudden mist between my eyes and the faces around; the curious faint sickness of expectancy common to me when strongly moved, as if I waited in some great loneliness for what was yet “on the knees of the gods.”

The Laird and Sir Richard got on well together. They had farms and tenantry and horses to argue about and discuss. Ann—keenly interested in me and my ill-concealed agitation—tried to divert my thoughts from that ever-present subject. She had one startling piece of information to give me which did arouse a fresh interest.

“Fancy, I have at last unearthed ‘Electra’! She is coming out as a lecturer. Some American woman

came over from New York and made her acquaintance, and is taking her back there to lecture on 'English Literature and the Degeneracy of Public Taste!' A good subject."

"She will speak feelingly on public taste," I said, "meaning its non-appreciation of herself. Going to America, is she? I wonder if she knows Dorian is there?"

"It is rather a large country," laughed Ann. "I suppose he will soon be coming back. Has he ever written to you?"

"Only once, to say he had arrived in New York; but he was going to Boston, Washington, Philadelphia, San Francisco. I couldn't expect him to keep up a correspondence."

"No one should ever expect anything of Dorian Giles," she said; "he would be sure to act in direct contradiction. How hot it is! I wonder you manage to look so cool. Mother and I are going off to the seaside. North Devon for choice. I wish you could come, too, but of course, everyone and everything will be of no account—now!"

"That is unkind. But you couldn't expect me to forego a day or hour of her after so long an absence. If she goes away to the sea I should certainly try for the same place. If not——"

"You will remain on in London as you did last year. That will be a pity, Sîba. You need a change; you have worked very hard."

"Hard! What about yourself?"

"Oh, I'm used to it; and then I have a thorough rest and holiday every summer. . . . Where have your thoughts flown now?"

"I was thinking of 'Electra.' If she goes away, what will become of her father? Poor Old Boy! Did she say anything about him?"

"Not a word. It was yesterday that I met her at a house in Kensington Square; we were both paying a duty visit. I hardly thought she would speak to me, but she was most gracious, and asked after you, too. I told her of the Laird's return, and mentioned where you lived. Perhaps she will come to see you before she leaves England."

"How did she look? Is she much altered?"

"She is much stouter and her face is redder than ever;

but that might have been excitement. She was as boastful of what she intended to do by lecturing as she used to be about writing. She told me that it was useless to try and do good work for an English public; they could only appreciate rubbish!"

"Polite—and to you! But it was just like her to say it."

"I quite agreed with her. I said the largest sales always meant the smallest books. Human intellect is so limited that the classes only read what the masses despise."

"How did she take it?"

"She said all that would be altered when women came more to the front and were intellectually valued. Then she began about her gowns—white satin with a gold border, made after a Greek model. I hardly thought her style was Grecian, but 'art' seems a cant word nowadays. She used it a dozen times at least in her description."

"When does she go?"

"End of August, I believe. She gave me her card before saying good-bye. She is still living at Fulham."

My interest flagged again. Eight o'clock was an hour nearer! Just about time to go home and dress and leave the Laird comfortable, before I set out for the Square.

I rose abruptly. "It's seven o'clock, Ann."

"I won't keep you a moment longer than you are inclined to stay; but come to-morrow and tell me all about it, won't you?"

"Perhaps—" I promised rather faintly, and going red and white before the quick, sudden gaze of Sir Richard.

"Come in the morning; I've no work on except tiresome letters. Of course, if you are wanted elsewhere I'll know it by your non-appearance."

Then we said good-bye. Sir Richard walked part of the way back with us; he said it was in his direction. When the time for his farewell came he held my hand a moment longer than etiquette demands.

"Why, how you are trembling," he said. "I couldn't have believed it possible that one woman could care so much for another!"

I drew my hand away.

"You've no message?" I asked.

"None." His tone was cold; the fire had gone out of his eyes. He lifted his hat and turned away, and I followed the Laird into the house.

Nothing mattered now but one thing ; I should see her soon ! soon ! soon !

* * * * *

It had been summer when she left—to me, only a black and bitter winter-time. It was summer again when I was speeding on my way to welcome her back.

Four years ago ! Four years since that hateful day when, with tear-blinded eyes I had rushed away, unable to bear up any longer against the misery of parting. I saw her still as she had been that morning ; with that white tense face, those lovely sad eyes. What had those years done for her ? Would she be changed ?—less beautiful, less kind, less inclined for confidences ?

Well, I should soon know.

I reached Pembridge Gardens. Before me lay the well-known Square. A few moments more I was round the corner—I was at the house. Surely I had been self-denying for I had given them all time enough to greet and welcome her, and kept myself back to the last.

I ran up the steps and rang the bell ; my heart was beating so wildly now that I was unable to frame a single question. Jane, the prim, gave me a friendly smirk.

“ They’re all upstairs, miss ; in your grandma’s room.”

I remember nothing of how I got upstairs, but I do remember that the door was open, and a buzz of voices, and then—I was standing speechless before her as she half rose from the couch.

“ Sâba ! Is it possible ? ”

We were in each other’s arms, and my cheeks were wet with tears and her sweet eyes were drowned also. But I could only see how thin and pale and changed she was, and that all the youth and beauty had gone from out her haggard face of suffering ; but for her voice and those sweet brown eyes I should never have known her again. But they were the same, and so, I think, was her love and her memory of me, though we were both too deeply touched to say very much.

Grandmamma fussed about and insisted she must lie down ; she was worn out with the fatigue of the voyage and the journey ; and, indeed, she looked frail and white as a ghost, and her dress hung loosely about her wasted figure—she who used to be statuesque and rounded of limb as any Juno. I was so shocked and horrified I could

find nothing to say. Of course, I should have told her she looked just the same ; should have rattled on about personalities and generalities like the others, but it would not have been Sâba Macdonald to have done anything orthodox.

She spoke of my own changed appearance with wonder. " I was so tall, so altered, so improved ! " but I have a vivid memory of displaying only the old stupidity and silence and emotion ; of doing little credit to my additional years.

Oh ! to have been alone with her for a few moments ! To have been able to express what was breaking and burning in my heart ! But the senseless chatter went on and on. I sat apart. Mother, father, sister—they had claims exceeding mine. I was unnoticed—probably unwelcome.

* * * * *

At last I rose and slipped out of the room ; I went up-stairs to her old bedroom ; I had suddenly remembered—something.

There was a dim light in it, and a white figure sat by a little white bed. She lifted a dark face at my entrance, and said something I did not understand. I crossed over to the bed and looked down.

I saw a little dusky head—all a mass of soft brown curls—and a tiny sallow face. Oh ! how very small and colourless it was ! As I stood there a pair of large dark eyes opened and met my own. Oh ! the pathos of that long-puzzled gaze ; of that small, weird face.

I felt a lump rise in my throat. So this was her child ! This tiny, weird creature, whose dumb baby soul seemed struggling for expression ; whose little brown hands lay curling and uncurling themselves on the white quilt. Timidly I touched one and the wee fingers closed round mine, and sent a thrill to my heart. The eyes never left my face. What do babes see, and of what do they think in those prolonged steadfast gazes that men call " a vacant stare " ; that to a woman and a mother are full of nameless mysteries ?

I was unused to young children and knew nothing of what to say or do with them ; but I just let the little fingers twine and untwine and the deep solemn eyes gaze into my own—and thus we made acquaintance—Zoe and I.

* * * * *

“ Sâba ! ”

It was the dear voice of old. “ Sâba—darling child—
Oh ! It is sweet to have you again ! ”

I leant my head against her shoulder in a speechless
agony of happiness.

“ Oh, dearest ! is it true ? *Can* it be true ?—*you*—your
very self—back again ! ”

“ Why wouldn't you speak to me downstairs, Sâba ? I
saw you slip away and I made an excuse to see baby and
follow you ! I knew what the old Sâba would have done,
but this is a new one—not the child I left, who thought
the sun only shone and the world only existed for her
foolish old auntie.”

I silenced the heresy with kisses. “ I am just the
same—at heart ; I can't help being grown up.”

“ Grown up ! ” she echoed sorrowfully. “ Grown to the
woman's fate—the woman's kingdom. Child, when can
we have one of our old long talks ? I must learn to know
the new Sâba as I knew the old—I must——”

“ Ma-ma ! ” piped a tiny voice.

She sprang to her feet, and was at the cot's side in a
moment. Then I knew what the change meant to her ;
that those four dead years had borne living fruit ; that
this frail thing she lifted to her heart was dearer and more
precious than all the world beside. She came back to
the chair and sat down, holding the babe on her knee.
Its soft head lay against her breast ; its wide deep eyes
looked at her face with loving recognition of a claim never
to be gainsaid.

“ Isn't she sweet ? ” said the mother-voice—changed,
full, deep with the passion of new-born love.

“ She is like a little brown bird,” I said, looking down
at them both—and envy and jealousy burnt themselves
out of my heart in that moment. I only knew that the
tiny child before me would never miss what I had missed ;
would never suffer those agonies of crushed and repressed
feeling that to this day and hour are unforgotten by
Sâba Macdonald.

* * * * *

The child fell asleep in her mother's arms, and we sat on
in the twilight, talking softly in disjointed fragments ; learning
to know each other under new conditions, yet conscious
that the old memories and the old love were blending
into the altered circumstances with every word we spoke.

We were not long left in peace. Mamma and grand-mamma came up—jealous of that hardly-won confidence ; full of concern that she was not yet in bed—and resting.

The *ayah* took the child and laid it back in the cot. I was reminded that it was nearly half-past ten, and a cab was waiting. So I could but say good-night with all my full heart still uneased ; with nothing spoken that I had longed to speak ; with only a hope that the whispered “to-morrow” meant at least an opportunity of which to-night was empty.

When I sat alone in my own room and thought, “It has happened ; it is over”— I seemed to realise all the difference between the expected and the obtained. I knew the past was irrevocably gone ; that this wasted, changed, pre-occupied creature was as different from the radiant Aunt Theo of four years back, as night is different from day.

That she remembered me as of old, that I held still that coveted place in her heart, was plain enough ; but there was a change—wide and deep and terrible. Her face spoke out unhappiness ; its tired, beaten look, as of one wearied of a struggle and crushed beneath its hopelessness, haunted me. I saw her placed in some new unnatural position—accepting it, suffering it, dying under it ! And she would never complain ; she was too proud for that. Like many another woman, she had taken up her cross, and must bear it to her life’s end.

“What has happened ? What has he done to her ?” I asked myself ; and with each unanswerable question hated him the more. To have taken her beautiful youth and all the glory and sweetness of her life, and crushed it beneath his own selfish passion ; to have so changed her in four little years !

* * * * *

In her room again.

She was lying on the couch in a loose white dressing-gown. There was something strained and passive in her face. She had been saying—something—and I had heard it as one hears some dread and awful thing whose happening one cannot realise.

“Don’t look so miserable, dear ; I won’t be the first woman who has gone through it, and surgery has achieved such wonderful cures that——”

“Oh, *don’t!*” I said. I dragged myself to my feet and

stood looking down at the wasted face ; met the haunting pain of her eyes.

"It is a chance for life, and—better health. Come, be brave, Sâba. The others——"

"Oh, the others ! Do they love you as I love you ? Have they counted the months—weeks—days—till they should see you again ? And then to face—*this* !"

A dry, hoarse sob tore my throat ; but the pallor of her face, the sudden tremor that shivered over it, accused me of too selfish a betrayal of feeling. Whatever I thought or feared I must keep to myself. She had to face her ordeal in one way ; I in another.

Presently she spoke again.

"Mamma is looking for a house—furnished, of course. You might help her, Sâba. I have a fancy for Edwardes Square ; it is so quiet, and yet not too far from here. I think papa dreaded my remaining on. As if I should turn his house into a hospital !"

I shuddered. I tried to say that, of course, I would help grandmamma in her search ; I was conscious that my lips moved, but I heard no voice. Then she half rose and held out entreating arms. I sank on my knees beside the couch ; I pressed my face tight against her shoulder, I felt as if all the world was passing from me in that spasm of mental agony.

"Sâba !—Oh, Sâba——" The tears were raining down her wasted cheeks. "Be brave and try to help me, for I'm a sad coward ; I've always hated pain so—and you must take care of Zoe."

I said——

But I don't know what I said—or did. I cannot write of that hour. Let it pass.

* * * * *

We found a house in Edwardes Square. It was taken for her, and servants and a nurse engaged. Everything was done with expedition as her case was considered critical. These small excitements, the knowledge of being of some use, helped to pass the time—that agonised time of waiting.

At night, when I was alone, I would shut my eyes and seem to see her lying on that bed of pain. And the days—oh ! those days ; grinding out youth and hope with relentless force, and slowly, slowly, bringing nearer that one which held her fate in its issues.

When it came I was forbidden the house, but I haunted the Square for hours, walking round and round; sometimes with the *ayah* and the babe; sometimes by myself—once with Ann, who knew and had come to share my vigil, and vainly entreated me to go home with her and rest for a while. But I would not! *She* had promised to send for me the first moment it was possible. I waited on that summons as a soldier at his post; fighting the one hateful fear that it might—not—come.

But at last the nurse appeared and led me in. All the tiny house seemed saturated with odours of anæsthetics. I grew sick and faint as I crept up the stairs.

She opened her eyes and smiled as she saw me. I touched her hand, afraid of the trembling of my own.

“It is all over, Sâba,” she whispered, “and quite successful. They say I have a chance of getting well and strong—once more.”

“Oh! thank God!” I cried hoarsely. Then my stubborn knees gave way, and once again I learnt that in great trouble or in great joy the soul is brought very low, and as a little child cries to its parent, so does it cry brokenly to—God!

* * * * *

All dark and hushed the Square lay in the moonlight as I crept out of the door, and stood a moment trying to steady nerve and senses after the long strain of the day's agony. Grandmamma and my mother had long been gone. I am sure they had forgotten me altogether and I could not blame them. It was not late—not more than nine o'clock. With a sense of relief beyond all power of expression I stood for a moment looking up at the blue depths of the sky, revelling in the sweet coolness of the air.

Suddenly I was conscious that someone was speaking to me; I heard my name, and dropped startled eyes upon the white anxious face of Sir Richard Elmore.

“How is she?—I only heard about it to-day. I thought it would be excusable if I enquired.”

“Excusable!” It seemed to me that nothing else in the world mattered save just the fate of that sweet soul.

“It is over—and she is safe,” I said huskily. “I have only just left her.”

"You don't mean to say you had courage to stay through it all?" he exclaimed.

"Not in the house; they wouldn't permit it. But I haven't been far off. Was it Ann who told you?"

"Yes——"

We were walking on mechanically; I was only dimly conscious of movement. I accepted his presence and his escort as I should have accepted anything commonplace amidst the exaltation and wonder of these new feelings.

"We will go up the lane," he said presently, "if it is not too far for you to walk home. Would you rather have a cab? You seem quite forgotten."

"Oh! I am a person of little consequence," I said. "Yes, I'll walk now you are here. It will be such a relief to talk to someone. This has been such a terrible day!"

Tears were in my voice, and in my eyes. I was shaking so that it was a relief to feel him draw my hand within his own.

"Don't speak about it just yet," he said soothingly. "I—I understand."

So we walked on in silence for long moments. At last he said:

"Do you know I have haunted this lane and the neighbourhood of Campden Hill for a whole week in the hopes of catching sight of you? Did you forget that I trusted to you for—news?"

"I forgot everything but her," I said. "Think of what it was to hope and long and expect, and then find her so changed and broken; to learn that her life was in jeopardy! All the world seemed to be extinguished for me when I heard that, and even now—there is a lurking fear in the background."

"Let us hope it will not be realised. I am more sorry for you than I can say. I know what this meeting has meant, and to find it so—so——"

"So exactly the opposite? But I ought to be getting used to that. I mean the 'lost gazelle' business. It certainly is a case of 'ever thus since childhood's hour' with me."

"Ill-luck doesn't last for ever."

"No," I said ruefully; "but it can last long enough to spoil one's life!"

"Your life has only just begun, Miss Sâba."

"Oh! has it? That is so like you grown-up folk! What of childhood? Don't children live and suffer, and *think*? Are we supposed to start on life full-grown and in possession of faculties that earlier years have done their best to suppress? I speak from experience," I went on hurriedly, "and I know that children think and judge more accurately than their elders credit. As for feelings, I shouldn't like any child of mine to suffer what I have suffered."

"Let us hope your case is exceptional," he said gently; "so much depends on one's nature. All are not equally sensitive. And now—tell me—is she much changed?"

I stood still suddenly, and for a few brief seconds I lived over again that meeting—and my shock, and grief.

"Oh, yes——" I faltered. "It almost broke my heart to see her. It's not only that ill-health has altered her, but some other unhappiness. And then—this——"

"Don't cry, child," he said tenderly, "tears do no good, and the worst is over. At least, you won't have to live through suspense like this again. She may soon be well and strong; her native air will prove the best medicine. Very few women can stand the Indian climate and the Indian life. Try and look forward more hopefully to her recovery and to the old companionship—won't you?"

There was something in the way he said that "*Won't you?*" that soothed me strangely. Again we walked on, he saying no more till I had recovered self-control; then he talked so kindly and gently that I had much ado not to tell him I wondered no longer that my aunt had loved him, but much that having loved him she could ever have given his place to another man.

I didn't say so, however, but the soothing spell of the night and his quiet words sank into my heart and gave me the comfort I sorely needed.

I was too fond of looking at the worst side of the picture. I had counted on this meeting and it had happened. Was not that something to be grateful for? If some bitter was mingled with the sweet it only meant that joy was unequal. When had it been anything else to others beside myself?"

He came all the way home with me, and left me only at my own door.

"Shall you be with her to-morrow?" he asked as we said good-bye.

"To-morrow? Yes, and every to-morrow that is possible."

"I—was thinking I would call and make enquiries. After all, it would only be polite!"

"Do!" I entreated; "I am sure she will be glad to know you haven't forgotten her. And, after all——" I went on magnanimously, "why shouldn't you both be friends?"

"Yes——" he said, looking at me thoughtfully, "why shouldn't we? There is no one to forbid me the house now, is there—except herself?"

"As if she would!" I said scornfully.

And having raised my voice I became conscious that its tones must have penetrated through the open window of the dining-room, for suddenly the blind was raised and I saw mamma's face.

"Oh! good-bye!" I exclaimed hurriedly, and ran up the steps without further ceremony.

"Who was that you were talking to?" was the first enquiry that greeted me as I entered the room.

"Sir Richard Elmore," I answered quietly.

"*What!*" almost screamed mamma. "Where did you meet him?"

"Just as I was leaving Aunt Theo's," I said, "and he walked home with me."

She seemed too surprised for words, so I took off my hat and went over to the Laird, who was smoking by the open window.

"I am dead tired," I said, as I sank into a chair. The supper things had been removed, and I was wondering if I might ask for some milk and a biscuit; I had no recollection of tasting food since breakfast time. I put the question. For a wonder it met with gracious response, and the order was given to Jean Macgregor.

"How came Sir Richard to be in Edwardes Square?" asked my mother presently. "Was he going to call?"

"I believe so," I said.

"Had he heard of your aunt's illness?"

"Yes; the Shotters told him."

"Sir Richard!" said the Laird suddenly. "Ay—I mind meeting him. A very fine young fellow and rarely sensible—not like yon other popinjay. Is it of him you're speaking, lassie?"

"Yes," I answered, rising to pour out the milk. "He came home with me to-night."

"Why did you not ask him in?" enquired the Laird hospitably.

"It was late," I said tiredly, "and really I didn't think of doing it."

"Ay—ay, it's been a wearying day for us all, and you look like a ghost, my lassie; but I hear poor Theo is well over the business and she'll soon be on her legs again."

"Did you see her, Sâba?" asked mamma.

"Yes, for a few moments, and she was quite conscious and spoke quite cheerfully."

"It has been a dreadful upset; we had no idea her health had broken down so utterly. I do hope she will make a quick recovery and be able to get away to the seaside with us. I cannot stand London in August; the heat is killing."

"What has her recovery got to do with your going to the seaside?" asked the Laird.

"Mamma won't go unless Theo is out of danger; and if she doesn't, I can't either."

"You and Sâba might run down to Broadstairs, or Margate, for a fortnight," he suggested.

How the idea was scoffed at! Such places! such accommodation! such low society! No, if her mother couldn't get away, neither would she go anywhere. Duty—I think—came into the question and a variety of side issues, drifting finally back to the extraordinary attention Sir Richard had paid me. Did I know why he hadn't called at Pembroke Square?

"Yes," I said bluntly; "but I would rather not say."

Strong pressure being brought to bear on the subject, I confessed that he had not forgiven grandpapa's one-time rudeness. He bore no grudge against other members of the family, but he had not the slightest intention of renewing hostilities with that autocrat of lovers' destinies.

"But that's all over and done with long ago!" said mamma. "He must be very thin-skinned if he can't forgive the natural anxiety of a father to do his best for his children."

"Trust old Heavysage for that!" chimed in the Laird; "a *dour* canny old rascal as ever lived! Not a bawbee to give with chick or child; all put aside in his own strong box; and for all that, shaking his money bags in one's face, and aye thinking he'll live to be a Methuselah! Weel,

weel, the de'il looks after his own, as the saying is, and I doubt not that he's keeping a warm corner for yon auld Pharisee when his time comes ! ”

After which audacious challenge to the “ vials of wrath,” Sâba deemed it prudent to retire.

CHAPTER XI.

FOR a week I went every day to Edwardes Square ; made friends with the odd weird baby, waited and watched on the precious invalid, and—walked home every evening with Sir Richard.

He would not call at the house, but as surely as nine o'clock came round he was waiting at some corner of the square for my “ report,” as he called it.

With its increasing hopefulness my spirits revived. I could smile and laugh once more. I could talk frankly and freely to him though the topic of conversation was nearly always the same. However differently we started we always drifted back to “ her.”

Ann and her mother had left town and I almost envied them, for our small domicile was intolerably hot and stuffy. Once I said something to that effect to my companion.

“ It must be,” he said, “ and there am I in a great rambling barracks of a place with lawns and gardens and moors all round, and I suppose you and your people wouldn't come and stay with me ? ”

“ Do you mean all of us—the Laird and my mother and——”

“ *You* ? Of course, if you could be happy away from your aunt ? ”

“ Frankly, I could not ; ” I said. “ Nothing would induce me to go out of town while she is in it, but I think—I hope, she will be well enough to go to Scarborough in another fortnight. Grandmamma and mamma are off to-morrow. If Aunt Theo improves as steadily as she is doing now, she and I are to join them.”

“ Not your father ? ”

“ He cannot be persuaded to go away. He says he is quite well and happy and prefers a quiet life at home. I don't like to leave him, but——”

He laughed. “ Oh, your ‘ buts,’ Miss Sâba ! I wonder

he is not jealous of all this devotion. It has seemed to me that no one under the sun seems to count with you beside Aunt Theo."

"Do you think I'm selfish?" I asked quickly. "I often wonder. But what am I to do? She needs me and—God knows how I need her!"

"It's unwise to care too much for anyone," he said sadly. "I have learnt that, and you will learn it too if you persist in casting all your pearls before one shrine."

"Oh! I like other people too, only——"

"Only, *one* love is worth all the others put together. Why, child, your heart is as easy to read as an open book, and it holds one name on every page!"

I was silent; I wondered if he was right. Had I permitted this feeling to oust all others, and in doing so, had I forgotten other claims? Had I not been quick to detect selfishness as a ruling passion of the family? Yet, was I not encouraging the same vice in my own person?

"What can I do?" I said rather helplessly. "How does one *make* one's self care less for one and more for another? Why should my aunt be dearer to me than anyone else in the world? I have often wondered, but I can't answer the question."

"Nor can I," said he quietly. "The heart is a stubborn thing. I don't know whether the scientists have agreed as to its being the seat of the affections, but it has decided inconveniences."

"Then you can't propose any cure for my case?" I said lightly.

"No, there are loves that nothing can change, that burn the brighter for storm and trouble, that refuse to die even the death of unworthiness——"

Was he speaking of his own love? Did it still live and ache in his heart?

"But there are others," he went on after a long pause, "lighter loves; less lasting, safer in every way for the votaries who shun pain. Knowing life as I know it, I had rather care often than care once."

"Oh!" I cried in shocked amazement; "surely you don't mean that?"

"I do," he said. "It is only another form of selfishness to shut out all the light of heaven because one's own poor little candle has gone out. Human love has its fallacies as well as its virtues. Don't you think it would be nobler

to own one had made a mistake than to persist in painting that mistake in the colours of so-called constancy?"

I looked at him hopelessly. "How can I tell? I have only had other people's experience as a guide."

"Nothing of your own?"

I shook my head. "Thank goodness, no—and don't wish it! I agree with Ann Shottery that a woman's life can be sufficient for herself if she chooses to make it so. There would not be half the silly love affairs there are, or half the unhappy marriages, if girls were occupied instead of idle. If you fill your brain and your mind, your heart is safe."

He laughed softly and amusedly. "Oh, wise young judge!" he quoted; "so that is how you look at the matter. Shall I paint you a man's view of the subject? Shall I tell you that each of us is meant for the other, a counterpart to be fulfilled?—that the day and the hour comes when nature speaks and will not be denied. Loneliness demands a sympathetic handclasp, a mental support and comfort. Sometimes in youth one loves with blind desire; stakes all and loses; goes mad, revives, and calls one's self philosopher. And so, perhaps, one is, until a new foe confronts the citadel—a subtle, gentle force of which one suspects no harm. But slowly and surely it works its way until one defence after another is undermined. Then comes a call to surrender, and aghast and amazed we confront again the capture of that invulnerable heart we had fancied securely barred."

"Is that a fairy story?" I asked.

"No, Miss Portia, it is not. It is a true and by no means uncommon incident. First love is a fine theme for poets and romance spinners, but the love born of knowledge, and tender comprehension of faults and virtues, that is better worth the winning."

"It sounds very cold and prosaic," said I, my thoughts busy with a romance even then in progress; a noble, wonderful story in which "one love, one life" was the main episode, the story of a true and deathless passion by which I meant to take the world by storm some day.

"Perhaps; but I thought such things made stronger appeal to young philosophers."

"Ah! you are laughing at me," I said, somewhat offended.

"Indeed I am not," he said earnestly. "I am only

trying to save you some future disillusion by giving you a foresight of life at second-hand."

"No other impressions affect one like one's own," said Sâba the wise.

"Then you would prefer to suffer rather than listen to advice?"

"Decidedly. The adviser only argues from his point of view. It would not be mine, so it would be useless."

"I suppose you are right. No two persons can face each other from the same mental standpoint. We are all different, despite the same clay and the same Modeller."

"And I wonder if it matters—after all?"

I had come to an abrupt stop at the Kensington end of the street. By some tacit arrangement he did not accompany me to the house *every* night.

I was looking up to velvet depths of sky, to endless range of stars; I was thinking of those I had known and who were there, or somewhere that meant what those deep heavens represented of the other world. They too had loved, suffered, walked this earth and given of their best to fellow mortal; proved the faith, fought the fight, and for what?

"If it matters?" I heard him repeat. "I am sure it does. The world is our school and life our schoolmaster. It has its prizes and rewards, its competitions and struggles. I think some day, some hour comes to each of us when we confess we are glad to have gone to the school, to have learnt some of its many lessons, to have secured even one of its smallest prizes."

I gave him my hand. "Good-night," I said. "You have given me something to think about."

* * * * *

I went home to find my mother in the last flurries of packing, labelling and strapping for the morrow's journey and railing at the Laird for not helping her. He maintained that there would be plenty of time in the morning; that experience had taught him she would have forgotten half a dozen things and would have to open the box in consequence. I could have endorsed his opinion, but tried to pour oil on the troubled waters by going through a list of personal effects and checking them off on each assurance that they were "packed."

Following this came a raid on the kitchen premises to

see that Jean was duly furnished with instructions and the store cupboard fitted for a month's supplies, an inspection of saucepans and kitchen drawers and receptacles for paper and string, dusters and dust sheets.

Having thus worked off housekeeping energies she lectured me on my duties during her absence, and then condescended to have supper served up.

It was a somewhat stormy meal by reason of the Laird having helped himself to a liberal drop of "Highland Dew" during her temporary oblivion of keys. Whenever this was the case he brought forward his "King Charles' head" for discussion—grandpapa, his music and his admirable qualities! My mother maintained that the autocrat was all that was generous, kind and good. But for *him* what should we do for clothes, for change of air, for various luxuries and comforts dispensed almost daily for our benefit?

I sat in silent misery and listened to it all. Grandpapa's name was always a sort of bombshell exploding in every direction once the Laird let it fall. Of grandmamma he usually spoke kindly enough. She was "a decent body, with more sense in her little finger than yon old curmudgeon possessed in his whole person." But to-night even grandmamma came in for a share of wrath. I could not quite fathom her offence, I only learnt she had been there this afternoon and suggested a removal.

"Why shouldn't we have a house of our own; not live in this stuffy, furnished villa?" Mamma caught up the idea eagerly, but the Laird wanted to know who was going to buy the necessary furniture. It couldn't come out of his income; it wasn't likely that "old blunderbuss" would present his daughter with the requisite goods and chattels. Catch him at it!

With her usual tact mamma plunged into a discussion on the "muddled" Scotch property, and that opened all the vials of wrath together.

Finally I brought about a truce of war, pointing out the lateness of the hour, and adding that mamma had a long journey on the morrow.

Taking the hint she proceeded to lock up, and summoned Jean to "clear." The storm died off into muttered rumblings. I brought the Laird his pipe and tobacco-jar, and peace once more descended upon our strange household.

"Get *married*," I said to myself as I wished them both good-night. "Catch me doing such a foolish thing."

And certainly with three such examples of matrimonial bliss as that of her mother, grandmother, and Aunt Theo, no one need wonder at such a determination on the part of Sâba Macdonald.

* * * * *

On the morrow mamma departed. I believe the Laird and I did not manifest any extraordinary amount of grief!

It occurred to me that people seemed to reap pretty much what they sowed, and had no right to blame the soil for producing what they put into it. You cannot terrorise and bully your family and expect it to love and admire you. You cannot stand to it as judge and executioner of all that is bright and joyous and heart-whole, and yet claim all attributes of mercy. You cannot hurt, degrade, and mortify innocent love and yet count upon its spontaneous offerings. You cannot display a hideous idol for worship and expect admiration and reverence as its due. In fact, Sâba Macdonald had serious thoughts of publishing a treatise on the "Education of Parents." It was to have definite rules and obligations which would be clearly set forth, and its epilogue was addressed to children in this fashion:

"Be very careful whom you *choose* for your parents, for they may mar or make your life!"

As on previous occasions she took the reins of household management and the safeguarding of keys. She had less time to spend with the Beloved, but paid two short daily visits instead of one long one. And oh! the joy of seeing the steady return to health, of watching the wasted cheeks grow round and the lovely eyes less haggard and pain-filled; of the exchange of bed for couch, and finally of bedroom for sitting-room.

On that blissful occasion the Laird accompanied Sâba to the little house in the Square and saw her aunt for the first time since the operation. Their previous acquaintance had been slight, but it was easy to see that they would agree well and become firm friends, in spite of "family antipathy." It was somewhat unfortunate that on this special evening grandpapa should have taken it into his head to pay his convalescent daughter a duty visit. He

stalked pompously into the little drawing-room to find his recalcitrant son-in-law also there. As for Sába, she was a subject of indifference now.

The conversation was stiff and formal at first. I knew grandpapa's objection to long visits and was praying that the usual ten minutes might be his present limit. Surely one could ward off dangerous topics for that period. Unfortunately he began that everlasting: "I never get ill"—"I never want a doctor"—"Every man's health is in his own hands"—which was so particularly aggravating to less fortunate mortals.

It aroused the ire of the Laird. I scented battle and trembled. He bent forward, his eyes gleaming under his shaggy white brows.

"Let me tell you, my good sir," he burst forth, "that what you say is a direct challenge to Providence. Man's life and man's health are *not* in his own hands. Maybe ye'll yet be brought to see the sin of boastfulness and trust in paltry human power. Read the parable of the rich man who laid up treasure and bade his soul rejoice and take its fill of good things, and remember that answer of the God he defied in so brazen a fashion. "Thou fool! This night thy soul shall be required of thee!" Take that to heart, gude man, and ay bend your stubborn will at the footstool of grace! It's only due to His maircy that you're still cumbering this airth, and for aught ye know the same answer as fell to that rich man's fate is even now awaiting your ain boastful self!"

Grandpapa's face was purple with indignation. He was upright and God-fearing enough to have had texts for answer at his finger-tips, but he seemed unable to remember anything that suited the occasion. He began to stutter, "Tut-tut, my dear sir, that's all very well, but——"

"Hoots!" stormed the Laird, "but me no buts! It's gospel truth what I've been telling ye; the sin of boasting is of all sins the most detestable. Look at your life and your heart. Are they clean? Are they free from guile? Have you played the gude Samaritan and helped the poor and needy of your great abundance? Have you blessed Providence for his undeserved benefits to you, or made kith and kin happier for the sake of your ain good fortune? Is your heart maircifil and your soul pitiful to the weak and the fallen? Is your wealth the wage of

honest labour, or just a loan for which you will have to give account when your soul is judged and your body that you think so much of is but dust and crumbling bones? Ay, gird away! Ye dinna like to hear that and you think I'm but a poor daft old man! Maybe I am, but I've had my say and spoken to your face as I do not fear to speak behind your back, and—Godsooth, I'm all the better for it."

He leant back, and surveyed his enemy's angry face and vain efforts at articulation with a satisfied smile.

"That's enough now," he went on. "It's not becoming that we should be brawling in your daughter's drawing-room. I'm sorry I forgot that, but I'm no sorry to have said what I did, and I hope ye'll call it to mind if ever ye find your tongue inclining to boastful words. Your life is *not* in your hands to hold or to keep. And not all your selfish care o' it, or your rules, or your diet, or any other thing will grant ye one hour more than Providence has destined for ye."

His voice was so solemn, his manner so impressive that one thought of "gifts of prophecy." There was a moment's dead silence. Then grandpapa rose, took up his hat and stick and—*walked out of the room*. Any ceremony of farewell was omitted, or forgotten.

"I'm thinking he's vexed," said the Laird, wiping his heated brow with his handkerchief.

Aunt Theo leant back on her pillows, and laughed till the tears came to her eyes. "Vexed! Oh! Laird! Laird!" she cried. "It was better than any play! It was almost worth waiting all these years to hear! I believe you are the first and only person who has ever dared to speak the truth to his face."

"Maybe," said the Laird, "and I trust he'll benefit by it; but I'm no hopeful."

"It is the curse of our family—selfishness," she went on with sudden passion; "wanting the best of everything. Whatever ministers to personal pleasure and pride; life, death, love, marriage, all played in that one key. Sâba there, her childhood, and my own, and the after years——"

She broke off abruptly. "Of course it's not dutiful to speak so. Perhaps I ought not to recall a time made bitter by that same vice, yet it faces me when I look at her and I thank heaven that her own father came to save her from what I endured."

"Ay, ay! He's a gey hard man, yon," said the Laird. "Well I know it, though 'tis little I've said, being a man of peace, as my lassie there knows. But I hold his letters with all his harsh abuse when misfortune overtook me and I asked for a little help. I'm a Christian man, I hope, but its hard to keep a civil tongue when in the presence of yon old hypocrite. *His* health—forsooth! and everything done and thought of that his 'proud stomach may take comfort therein,' as says the Psalmist."

I began to laugh. The comic side of the situation struck me at last and when I thought of grandpapa's angry face and tragic departure I was convulsed with mirth. It was some time before any of us quieted down to normal conversation or discussed the probable visit to Scarborough. I wanted the Laird to come also, but he was obdurate. What would he do among a pack of women-folk, he asked?

A wife, a daughter, a mother and a sister-in-law together were too much for any man of normal intellect.

So it was arranged that I was to accompany Aunt Theo in a week or two, and remain with her as long as she needed me. The Laird assured us he would do very well with Jean to look after him. Had not he had lonely years enough to have got used to his own company?

He began to talk of those years as I sat by the open window looking out at the square. Aunt Theo was half sitting, half-lying against the pillows. She, too, looked out at the lingering light, at the white sickle of the moon lifting itself above the darkness of the trees. It was so quiet that the Laird's voice seemed the only living thing about us; so quiet that a footstep on the pavement had almost a disturbing sound. It passed, echoed, died away, returned, without entering into my thoughts as a sound of special import. I was indulging in a blissful reverie compounded of relief at Aunt Theo's improved health, amusement at the Laird's Scotticisms, and the delightful prospect of that Scarborough visit. We would be together, she and I—have quiet rooms for ourselves, not go to the fashionable boarding-houses beloved of grandmamma and mamma. How much happiness can a heart hold without running over?

The Laird was still talking when I felt a sudden quick clutch at my arm. I heard a hoarse whisper: "Sâba! Who is that? Look—standing by the gate of the Square?"

I followed her gaze. I saw a figure I knew well, and I saw the face turned towards our open windows. I looked at her; she was white as death. I felt the blood leap to my face, but my voice was unmoved enough.

"I think it is Sir Richard Elmore," I answered.

"How do you know?"

"Because he comes every evening for news of you," I said.

"He has never called?"

"No, he had not the courage while you were so ill, but would you like to see him now—for a few minutes?"

She hesitated. The Laird was asking if he might sit out on the balcony and smoke a pipe till I was ready to go home. "Yes," she said, "of course."

I took that consent for answer. I stepped out on the balcony and beckoned to the watchful figure. When he was beneath me I called down, "Please come up; Aunt Theo wants to see you."

CHAPTER XII.

AMONG the later experiences of Sâba Macdonald, lovers and love-making had had no part. It was with almost painful interest she watched the meeting of these two whose tragic farewell she had heard in that far-off childish time.

That lovely face leaning against the cushions flushed faintly, the great sad, brown eyes looked back at the grave face bending over her; their hands clasped.

"I am so pleased you are better—Mrs. Danebury!"

"Thank you, Sir Richard. It was kind of you to enquire so often. Sâba has told me."

That was all. They loosed hands, and he sat down and said something about India and Egypt and various ordinary matters. The Laird called out a welcome from the balcony; it seemed a relief to the strain of the situation.

I stood half in, half out, of the long French window, resolved not to interfere with their conversation, thinking sadly of the two who had loved so wildly, parted so coldly, and now met again under such changed conditions.

I wondered if he found her greatly altered. To-night she seemed as lovely as ever to me, her rich brown hair tied loosely back, her muslin gown with all its soft transparencies

of lace and amber ribbon shrouding the wasted outlines of her figure; a bright colour burnt like a flame in her cheek and changed its rare delicacy to beauty.

I slipped out into the balcony and talked to the Laird. I felt sure they would not want me, and so that she was happy for even a brief hour was all I cared about. Proprieties I scorned.

The Laird suggested departure at last, and rose from his chair to re-enter the room. Sir Richard seemed to accept it as a hint. His farewells were as conventional as his greeting. I pressed my lips to hers and whispered a hope that she was not tired. She laughed quite gaily. "Tired, no; only of being an invalid. I should like to be off to Scarborough to-morrow!"

"Scarborough!" Sir Richard turned hastily. "Did you say you were going to Scarborough?"

"Yes, my mother and sister are there, and Sâba is coming to take care of me."

"My place is not fifteen miles from Scarborough," he said. "I may perhaps have the pleasure of meeting you all."

I thought the "all" was an after-thought, but I walked home on air that night, asking myself what I had ever done to deserve such glorious good fortune as was being showered upon me.

Sir Richard did not perform escort duty on this occasion, but took farewell of us in Hammersmith Road, and hailed a cab.

It was all in strict accordance with what I felt should be the case after such a meeting. He would want to be alone, to recall, to readjust existing conditions with past emotions. Men were so different from women. We rushed into confidences, they to solitude; we craved sympathy and they only eschewed their fellow-men as intruders, or worse, as non-believers in the actualities of romance. It pleased me to think he could say nothing to me on this occasion; that even my timid "Do you think her *very* much altered?" had only received a brief "Less than I expected."

I had no need to talk to the Laird, for he was so full of what he called the "dressing" he had given that old "curmudgeon," that he could speak of nothing else all the way home.

Before wishing him good-night I once more tried to coax him into accompanying Aunt Theo and myself to

Scarborough, but he was inexorable. He would have to stay with the "gude wife," as he called her, in some abomination of a place termed a "boarding-house." Were it possible to share our lodgings and be let do as he pleased he would come at once, but under the circumstances he preferred London and peace.

I could not assert he was altogether wrong in his choice, neither could I quite understand how I had been so favoured as to become Aunt Theo's companion and stay with her on those quiet north sands where fashion troubled not, and no one need change their dress thrice a day.

I took a very light and happy heart to bed with me that night, but as usual I felt a little afraid that the dogging shadow I knew so well was not very far off. That sooner or later its ill-omened presence would fall across my little burst of sunshine. I slept badly, and when at last the restless dozes and turnings lapsed into a longer period of unconsciousness I dreamt again that strange dream of the desert and the veiled figure. I woke trembling and weeping to find that morning was here. By light of day the terrors of the night vanished. I told myself that dreams, even if repeated, could not really mean anything.

* * * * *

Each day saw a marked improvement in the Beloved. The doctor was delighted with her rapid recovery. It was one of those instances where surgery really is of use; the cause removed, the patient recovers. In a week from the time of Sir Richard's visit she was pronounced well enough to undertake the journey. I helped the *ayah* to pack, and was to and fro every day between our respective domiciles; busy, happy, gay; a changed and radiant Sâba, who wondered at herself and at the change, and saw in it only the delusive joys she desired to see.

"We must find someone to take charge of the house," said Aunt Theo one morning; "the domestic refuses to stay by herself. Do you think you could find someone, Sâba?"

"I'll ask at the registry office," I said.

Accordingly I walked down towards the High Street after leaving her, and made the application.

"I know an excellent person," said the official; "she goes out by the day or week."

I put the usual questions as to honesty and sobriety; being a furnished house one had to be particular.

"Perhaps you would like to see her yourself," said the woman turning over some leaves in her book of addresses. "She has a room in Silver Street, could you go there?"

It was as much on my way as the lane, so I took the address and went off. I looked at the card.

MRS. HIGGINS,

Caretaker and Charwoman.

9, Silver Street,
Kensington.

The name had a familiar look. "Higgins?" Where had I heard or seen it before? I remembered the days at Brompton Square and "Electra" and the servant difficulty. Old Boy and Betsy 'Iggins, who had had charge of him on that memorable occasion when he interrupted the supper party.

I found the house and knocked at the door; it was opened by Betsy herself. She did not recognise me, which was not surprising considering I had been a childish insignificant person in the Brompton Square days. I mentioned my errand and brought myself back to her remembrance.

"Well, for sure now! Is it really!" she exclaimed. "Who'd a thought you'd h'ever 'a' grown up so tall and laidylike and h'improved! And it's for your h'aunt you want to h'engage me? It's h'extraordinary 'ow things *do* 'appen in this contrairy world, but it just chances I'm free at the present time an' a pleasure it will be to join h'associations with you, miss. I h'always 'ad the deepest respect for one so onnat'trly gifted, h'as many a time I've said to the h'old gentleman."

"Do you mean the Captain? How is he? Do you ever see him now?" I asked eagerly.

"In a matter o' way h'on and h'off, I does, miss. You know, p'raps, as 'ow circumstances got a bit straitened in that 'ousehold, and there was a 'int of brokers owin' to arrears in Queen's taxes, the dratted things; there's more misery bin caused in 'umble but respectable 'ouse'olds by them same h'impositions than tongue can tell! Yes, miss, h'as I was a-syin', only last Saturday week, bein' down for a 'alf day, as they lives in a h'upper part now, with sich relics of bygone greatness as was snatched from bailiffs and courts and other h'engines of injustice—' Miss

Puffin,' I ses, 'wot's become of that sweet young lady as used to play the pianner to you when you wos uncertain o' temper,' which bein' a misfortune such as is liable to h'all flesh h'as is grass, for wich there is Bible versification, though for my part I never could see 'ow it h'applied to flesh and blood, which certingly h'is our componing parts, eh, miss?'"

She came to a full stop for want of breath. Time being limited I suggested she should call at Edwardes Square about seven o'clock that evening to see my aunt. I would be there, and she could then give me any further information respecting the once famous novelist and her affairs.

Matters being satisfactorily arranged I hastened home. I had my own packing to see to, and my time was fully occupied till tea. The Laird walked to the Square with me but would not come in.

"You women have so much to clack about, your dresses and bonnets and flummeries, ye'll not be wanting an old man's company," he said. "I'm thinking o' a tramp up the High Street yonder to look at Thackeray's house, and a stroll up the fine avenue o' Palace Gardens."

"Thackeray's house is in Young Street," I told him, "the place where he wrote 'Vanity Fair.'"

"As if I didna ken *that*," scoffed the Laird. "I know my London better than you, lassie. With all your literary attainments I'll be bound ye could no tell me the year of publication of that same 'Vanity Fair.'"

"Indeed I can," I said triumphantly; "it came out in parts as Dickens used to bring out his works, and the year was 1847."

"Well, ye're better informed than I imagined," said the Laird. "Go awa' in with you and I'll be thinking of something else to ask that ye'll not have so pat on your tongue."

He shook his stick at me, laughed and strode away with a step that bore little trace of his three-score years.

I entered the house and ran up to the drawing-room. "I've found you such a character," I said to Aunt Theo, and explained Betsy 'Iggins as associated with that memorable party at which she and I had been guests.

"How long ago it all seems!" she said. "And how small the world is! Our circle is narrowing, Sâba."

"Mine has always been a very circumscribed one," I said; "but I'm not inclined to quarrel with it any longer."

She looked at me with that wistful gaze I so often caught now. "You certainly seem happier, child," she said, and at that moment Betsy 'Iggins knocked at the door and announced herself as 'aving come by appointment and 'opin' as punctuality was no h'objection."

My aunt explained her duties and that for a month at least she would be required to take charge of the house and keep it clean and in order. The other servant was to have a fortnight's holiday. On her return the two would be able to work together. Betsy was perfectly willing to undertake all and offered many references as to character and general trustworthiness. This subject brought in the celebrated "Electra" and the woes of the poor old Commander.

"And many a time 'as my 'eart ached for 'im," she told us, "a-sittin' there so lonely and not a soul to speak to save that dratted bird, which is a screecher if h'ever there was one. 'Eight bells!' 'e ses all the blessed day. 'Time for grog. Pipe all 'ands aboard.' Lord! the way I tried to 'ush 'im by rattlin' fireirons not to mention a throwin' of dusters to be snipped out of yer 'and, if you'll believe me, ma'am, same as if 'e knew 'is powers of aggravation."

"I hear Miss Puffin is going to America," I said. "Who is to take care of the old gentleman while she is away?"

"Well, miss, she was talkin' o' h'offerin' that sitiuation to me. I was to live at them rooms in Fulham and see arter the Captain and the parrot, cook and care and sich. I've not decided yet as to whether I feels h'able for the responsibility, the Captain 'aving a 'abit of going off queer besides ramblin' in 'is 'ead, and I'm not one as is partial to crowners' 'quests. Not but what they're h'interestin' sometimes, taken seprit and h'apart from pussonal disqualificashuns. But where there's a chance of h'interference and questions as, so to say, h'infringes on private matters, I don't 'old with 'em, not at all."

"She ought to engage a professional nurse, I think," said my aunt.

"A nuss!" snorted the redoubtable Betsy. "No, ma'am, axin' your parding, not a nuss, and not a purfessional, for I knows their ways as 'as been trained in 'orspitals and a cryin' scourge and shame they is. No more feelin' for a sufferin' human creature than if they were'nt o' the same flesh and blood, even if diseased, as isn't in mortal power to 'elp, and where'd the medical purfession

be if it was? That's what I ses. Live and let live, though when it comes to cuttin' h'orf legs and h'arms leave alone h'entrails, there's not much o' life worth 'avin'."

After which cheerful speech my aunt dismissed her, having stated both date and terms for the taking up of her duties.

"That's over," she said, with a sigh of relief. "Oh! I shall be glad when we are off, Sâba child!"

She lay back on the couch rather wearily, and fanned herself with a quaint Oriental fan she had brought from India.

I have made no mention of Dacca muslins and Indian silks and cashmeres brought for me; materials lovely and costly, and which would place me above all necessity of purchasing dress fabrics for a long time to come. A couple of the muslins were in preparation, and my aunt had a seamstress in the house working for herself. Every day brought nearer the date of departure and increased our longing for the cool and bracing air we both loved.

To-night after Betsy Higgins' departure, Aunt Theo asked me to play to her; she had not heard me since her return.

"Let me see if you have fulfilled the promise of your youth," she said.

I went to the piano. "I am dreadfully out of practise," I said. "The copying takes up so much time that I have had to give up music."

"Play the *Traümerei* of Schumann's," she said; "dreaming is self-indulgence, but when I hear *that* I am able to fancy there is something left to dream of, and to forget the awakening."

So I played it and drifted on to other soft and melancholy fragments—the "Nuits Blanches" of Heller's; that exquisite *Lied* of Mendelssohn's in F Major. Book IV., which always seemed to me the embodiment of a devotional hymn. I knew the door had softly opened while I was playing, but as my back was towards it I was unconscious of visitor or message. At the conclusion of the *Lied* I looked round and in the shadowy corner saw a figure seated.

"I would not disturb you," said a familiar voice. "Music is a passion of my own, and I never can forgive its interruption. I had no idea, Miss Sâba, that you could play so beautifully."

He shook hands with my aunt and then with me, and pleaded for some more music.

"Play the *Traimerei* again," said my aunt, and I did, lingering over its melancholy sweetness and thinking to myself that those two who sat in the shadowy dusk might well dream on of what they had lost—of life's sorrowful awakening. When I ceased there was a moment's silence; I still sat at the piano, striking soft chords with my left hand, conscious at last of low and earnest voices to whose melancholy the *Traimerei* had been a prelude.

"All life's best hopes are dreams—things we never realise." It was Sir Richard who spoke; a note of desolation in his voice that went to my heart.

Unwilling to seem a listener I drifted into other themes, the old Weber variations on *Vien'qua Dorina bella*, of which Aunt Theo had been so fond. I played very softly, so that they should talk on as they wished, and I played, too, to an odd fancy of my own. In this fashion should I like to be made love to, supposing that ever the suitable love-maker appeared. Just in some hushed and drowsy twilight, with music faintly throbbing on the silence; with melody sweet, and yet sad as sweet, to match the fear of longing and the fear of hope. Such ache and fear could never be very far apart from love, or so said that wistful *Traimerei*.

* * * * *

When I rose to go home Sir Richard offered to escort me. This was a farewell visit. He was leaving town the next day for Yorkshire. I noted no change of manner; they parted with the usual cool friendliness, but he did express a hope that they might meet before long. He very often came to Scarborough from Cross Barrows. She half smiled and glanced at me, then at his politely anxious face.

"I hope we shall see you soon," she said; "an invalid is poor company for Sâba."

I felt vexed she should say that; surely she knew what one special invalid was to me.

* * * * *

When we were in the quiet lane under the August moonlight he said, "You have not yet asked me that question, Miss Sâba."

"Question?" I repeated.

"Yes, respecting the readjustment of feelings to new situations. Are you not curious on the subject?"

"I am, but it is not one to discuss; I mean, it would seem disloyal."

"I wonder how you mean to fight the battle of life," he said; "for believe me, *that* is no abstract thing and fine feelings don't count."

"Oh! I shall fight it as it has been fought by others," I answered; "one goes through phases of experience and I have a feeling that one is helped according to one's efforts."

"Helped by what? God or man, or evil forces? Are you superstitious, Miss Sâba?"

"Not at all, but I have had a curious bringing up. At one time there was a strong element of the supernatural concerned with it, and I always remember I have had a warning from the other side."

"What sort of warning?"

"I had a friend who loved me and whom I loved; she was a strange creature, more spirit than mortal; she had a conviction that she would die young, and when we talked of it we made a compact that if possible she would appear to me. Strangely enough I was with her when her presentiment came to pass; she was drowned. It was at Scarborough, and I am going there for the first time since that fatality."

"But was the promise ever kept?"

"Yes, I *did* see her; it happened three years after her death when all hope and almost all memory of that promise had passed from my mind."

"This is interesting," he said; "tell me the facts."

They carried me back to those early days—the memorable *séance*, that strangely-delivered message; I told him all.

"But I have always thought she came back to warn me of her grandmother's death," I added; "she knew how fond I was of her, what a good friend she had been; perhaps it was also to show me that death is not an irrevocable barrier."

"Also," he said, "it appears to have been the night made important by your 'coming out'—your acquaintance with the gay world—with *me!*"

I looked up quickly. "So it was, but that——"

"Ah! don't be so cruel as to say that was a matter of unimportance. I can never think it so; I have gone back so often to that talk of ours under the trees—your anger,

your accusation, the frank honesty of it all. Now I can picture your return. Perhaps you were still remorseless, still unforgiving, and then an angel whispered of peace and mercy and life's petty methods of spoiling life, and so you grew compassionate again and resolved to pardon the sinner."

"Oh! but you weren't altogether a sinner."

It was his turn to smile. "I don't believe you could deceive anyone, Miss Sâba; it is a rare virtue—honesty in a woman."

"Do you mean we are morally dishonest?"

"Not in the sense of stealing what does not belong to you, but as far as deviation from truth, deception and pretence go, it would be a difficult matter to find one who reached the standard I meant as honest."

"Have you had such a dreadful experience?" I asked in a hurt tone, for as usual I was applying the words to an accepted pattern of perfection and they seemed disloyal.

"It was bad enough to make a cynic of me once, but something sweeter and better crept into my heart to knit up the broken strands of faith once more."

"I am glad of that," I said quickly; "it's rather cowardly to blame a woman for what she can't help; we are never able to do what we like as men are. We must just sit and wait till the handkerchief is thrown, and even then we are not allowed to pick it up unless the thrower is approved by a whole host of others."

"Shall you trust your own judgment, do you think, or be guided by that 'host of others'?"

"I? Oh, good gracious! I never think of such things! I theorise about them, of course, because some day I mean to write a book. One must have lovers in a book, and I am always planning and thinking of how I would work out their lives."

"I see," he said in an odd dry tone; "such an idea has no connection with you personally as yet."

"No, except——" I hesitated and stopped short, remembering Dorian Giles and his expressed intention of coming home to marry me.

"Except? There is an exception then?"

"I don't know if I can call it that; I suppose one can't be married against one's will?"

"That depends on the strength of the will."

I shrugged my shoulders. "I think mine is strong

enough for that ; I often wonder why people don't say 'No' at the altar, sooner than go through with a ceremony that may only mean lasting unhappiness."

"It would be rather humiliating for both parties to have that final rejection so late in the day ; a woman should know her own mind well enough to decide that important matter before she dons a bridal dress."

I was thinking of that one and only bridal with which I had had any concern ; of the white despair of the bride's face, of my agonised farewell. Oh ! why had she not waited ! How different everything would have been now !

"We have drifted a long way from our opening subject, the hidden forces that help one to fight life's battles," continued Sir Richard. "Do you fancy your school friend is in attendance on your destiny ?"

"How can I tell ; it is all so deep a mystery."

"Miss Sâba !"

I started ; I became aware of a long pause ; of many strange thoughts.

"Yes ; I beg your pardon, I forgot you were there."

"I only wanted to bring you back to earth again. I wish you could realise you are young and have the right of youth to enjoy and be happy."

"What makes you think I am not happy ?"

"Your face tells its own story, it is far too grave and sad for your years."

I wondered why he should trouble as to what my face expressed or my years held, but I could not assert I was happy, except by comparison with worse mental and moral conditions than those at present surrounding me.

"Are you fond of animals ?" he asked abruptly. I laughed at the sudden change of subject.

"From clouds to earth, from spiritual visitants to the lower order of creation ! Not that animals are so much our inferiors. Yes, I love them ; why do you ask ? The Laird and I had a passion for dogs and horses. But now I haven't even a cat to bestow my affections upon."

"I asked, because I am trying to find a home for a little Skye terrier ; I thought you might like to have him, he would be capital company for your father."

"I am sure he would like him !" I exclaimed ; "he is always lamenting his dogs."

"Then I shall send this one if you will accept it."

"Me ? I thought it was the Laird you meant ?"

"Oh! if you prefer he should have it——" His tone was cold and offended and I glanced at his face, wondering why it should be so stern. Perhaps I had been guilty of another breach of manners; impulsively I laid one hand on his arm.

"I seem to be always offending you," I said; "of course I shall be delighted to have the dog, but it would please the Laird a thousand times more; give him some occupation when I am away, and I am away a good deal now," I added contritely. "Conscience often accuses me of neglect, but then I may not have her very long—a year, it soon goes."

"Does it?" he said bitterly; "not always, nor for everyone. This special year is to be a golden one to you, I suppose."

But I shivered and grew cold. "*Don't!* I have told you that a fate pursues me, that I never *dare* look forward to any great happiness. Remember what I have just endured."

"Pardon me, I ought not to have forgotten. I am glad you are going away; you have worn yourself out and lost all that radiant look of health and hope."

Again I wondered why he should have noticed any look or looks of mine, thought of *my* need of change, of me at all under the circumstances.

"Oh! before I've been a week at Scarborough I shall look like a dairymaid," I said; "not that that matters. It is Aunt Theo we ought to think of after all she has gone through. I feel as if I was undertaking a grave responsibility."

"You will have your mother and *her* mother to help you."

"Of course," I said drily; "we can play at nursing in the Betsy Prig and Sairey Gamp fashion, turn and turn about. Poor auntie, how she will enjoy it!"

"I can't make you out to-night," he said crossly; "would you mind telling me if it will make any difference to your holiday if I happen to turn up at Scarborough?"

"Difference?" I exclaimed; "of course it will! We expect you to 'turn up.' You promised."

"I said *you*, not *we*."

"Oh! well, you don't expect me to be so rude as to say it *wouldn't* make any difference; we are quite good friends now, in spite of my rudeness to you in the first instance, and besides——"

“Never mind the ‘besides’—Good-night.”

With an abruptness that astonished me, he lifted his hat and dispensing with the ceremony of a handshake strode off and down the street.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE dog arrived before we left town. I therefore imagined that Sir Richard must have had it with him in London. The Laird was delighted with the well-bred, friendly little fellow, and I knew that training him and taking him for daily exercise would keep his master from being as lonely as he might otherwise have been, so I was duly grateful to Sir Richard for his kind thought. I was, however, unable to express it because I did not know his address.

In due time the day of departure arrived. Aunt Theo bore the journey fairly well. We drove direct to our rooms and found mamma and grandmamma awaiting us. We had a delightful sitting-room with a balcony; it faced the sea—that noble great expanse of sea which breaks on the northern shore of the town, and to my thinking was a far more beautiful sight than the Spa with its fashionable crowd and noisy bands.

And now began a delightful time for Sâba Macdonald. The morning dip, the lazy hours on those yellow sands beside the invalid chair with talk and work and books, the instruction of small weird Zoe in the art of conversation. Of course grandmamma and mamma came every day to see how my aunt was getting on, and gave her the latest gossip of the boarding-house or described the latest belle of the Spa promenades or the hotel balls. But we were left much together and grew to know each other more intimately and affectionately than ever.

In spite of the melancholy associations of this particular seaboard I do not think my spirits suffered. In fact, I had become so frivolous that I often took myself to task for it. I could not understand why every day should dawn upon happy content and idle enjoyment, yet so it was. Of the sea I never wearied; it was a never-ending joy, and its changeful phases suited my every mood.

Morn and noon and night there it lay for my pleasure, wearing the colour of cloud or sky, broad and deep and boundless, a never-ending mystery.

I would guide the babe's toddling steps and let it paddle in the little rippling waves. I would watch the bathers in their quaintly British garb floundering and bobbing and dipping in the water, evincing enjoyment by shrill shrieks and playful splashing of each other's backs, an odd *mêlée* of unembellished forms and figures to whom Nature had been bountiful, or the reverse. It was very different from the spectacle on the Boulogne sands. Our French neighbours have decidedly the art of costuming every occasion becomingly.

After a week the wheeled chair was discarded and my aunt could walk from our lodgings to the sands. There she would lie among cushions and rugs for hours at a time, drinking in health and strength, growing brown and rosy, and but for that ever-haunting sadness in her eyes I could have pictured her as the beautiful Aunt Theo of the old days.

But that shadow never left her. Whether it was a legacy of pain or suffering I could not tell, neither dared I question its cause. But at times she would seem perfectly happy and content, and assured me I was the best and most careful of nurses, with such a memory of hours for tonics and nourishment and rest as would have put the professional element to shame.

It occurred to me to wonder sometimes if Sir Richard would carry out his intention of coming to Scarborough, or if he would think of looking for us on the unfashionable side of that delightful sea coast. But day followed day and he did not appear.

One evening we were sitting on the balcony. The golden globe of the full moon was just rising above the quiet waters. It was so beautiful, so restful, that neither of us spoke for fear of disturbing the perfect enfolding calm.

My thoughts drifted back to that time of my last visit. It all looked so far away, like part of some strange dream, and in the silence and drowsy calm of the hour this too, looked part of that dream—a part that had lost the ache of the old longing, but was still possessed of the shadowy unreality that used to fill that longing.

I lifted my head suddenly and looked at her. She was very pale; her eyes were gazing far away to where the sea-line touched the dim blue of the sky. As I watched her I saw a little quiver of the lips, then two great tears rolled down her cheeks. She did not seem to know she was

crying. The quiet attitude and strained sad gaze never changed. I wondered of what the sea spoke to her; what its lulling murmur had recalled?

Suddenly one of the tears fell on her clasped hands. She started and then looked at me.

"Oh, child!" she cried bitterly; "if this peace could only last!"

"It will last for this year surely," I said.

"A year! That is not long for happiness. But I shall not be left undisturbed. In six months he will be home also."

"He? Do you mean the doctor?"

"Yes," she said drearily.

I was silent from sheer inability to say what I would like to have said. This was a blow I had not expected, though I might have guessed at Fate's tricks.

"I—I thought you were to have a year to yourself," I stammered at last.

"It appears men change their minds as well as women."

"You would rather he did not come?" I faltered.

A curious light flashed into her eyes. "Yes, I have almost reached the limits of endurance. If it were not for the child——"

"Yes—yes," I said, leaning eagerly towards her. "But for her you would have severed this hateful tie, is it not so?"

"I could not have borne life as it was," she said drearily. "Often and often I have told myself I had reached the limits of endurance, have prayed to die. A brief while ago when my life hung in the balance I—I scarcely knew whether to make that effort which might save it, or——"

"Oh, *don't!*" I cried passionately. "Did you forget me? Did you never think what you are to poor lonely Sâba? Oh! it nearly broke her heart to see you so changed, to know how you must have suffered!"

"Suffered! My God, if I dared speak of it! No one would believe me! Life, happiness, health, peace—all gone, all destroyed! Sâba, you are too young to understand what wrongs a wife may or must endure and condone. I did not mean to speak of this, but I know no one in the world loves me as you do or would give me such sympathy, and it is useless to conceal that I am unhappy; dreadfully unhappy. Oh! to undo it all! To be free—to be free!"

She wrung her hands with the despair of some fettered prisoner. Thoughts crowded so swift and thick upon my brain that I could not speak, I only looked at her helplessly.

"Can nothing be done?" I faltered at last.

She shook her head. "No. The law makes freedom impossible except through gates of disgrace. I have wrongs enough, Heaven knows, but I cannot publish them. I must just go on enduring until——"

I threw myself beside her chair. "No! no! *no!*" I cried passionately. "You must not, you shall not! You to be sacrificed for him! your beautiful life crushed and killed, as it has been crushed, as it will be killed! Oh, dearest, dearest, it must not be!"

She looked down at my tear-blinded eyes. "Who can help it, Sâba? Who can alter it? Wilfully and madly I took up my cross and I must go on bearing it. Before—before my baby was born I had almost resolved to put an end to it, but then she came, and I thought things might be different."

"And they're not?" I said.

"Not a bit; my life is one agony of humiliation, an outrage to decency. I—I can't explain. You are only a girl and when I say anything to my mother she only tells me things are always like that in India. The conquered race has set the example of 'harem-keeping' to the conqueror, and he is not slow to take the hint."

I felt the blood rush to my face—she, the beautiful, the adored, to suffer such treatment at the hands of this monster!

"I know what you mean. You are not the only one. The marriage vow is broken."

"All men break it in some sense," she said bitterly. "They can always plead nature as their excuse. The law was made by man and it is defended by man, so they escape scot free. If a day ever comes when women have their say in the matter it will mean such an upheaval of old prejudices and accepted vice as will wreck society to its foundations!"

"But that day is far off," I said, "and meanwhile you suffer."

"I am not alone in that, child; it is the sure heritage of the woman's kingdom."

I was silent, thinking out the problem for myself;

thinking that something should and would and must be done to save her further suffering. I could not endure the thought that she was regaining health and strength and beauty to cast them once again under the feet of a brutal captor—that no slave in a sultan's harem was more helpless than a wife wedded to her obligations.

I rose slowly from my knees and leant my arms on the railing of the balcony. I looked away to the shining sea, all gold and silvered in the exquisite light. That earth should be so beautiful and humanity so cursed!

I turned to her at last.

"It seems to me," I said, "that when a man oversteps the line of decency he deserves to be punished. Unwritten laws have their obligation."

"Your experience, Sâba, is that of books or of hearsay; purely impersonal. You little guess what the reality of marriage means—the lost identity, the hopeless groping after faiths, ideals, sensations; the suppression of intellectual activity beneath that eternal formula: 'Women are inferior; women have smaller brains than men; women are illogical and unreasoning.' 'Women are bound to keep their senses in abeyance and suffer indignities with a smile on their lips.' All this and worse is our fate. So it has been, so it will be, for when we rebel our own sex cry shame on us, and the other hunts us down into even lower depths of humiliation ere granting relief."

"Could you not get a divorce? Could you not refuse to go back to him?"

"Of course I could, but think of what it would mean—the exposure in public courts, the disgrace, the harrowing details, the sickening revelations. And even then it would not mean freedom, only a separation. I have no means of support and there is the child to think of. And picture home for me again, Sâba. You know what it used to be. Fancy it under such conditions as these! Why the very word 'divorce' means social degradation to my father and mother. Husbands and wives once united must live together to their lives' ends, no matter what suffering, disgrace, agony, or neglect they endure or inflict. Do you suppose papa would have told me anything about Neal's past life (short of his being a murderer!)? He wanted to get rid of me, just as he had wanted to get rid of all his other daughters. Marriage was the right and fitting way to do it. And now if I told them a tenth part

of what I am confessing to you they would be horrified. They would oppose me in every possible way because of the scandal; the fact that their name would have to appear in the matter. Was there ever anyone who so worshipped the opinions of Mrs. Grundy as my own father!"

"I shouldn't care," I said doggedly. "Your life and your happiness are worth all the smug old-fashioned notions of respectability in the world."

"To your thinking, child, but no one else has ever loved me in your absorbing fashion——"

"One man has!" I burst out suddenly.

The delicate colour flew to her very temples. I saw her eyes fall on her clasped hands, and on the wedding circlet that shone on one white finger.

"That was long ago," she said, and sighed wearily. "What use to think of it now? What could love be but disloyalty, the forging of new fetters linked by unutterable disgrace?"

"But if he loves you where would be the shame?" I urged. "You both would know in your hearts that you could atone to each other for all else; for the world's judgment among the rest, and the world soon forgets. There are many places to go to where your story would not be known and——"

"Sâba! What *are* you saying? What is in your mind?"

I withdrew my eyes from the sea and looked at her.

"Sir Richard is in my mind," I said; "he loves you as ever he did. Why should you not do what other women have done; accept his love and trust to his honour? You know as well as I do that you should have married him, not Dr. Danebury!"

* * * * *

There was a long silence, then she lifted her white cold face to the golden moonlight.

"You must have a strange opinion of me, Sâba, if you think I could do such a thing as that. I am a mother as well as a wife. Have I not my child's future to consider? Do you forget our old talks about the responsibility of parents, their duty in the formation of character, in the love they bestow and the lessons they teach? Don't you know that if I did what you suggest my place would be among the shameless ones of earth? My child would be

taken from me. Could I give her a worse fate than this cowardly surrender of her life to the man from whom I myself fled?"

I groaned in spirit. I had not thought of this. It was, indeed, a case of impersonal judgment and hot-headed ignorance with Sâba Macdonald. Yet she still pleaded for recognition of those forfeited rights, for some less unselfish consideration of wrecked womanhood and hopeless future.

It seemed unutterably terrible that such a fate should be in store for this beloved woman. It drove the girl's soul desperate as she thought of it, set her wits to work on some method of solving the problem by which guilt might be averted and the result lead to freedom, not humiliation.

It would have needed a far wiser and wider experience than hers to have overcome such a difficulty. But while her heart burned under that fierce sense of injustice, of patient wrongs and hopeless bondage to both, she could only think that there must be a way out of it all, that one could be made, if not found; that this and this alone meant her own past struggles, her own resolves, her faithful love.

At last the meaning of life flashed upon her senses—to help, to succour, if need be to sacrifice one's self for sake of what one loved; counting no cost, taking no heed, only resolved to do and dare everything so that happiness might be the gift of a heart faithful unto death.

CHAPTER XIV.

"WE won't speak of it any more," she had said as we parted that night, but I knew there could be no closed volume for me. I had gone to the root of her unhappiness and I should not be satisfied until I had discovered if cure or alleviation were possible.

I had seen one way of escape and seized upon it, only to find it led to a worse *impasse*. The wiser self that confronted me that night had learnt a never-to-be-forgotten lesson. A mistake once made must be paid for in blood and tears and by endurance, until reparation is possible. No one can disclaim responsibility for an action; excuse is only possible to a child or a lunatic. Resentment flamed

within my heart. Though I had only dimly comprehended what were my aunt's wrongs, I hated the offender doubly because she *was* wronged by him.

And two months of precious time were gone since she had left India. Only four more and her liberty would be over, and I should again be the shadow and not the substance of her life's engrossing duties.

I threw myself down by the open window, and stormed and wept as the Sâba of old might have done. This iron-bound fate that tortured human lives seemed to mock me more cruelly than I had yet been mocked. My presentiment of ill had been correct; my hatred of that Anglo-Indian, with his cruel face and thick lips, and taunting smile, had been fully justified. It seemed to me as I thought of him and remembered her words, that I should never be able to meet or speak to him with conventional civility. I could not pretend that life was fair and smooth for the woman he had wronged, even though it was policy to do so for her sake.

Again and again my thoughts turned to the true lover and faithful friend whose place had been usurped. I wondered if he had read the truth in those changed sad eyes; if, by word or hint, she had betrayed her unhappiness to him. And, if so, to what purpose—since by her own showing he could not help her now. Would he come here as he had promised? Would they meet and talk as of old, knowing their danger, yet defying it?

How wise I seemed planning and thinking for them. How readily I would have faced blame and scandal on their behalf. But what use? There was always that one obstacle—the duty that bound a mother and enforced the obligations of a wife.

“Oh! if there had been no child, or if she had come home a year sooner!” I said wearily as I rose from my knees. And in saying it I never thought whether my sentiments were moral or immoral. I had heard of a wife's duty often enough; I had read of cases where women had held the power of reclaiming reprobate husbands; where patience and influence had worked miracles. But I wanted no practical illustration of fictional marvels; I had no desire to see Aunt Theo sacrificing herself for sake of a faithless and unworthy man—not if he were fifty times her husband.

* * * * *

The next afternoon we went for a long drive. On our return we found a card on the hall table. I knew whose it was—instinctively.

“How provoking that we were out!” I exclaimed as I read the well-known name.

“I wonder how he found our address?” said my aunt.

“He must have looked up the hotels and discovered grandmamma,” I answered. “I wonder if he is staying at Scarborough?”

“If so, we shall soon know.”

Her voice and face were quite unmoved. I could not understand her composure.

She did not mention him again, and after tea she suggested the sands as usual. “Why not the Spa?” I said; “you could drive there and we should hear the band.”

“I am not well enough for crowds and gaiety, but if you wish to go, you could call for the others.”

“Thank you!” I said scoffingly. “The others—and leave you to mope here?”

She smiled somewhat sadly. “But, dear child, I am poor company for you. A wretched morbid invalid—You ought to see some of the life and gaiety of the place.”

“Life and gaiety don’t attract me,” I said, “I prefer the sands and solitude and—you.”

She said no more, and we strolled down to our old corner and sat as usual watching the fishing-boats, or the idle groups sauntering in the warm, brilliant evening. The sun set, the twilight deepened, the groups and couples dispersed. But we still remained. It was so cool and lovely, it seemed a pity to go back to stuffy rooms.

Suddenly, in the silvery dusk, a figure loomed clear and distinct and close at hand; discovered our retreat; stopped and faced us, with a stammered apology.

“I wondered if I might chance on you here? You appear to have forsaken the fashionable quarter altogether.”

He shook hands with us, and asked after my aunt’s health, and told us he was staying at the Grand for a few days.

“How did you find us out?” I asked him.

“I met Mrs. Heavysage, and she gave me the address. I was so sorry to miss you this afternoon.”

"We were driving," I volunteered as information.

"Perhaps you will come back with us now?" suggested my aunt; "we take supper at nine. If you will excuse a lodging-house meal we should be delighted if you would join us."

"Yes, *do!*" I said, my spirits rising in unaccountable fashion. "And, oh! I must thank you for the dog. The Laird is perfectly enchanted with him, and every letter I receive tells of fresh sagacity and intelligence."

"I am pleased to hear it." He offered his hand to assist Aunt Theo to rise, and then his arm over the heavy sands. I walked beside them both, listening to his exclamations at the improvement in her—thinking how lovely and how young she looked in that soft light, and how changed the world seemed for both of us by the mere advent of that one presence.

During the simple meal that followed there was the same sense of quiet restfulness. We chatted like old friends; we told him of the way we employed our time; we touched on no dangerous topic, nor even drifted on the sea of reminiscence.

We sat out afterwards on the balcony, and talked with even less restraint. Nothing very wise, or very witty, just the simple friendly things that friends discuss. He suggested that when she was strong enough for the long drive we should pay a visit to his place at Cross Barrows. He would like us to see it.

I noted my aunt's face grew a shade paler; she did not respond at once. Then she said it was impossible to promise as her health was so uncertain; the improvement of one week meant sometimes the going back of the next. He did not press the point. In fact, just as she was speaking, a low, plaintive wail from the room above reached our ears, and she rose hurriedly, saying she must go to Zoe. Would he wait?

He said, "Yes, he would." And Sâba found herself alone with him.

He left his chair and leant over the railing, and for a moment neither spoke.

"Do you know, Miss Sâba, I had resolved I would not come to Scarborough?" he suddenly said. "Perhaps you forget our last parting?"

"You didn't shake hands, and I wondered why?"

"Oh! You did me so much honour," he said ironically.

"But surely you weren't offended, Sir Richard? What had I done?"

He laughed. "Done? Nothing. It was what you said."

I cast my thoughts back and tried to remember, but failed signally. "I am very sorry if I offended you; I didn't mean to."

"Perhaps that's why you do it—so often."

"Often!" I repeated. "Am I so ill-bred—or so unfortunate?"

"I suppose I am ultra-sensitive. Let us talk of the one subject we never *do* disagree about. Your aunt looks wonderfully better; she does credit to your care and devotion."

"I'm so glad you think so," I exclaimed eagerly. "Every day she seems more like her old self. That is joy enough for me."

"You would like to change her into that old self perhaps?"

"Oh! if I only could! If any spell or magic would give me the power! If I could force back the hands of Time and put the clock just where it was when I was a child, spending my first Christmas in England, and you and she were walking together up Regent Street—before you said good-bye."

He turned and looked at me.

"Do you remember so well? Is that the point to which you would again direct our flagging feet? Don't you know that even then matters had reached a crisis. We had agreed that 'Good-bye' was the only thing to say?"

"Oh, no!" I said eagerly. "There had been misunderstanding—misrepresentation. But the fault was neither hers nor yours; it was not too late then for explanation. All could have been set right, if only——"

"The chance was with us—'that might have been!' But you see it wasn't. Chances never are. And why should you wish to alter destiny? Don't you know that life pushes one on, on, on, relentlessly. We can't go back—ever. And sometimes—looking out on what the years have brought or—promise to bring—we are not altogether sorry that we can't."

I looked up hastily from my study of the sea.

"Do you mean one changes like that? Surely not. If one cares once, one must care always."

"We think so when we are young; we know better when the years have taught their lesson."

"Then——." I hesitated. It was not an easy thing to say, and his eyes were reading my own with embarrassing earnestness.

"Then—what?"

"I was wondering if you really mean you would *not* go back to that day—even if you had the chance!"

"Feeling as I do now, I could not go back to that day," he said gravely.

I felt the tears rush to my eyes. I was shamed and hurt by such disloyalty, such poor love as this. I looked seawards again, trying to choke back the angry passion of tears, feeling more helpless, more childish, more unutterably foolish than ever I had felt in my life.

"I suppose you wonder why I say so," he went on quietly. "Perhaps I wonder even more why you persistently try to lift another person's burdens on to your young shoulders? Why you cannot let Fate decide what is best for those whom you love, instead of trying to play at Fate yourself? If joy ever comes your way, I have a fear you won't accept it because someone else is unhappy, and you would rather be unhappy, too—out of sympathy. Don't think me hard and unkind to say this, but sometimes a little plain-speaking is wholesome. I have watched you keenly, and I see that you are obstinately bent on that noble career of self-sacrifice which makes so irresistible an appeal to romantic youth. Believe me, Miss Sâba, you cannot unwind the self-wrought threads of pain or misfortune that each individual winds about itself. You are the most generous and irrational little person it has ever been my lot to meet. That does not make you any less lovable. Only when you think of playing *Dea ex machinâ*, do not begin with loves and lovers of past and gone years; look forward to the future—to your own future. No one else seems inclined to do that for you. Try and believe happiness does exist, and may be claimed as a personal tribute without doing absolute wrong to another."

I had listened in complete bewilderment. It suddenly occurred to me that I was being lectured; made to look small and foolish. The smart of hurt pride dried my tears, and cooled my burning cheeks.

I turned on him with an indignation that vainly strove

for dignity. "It is very—kind—of you to interest yourself in what I do—or leave undone. I have no doubt I do look foolish in your eyes; but you see, I am not old enough *yet* to have learnt prudence, and caution, and the art of trimming one's sails to the favourable breeze. Of course you—"

"I am old enough to have acquired all these accomplishments, you would say. You are quite right."

He was laughing. At least his eyes were, and the handsome mouth beneath that tawny moustache twitched ominously.

A perfect rage of humiliation tore through my heart, and raced with the rushing blood in my veins. I was crimson, trembling, furious. When the door of the room opened and Aunt Theo returned, I sprang to my feet, stammered something incoherent, and rushed through the open window, out of the room and up to my own.

That he should dare to laugh—to speak like that! That he should pretend to read what was in my heart and turn its secret into a child's foolish scheming! "Oh! little fool!" I cried to myself, and paced the room in a perfect heroine's rage; looked at my scarlet cheeks and blazing eyes with the shame of youth flouted and mocked by its elders.

Oh! how could I have betrayed myself so? And knowing what was my scheme, what I had thought to hint and suggest with Machiavellian tact, I was the more enraged. He had changed; he had confessed as much. Probably he cared for someone else—for Mrs. Charteris; for—well, why not for Ann? He had sought her society often enough and sung her praises in my ears. But dearly as I loved her, I could see in her no fitting rival for my beautiful aunt. Who was there of womankind fit to stand in *her* shoes?

* * * * *

I put in a very bad quarter of an hour. It was evident that the old Sába Macdonald rages had not been put aside with St. Paul's "childish things." Evident that she was still given to one-sided conclusions; to the judging and summing-up of wrongs—her own and other persons'; to irrational prejudices, and all the hasty topsy-turvy foolishness summed up in that applied stigma "childish."

Well, she had indeed been snubbed and set down ; every nerve was quivering with remembered humiliation.

How long she raged and agonised over that memory she never knew. But a gentle tap at the door aroused her to the passing of time.

"Sâba, what's the matter ? Are you not coming down again ?"

It was Aunt Theo who spoke. Had he gone, I wondered ? I could not trust myself to meet him again to-night. I *could* not.

"I have a headache," I mumbled ; "and I'm going to bed."

"Let me in," she said ; "I have something to tell you."

Trusting to the darkness to conceal the tell-tale marks of tears, I unlocked the door and admitted her.

"All in the dark ?" she said ; and she seated herself in the chair by the open window.

"You wouldn't have me shame that moonlight, would you ?" I was trying hard for natural voice and natural manner. Instead of going to the window I stopped at the dressing-table and untwisted the heavy coils of my hair. She looked keenly at me, but I kept my face averted. When my hair was loose I put on a dressing-jacket, and then seated myself on a stool beside her chair. My voice I could command, and my face she could not see in that position.

"Well, what is the important communication ?" I asked lightly.

"Perhaps it is not so important after all," she said ; "but I never did like to leave anything unfinished, and when I said we would not talk—of what we talked last night—again, I forgot that there might be a sufficient reason for recurring to it. It was not finished."

There was a sudden hopeless sadness in her voice. I made no answer.

"It was natural you should have thought what you did, and natural—to you, as I know you, Sâba—to set about devising a scheme for my happiness. I told you very plainly that as matters stand nothing could be done—nothing could help me ; and I alone am to blame. I know that now. But what I want to say is that you must not put your own interpretation on—a—renewal of friendship. A woman is quick to know when a man's feelings have

changed. To him, as to her, love is not eternal ; it cannot be. I am so afraid that in your desire to comfort me you might hint at what I have betrayed both in the past—and recently. You must not, Sâba. Remember that. Dick and I can never go back to the old feelings ; we could not even if we were free—and that, we are not.”

“Not free ?” I lifted my head and pushed back the heavy hair. “Do you mean that he, too—— ?”

“I mean that Time has brought him consolation, as it has given me duties.”

“Consolation,” I said vaguely. “But Sir Richard is not—married ?”

“No,” she said ; “not yet.”

My lips parted, but no words came. I could only think of what I had betrayed to him ; of how I had—almost—confessed that the woman I so loved and honoured, still held him and his memory in her heart ; had never forgotten what he could forget so easily. Oh ! what would she say—think—*do*—if she knew of my folly ? She could never forgive it—or me.

“What are you thinking of ?” she asked quietly.

I started. “I was wondering how you knew ? Surely he did not say——”

“No ; he said nothing. But it doesn’t need words to betray a secret of which the heart is full. You see, Sâba, love is not the lasting, intense, life-filling passion that poets and romanticists would have us believe. A little pain, a little difficulty, a little absence, and the object of adoration is forgotten. The blank is filled up. Another presence can charm ; another voice can thrill. Fidelity has its period of termination, just as everything else in life. There is no greater mistake we women make than the mistake of believing we can fill a man’s heart and hold his memory ours for ever. Try and learn that lesson early, Sâba. It will save you from much suffering ; it may save you from such an error as has wrecked my life.”

Colder and colder grew my heart as I listened. The most exquisite thing in life was, after all, not worth trusting in ; of little value. Base metal—never pure gold. And I had seen it change hands already ; I was witness of the truth of her bitter words ; the hope of achieving that wonderful thing which had seemed possible a short time before, died out into blank darkness. I

faced her unhappiness in a new form, seeing that no fate or fortune could remould its broken fragments into the old sweet shape. Nothing I or anyone could do would alter things now. Life was cruel and love false. A cold and callous Fate alone controlled existence.

There was nothing I could do for her—for him—because they needed nothing from me.

She laid her hand on my head, and tried to turn my face to hers. "You mustn't grieve, child," she said. "I know quite well what you have thought and prayed and longed for. But it can't be. The change has gone too deep, and our lives have drifted too far apart, even if— But what use to talk of 'ifs'! You are young to learn such a lesson, but I am not sure whether it isn't better to learn hard things while we are young—the wounds heal, the scars close, and life goes on again just the same."

"Not the same," I said, and shivered suddenly in the hot August night. "A faith killed can have no resurrection. I shall never again believe in——"

"In man?" she asked. "Ah! child, you little know of what a woman's heart is capable; how she can forgive and condone and compassionate. Otherwise, men would have little for which to thank life, or—their mothers."

"Oh, but it's of *you* I'm thinking. You! *you!*" I repeated passionately.

"Dearest child, I am no worse off than hundreds of others of my sex who confront its martyrdom. Time will bring me consolation. I have *Zoe* to live for and train. I must try our old theories on her, *Sâba*, and see how they answer. We were very wise once, were we not?"

But I could not jest or smile. I sat there in stony misery feeling as if life had suddenly come to a standstill; I could not reason or think calmly, though I felt calm enough now. I had wanted truth always. Certainly I had heard it, and was realising its meaning and its full bitterness.

I confronted hard facts. She was Dr. Danebury's wife, as much his "goods and chattels" as the house and furnishings he had provided for her. In four months he would be here to claim her duty again. And my Quixotic scheme of freedom had fallen to pieces like a house of cards. Sir Richard was not the "Dick" of old; not the impassioned lover of whose fidelity I had dreamed. He had forgotten and replaced her. His love

was capable of change, and therefore valueless. He mattered nothing to me now. I felt that I never wished to see him again. I could never meet his eyes without remembering that scene on the balcony; the look that had seemed to say, "I know your scheme, but I shall be no party to it." Let him go, then; let him cease to haunt us with base offerings of a friendship for which she cared little, and I—nothing! What use to pretend interest when one needed service!

Aunt Theo sighed deeply and rose from her chair. "Well, we must say good-night. We have thrashed out the subject thoroughly; let it rest in its grave of silence now and for ever. I wish, child, that you cared for me less; that you would not think so much of what I suffer. Are you never going to accept happiness as your right without shadowing it with another person's troubles?"

"You are not quite 'another person' to me; you never were. I cannot be happy if you are suffering. I suppose it is foolish, but I am made so, and so I must remain."

She pushed aside the hair that fell about my face, and kissed me tenderly. "You know how to love, Sába," she said; "and believe me, some day you will find your heart is capable of holding more than one affection. You should not shut out the rest of the world for sake of me. Why do you try to do it?"

"Try?" I echoed faintly. "I don't know that I try, dearest; it's only that I measure others by your standard and find them wanting."

"But, child, can't you see I am just as imperfect as the others. None are without faults. Come, Sába, give up idealising and look out at life more sensibly. To each lot falls joy and sorrow; on each path falls sunshine and shadow. As none are perfectly happy, so in God's mercy none are quite hopelessly miserable. We take the good and the bad together, and so toil or struggle onwards to the final goal. I am not sure that the toilers don't get the best of it. Work is a wonderful panacea for heart-breaks."

I made no reply. Her words had rent another veil from my eyes; I was confronting a poor pitiable object in the present Sába Macdonald. Her very heroics were bathos, and her blind and faithful love only another form of selfishness.

CHAPTER XV.

I GREW to dread that stretch of sands on which the sea rolled or tossed its spoils of shell and weed, for morning, noon or evening, some hour of the day, that figure would make its appearance and discover our whereabouts and join us.

The *ayah* was always a sure landmark, and he knew we were never far off. Whenever I could I left them and joined nurse and babe. I helped the small creature to find shells and sprays of coloured seaweed in which she delighted. I endeavoured to convince her that Hindustani was not her native tongue, and that "Sâba" was as easy to say as "ma-ma."

She was the quaintest thing, with her small dusky head and scarlet mouth and great solemn eyes. To see her paddling in the pools with her tiny tucked-up skirts and bare legs was a daily joy to me. She was growing strong and rosy and more like her mother, and I was keenly appreciative of her love for me. I used to play with her and amuse her by the hour, while in the distance her mother sat and watched us, with that other figure I so studiously avoided by her side. What did they talk of, those two, in those long *tête-à-têtes*? I often wondered. I often thought of that foolish scene I had made on the balcony and asked myself if, after all, I could have been mistaken. Never by word or look did he recall it, but the shame of failure still burned in my heart; my great endeavours, their poor results.

It seemed to me that his "few days" at Scarborough were elastic in their continuation. There was no hint of departure. When I questioned Aunt Theo she said he evidently intended a long stay as he had sent for his horses.

The arrival of these horses brought up once more the suggested visit to Cross Barrows. We had come now to

our last week; grandmamma and mamma had already departed; in a few days we were to follow their example.

Finally Aunt Theo told me she had made up her mind to accept that oft-repeated invitation. There were certain improvements being made at the Hall about which "Dick" wanted a lady's opinion. Jealous pain racked my heart, my thoughts flew to Mrs. Charteris. Had she won her way after all? Was she the rival I had dimly suspected when I first recognised disloyalty to the "old love"?

I listened as my aunt explained the proposed excursion.

"Dick" (it was always "Dick" now) would drive us on his coach. We were to start early, directly after breakfast, have luncheon at the Hall, and be driven back to Scarborough in the late afternoon.

"Are you sure you are strong enough? It will mean such a long day," I said to her.

"I am strong enough to bear a little fatigue for an important object," she said. "I cannot realise Dick in his new position of Squire and lord of the Manor. He used to be the laziest——"

She broke off, and looked at me half-smiling.

"Dear child, are you not faintly curious also? The plan is quite as much on your account as my own."

I shook my head. I knew that was impossible, but it was useless to deny I was curious. I wanted to see his home, the famous library of which he had told me, the wonderful picture gallery, the art treasures which meant the collection of generations.

So the plan was agreed upon and the day fixed.

As I was dressing I looked anxiously at the sky. It was heavy and dark, and the air had the sultry closeness of threatening storm. At breakfast I spoke of my fears, but Aunt Theo would not pay any attention; she was strangely excited about the project.

When the coach dashed up with its four handsome greys and its smart grooms I confessed also to a little of the same excitement. We asked Sir Richard about the weather. He declared there was no fear; there might be some rain, but if so we could go inside. So we clambered up, Aunt Theo to the box seat and I behind them.

It was the first time I had ever been on a coach or seen anyone drive a team. I confess to some slight nervousness as the spirited creatures dashed off, and we turned narrow streets or clattered past other vehicles; but once on the

high road the animals settled down to a steady pace, and I began to enjoy myself. We covered mile after mile without any lessening of speed, and the way Sir Richard turned corners or passed the road traffic filled me with astonishment.

We passed one or two villages, skirted wide moors and harvest fields, sped through dusky woods, out again on a broad highway. Then without warning a sudden ominous peal of thunder broke on the air, the cloudy grey of the sky took a deeper shade of darkness. Sir Richard glanced quickly up and his hands tightened on the reins.

"We are getting near the North Lodge," he said, "but the avenue is two miles long. I'm afraid we shan't escape the storm."

His words were drowned in a louder, shriller peal like the rattling of musketry. The sky seemed to grow inky black in a moment; heavy drops of rain began to fall.

Sir Richard checked the horses and directed one of the men to get down and bring out cloaks and umbrellas from inside the coach. Just as he descended another peal louder and more terrible broke overhead, rolled into muttered threats and gave full warning of what it preceded. Scarcely had its last growl died into silence when all the brooding heavens burst into flame. A sheet of light and then a long crooked twisting flash! I shut my eyes involuntarily; as I did so I heard a hoarse cry. The coach rocked from side to side, and in a second the maddened horses were tearing along the road with the reins wrenched from their driver's hands.

I clung desperately to the rail of the seat, but even in that first moment of terror I noticed that Sir Richard was not attempting to recover the reins. He seemed lying or leaning against my aunt's shoulder, one hand pressed against his eyes.

"What is it? What's happened?" I heard myself crying.

"He is dazed by the lightning; his eyes——"

I could hear no more for the rain poured down and the thunder roared, and again a wild electric flash sped from point to point of the great inky space above, and still the horses tore on with ever-increasing speed, and every moment I expected the coach would be overturned.

"We shall all be killed," I thought, and strange to say the thought brought no terror. I was dimly conscious of

an intense curiosity as to the exact moment when I should lose touch with the things of earth and know myself a freed soul, speeding—somewhere!

But in another moment calmness was lost in confusion. I seemed passing through a whirlwind of blinding flame and heavy dense downpouring waters, of fierce wind and rushing air. Then came a crash, a sudden pause in our mad career, the sound of voices, the fierce plunging of those arrested steeds who had seemed bent on whirling us into eternity.

I was conscious of kindly help, of strange faces; of wildly looking round for the others and seeing Aunt Theo half-fainting in the arms of a motherly old woman, who turned out to be the lodgekeeper.

But Sir Richard?

He was being *led* away by one of the grooms; led as a child or as a blind man is led, knowing nothing of where he goes. For one dazed moment I stared at him, then rushed forward. I was shaking like a leaf.

“Oh! what is it? What has happened to you?” I cried.

He said nothing, only still he held one hand against his eyes. Some other voice answered me.

“He says he can’t see, miss; *that the lightning’s blinded him.*”

* * * * *

When clearer senses returned I found myself in a little room lying on a very hard couch. I sat up and gazed about in bewilderment. I saw Aunt Theo, white as death, sitting in a chair by the latticed window. Opposite in another chair, his eyes bandaged, was Sir Richard.

I sprang to my feet; I remembered all now.

“Oh! surely it’s not true! The lightning didn’t strike you?” I cried, rushing to his side; but he only put out a feeble groping hand in my direction.

“Are you there? I can’t see you. Thank God the horses were stopped! It—it wasn’t my fault; I couldn’t see to guide them. They say no one is hurt.”

“But you—*you*?” I cried in a sudden frenzy of fear. “Oh! it can’t be that your sight is gone! It will come back, surely—surely it will come back?”

Not knowing what I did I seized the outstretched hand and held it tight against my heart, pouring out pity, terror, unbelief in a string of unmeaning phrases.

He, so strong, so bold, so handsome—blind! To descend in one second's space to the helplessness of childhood. Piercing resentment burnt in my heart. That such a thing should be! That in the midst of life and happiness Fate could strike a blow at the very roots of life and turn strong manhood into this despairing misery!

For once I had forgotten the one who ranked first in my affections. I seemed to have no room for other thought but this most awful catastrophe. Even when I heard Aunt Theo's voice, when I knew she was standing there beside me drenched, shivering, unnerved, I still only recognised one sufferer and one victim to accident.

But all our grief could only tend to hopelessness. He could see nothing. That frightful flash seemed to have destroyed his eyeballs as it leapt from sky to earth.

We could not believe it at first. We thought of shock, of paralysed nerves, of anything sooner than that dread word "irrevocable." We bathed the poor scorched eyes and laid cooling bandages on them, and sent for the nearest doctor, though "nearest" meant a matter of four or five miles. A carriage was sent for us from the Hall stables, and we were driven there in melancholy state, trying our best to cheer him into hopefulness, scarcely conscious of our own shivering, drenched condition. But once at the great house discomfort was forgotten. Rooms and food had been prepared, and while Sir Richard's valet took him away to his own part of the house Aunt Theo and I divested ourselves of our wet clothes before a blazing fire, and were wrapped in blankets and soothed with mulled wine and looked after compassionately by a delightful old housekeeper and her daughter, who persisted in taking a cheery view of their master's accident and trying to induce us to do the same.

We sat there till our clothes were dry, and by that time we heard the doctor's opinion. He could not say if the loss of sight was merely the result of shock or if it would be permanent. He would require the opinion of an experienced oculist and would telegraph to London for one to come down. Meantime Sir Richard must be kept perfectly quiet and try to compose himself to bear the worst. He was afraid to hold out hope, still——

I astonished myself by bursting into tears, and then as suddenly checking them and growing hot and cold with shame, and yet of all experiences this seemed to me most

pitiful. That strong man struck down in his prime; all his wealth and importance of no avail to give him back that one most blessed gift of sight.

* * * * *

The storm cleared off at last. We were dry and warm. We had been fed and comforted, and now we asked each other what we were to do. To drive home would be impossible, even if we had the carriage.

We consulted the housekeeper, who suggested the train. There was a little local station; from there we could get to Whitby and thence we could easily reach Scarborough. A carriage should be ready for us when we were sufficiently rested.

"I suppose we cannot see Sir Richard?" said Aunt Theo, but the valet sent word that the doctor had administered a sleeping draught and his master was quietly asleep. So our visit to Cross Barrows ended without our seeing anything except the hall, for neither of us had the heart to explore the great mansion while its owner lay stricken and possibly condemned to that death-in-life which blindness means.

It was a silent, wretched drive and a slow dreary journey back to Scarborough. Aunt Theo was so worn out that she went to her room at once. I think we both felt the uselessness of talking over what had happened. Words were poor things to express our thoughts, and it would take time to readjust our ideas to this sudden catastrophe.

I began to think that Scarborough possessed some fatality for me in the way of accidents. In any case my usual ill-luck was once more to the fore; all that I had looked forward to spoiled for me by such a disaster as this.

And then our own helplessness! We could do nothing; we could not even get daily news of his condition. The housekeeper had promised to write and give us the opinion of the specialist, but days might pass before we heard it. And if it were unfavourable—

I shuddered as I thought of that; shuddered in the morrow's hot sunshine that mocked me with thoughts of what a day's postponement would have meant. To-day there would have been no storm, to-day our plans could have been carried out successfully, and to-day was helpless to alter one single incident of yesterday.

As I played with the child, as I sat with open page of which I read nothing, as I listened and talked and went in to meals and out again on the familiar sands, I was horribly conscious of some change in myself, some dreary pain at my heart that was new to it and inexplicable.

The murmur of the sea, the shining light, the merry voices, they all came to me shadowed by some fateful memory, bringing no longer the joy of their own beauty and my delight in it. He might never see such things again, never look on sky and sea and sun as I looked now. My thoughts hovered over that destined helplessness and would not be kept from it. For once I was glad to have the hours to myself, to hear my aunt say she intended to rest all the day. I went away to a quiet spot of which I knew, and there I and my pain fought for self-mastery.

What did it mean, this all-absorbing pity for another's fate; this cold sick longing for word or sight or news of him? A sudden blank had fallen on my life. I was as one tossing helplessly on an unknown sea, not knowing where the tide would carry me.

I could hear his voice speaking, half-grave, half-playful, as on that night when we had sat out on the balcony. Had anyone ever called me "child" in quite such a tender, remonstrative fashion? Had "Miss Sâba" ever sounded so sweet a name pronounced by other lips? And those grave, questioning eyes—should I never meet their gaze again, or wonder at their sadness or grow angered at their laughter? I thought of my rudeness, of his patience; of my defiance, of his gentleness; of my foolish scheme and his simple manly exposition of its meaning.

I spared myself nothing. From first to last I went through the details of our acquaintanceship, receiving no confirmation of what my blind obstinacy had insisted upon. The old romance was over for him—for her. Neither of them could knit those broken threads together ever again. All my thought and labour were vain; the stern realities of life alone faced my deeply-gathering wonder.

I had an hour of terrible loneliness. I could not understand or explain why things looked so different, any more than I could understand why my first thought in the terrors of that accident had been not for Aunt Theo, but for the man I had considered my enemy and hers. And now that enemy was shut out of my life henceforward.

I must trust to chance for any news of his welfare or his fate ; only a short time before and I had wished he might leave the place ; that his haunting presence would fall no more across the days and hours that meant my holiday. Yet now I knew I would have given all I possessed only to see that well-known figure striding across the stretch of sands, to hear that cheery greeting and meet the glance of those perplexing eyes.

I rose at last, soul-wearied with problems. I dragged myself slowly homewards. A few more days and then I must return to London, take up the old life, resume the old duties. Live and work and wait.

And behind all there would be a dread I dared not speak ; a knowledge of which my heart was ashamed.

I had wanted to understand life and love and the mysteries of our complex human nature, but I had not thought that the schoolmaster might teach me for myself what I had only desired to see others learning in the school.

CHAPTER XVI.

A WEEK later we were all in London again, my aunt at Edwardes Square, grandmamma under her own autocrat's roof-tree, and mamma and myself in our poky little house in Kensington.

It was the end of September, the trees were brown and the leaves were falling. There was a hint of mist and chill in the evenings ; the melancholy that is never wholly apart from the first touch of autumn seemed to have descended on street and town. I found the Shotters had returned and that Ann would be needing me for work again ; that " Electra " had sailed forth to astonish the New World by exposing the ingratitude of the Old ; that Dorian Giles was on his way back from San Francisco ; that the Laird and " Skye " were overjoyed to see me, and that Sir Richard's fate still hung in the balance as far as a decided opinion was possible.

Armed with such information and experience Sâba Macdonald once more faced life and its duties ; a little quieter, a little graver, a little older, perhaps a little wiser. There was need and to spare for *that*.

Beyond, on the blood-sprinkled meadows and vineyards

of France, two great armies had brought a shameful struggle to a disastrous end. Day by day the papers had teemed with accounts from the scene of carnage. To call it *warfare* were a misnomer. God was thanked for wholesale murder and His blessing asked on the usurper's greed and all the brutal holocaust of slaughter. The rest of the civilised globe had watched the struggle with equally brutal indifference, or betted on chances that merely meant a rise or fall in the money market.

Truly this world is a spectacle to make the joy of fiends and the despair of philosophers!

But our "tight little island" was safe. Only the Queen's grey head was growing whiter with many sorrows, and she wept in secret for a friend who had lost throne and empire, and fled to this more fortunate country for protection.

Once more the world had learnt how unstable a thing is the heritage of greatness.

But the little destinies rolled on beside the great ones. To each individual his life and aims and his circle mean the world, and perhaps to Sâba Macdonald the personal note rang clear as ever beneath the din and strife of the outer multitude.

"You are so quiet," "You look so much older." She heard this often as the old friends and the old faces crossed her path of outer consciousness. Within a more circumscribed limit she was living out a new experience. It was little wonder she grew self-engrossed.

"Tell me," said Ann, in one of their hours of confidence, "is the Beloved to blame; or life, or yourself, or another? Something has changed you utterly."

But Sâba would only say that she had nothing to confess, the change was but the natural result of circumstances.

Well enough she knew that she could speak to no one of what lay locked in her inmost soul; that it was impossible to analyse her feelings. They were a mystery even to herself. She worked steadily and well. Ann had never to wait for copy, and wondered sometimes if her secretary was giving less time to Edwardes Square and more to her duties; but Sâba knew that every unoccupied hour left her on a rack of suspense. As much as was possible she lived to deaden thought and fill up the long empty days. One of them brought her a letter from

Dorian Giles. It gave his opinions of America and things American; it was as amusing and as frankly impertinent as himself, and Sâba laughed over it as she had often laughed at the writer.

It was evident that the wonderful world "out West" was not yet sufficiently cultured to abandon money-making for art; "art" being, to its qualified judgment, a foolish thing at best and beneath contempt as a profession. Money could buy it in any shape or form, but it could neither make nor use money advantageously.

"I confess," wrote Dorian, "that I am disappointed. I have been seldom appreciated, never understood; the Yankees can only understand their own jokes. Of real wit or epigrammatic humour they are incapable. But they are a very young nation as yet; a nation of raw, boastful schoolboys and pert, self-opinionated schoolmisses. They imagine they know everything worth knowing, and by that argument prove to themselves that what they do *not* know cannot be classed as ignorance; it is merely indifference to the undesired. When they have grown out of school-day hyperbole and been licked into shape they may improve, but as yet their bumptiousness, boastfulness and onesidedness are appalling. As for their towns, one feels as if one were living in a factory of steam boilers, and matching one's powers of locomotion with a fire engine. It is rush, tear, and scrimmage from morning till night. A dazed, panting, hysterical crowd bolt for the 'cars,' tear through the streets, scramble on to 'elevators' and howl down their fellow man if he attempts to argue or interfere with such reckless use of life and time and energy.

"Everything is done on such a colossal scale that mountains, elephants, and the Brobdingnagian race of Gulliver should alone compete in the struggle for existence; moneyed existence of course; no other is worth a moment's consideration from a free or enlightened American citizen. They are always talking of liberty. That seems to mean complete indifference to other people's feelings, opinions, or conscience; a system of licensed fraud in all business transactions (yclept 'smartness!'); perfect irresponsibility in matters of religion (they possess some twenty thousand different sects!) and a general insolence and aggressiveness manifested by the poorer classes to those who employ them. This by way of proving that one man

is as good as another, when he's not better. But what I could say would fill volumes, so I shall reserve it for my next series of lectures. Meanwhile I leave this great and wonderful land without regret. I only hope they will not import their ideas into our less-favoured country, or intrude themselves and their shrill, grating voices and more awful expressions upon English society. Large words, big boasts, big promises, big 'things' in the way of invention, spoliation and devastation—these are their favourite pretensions. They exist solely for self-advertisement and supply the most vulgar and appalling journalism of any country of the civilised globe. An American newspaper makes me shudder, and an American magazine turns me faint. I have made many charming acquaintances, but 'friendship' is a plant of too slow growth for American soil. Most people I know I have offended by differing from their opinion that their nation is the one supreme and glorious flower of civilisation; by telling them truths wrapped in the sugared coating of satire; by pointing out their utter ignorance of art, their barefaced piracy of literature, their vulgar homage to wealth and rank, and their preposterous manner of living. They hate to be told these things. An American's idea of freedom is saying anything he likes to someone else and refusing to hear anything he doesn't like himself. They are mortally afraid I shall show them up in my lectures, and yet convinced they have nothing to fear from such 'showing up.' Are they not the greatest nation in the world? This is the individual lesson; it is taught to the babe in the cradle, to the schoolboy in the playground, to the clerk at his desk. It is a universal truth believed by all classes and conditions who have refused to believe anything else."*

* * * * *

I read this letter to the Laird; he seemed highly amused over it.

"The young man has evidently used his eyes and ears to some purpose," he allowed. "From all accounts the 'boastful continent' has not changed much since our great and lamented Charles Dickens wrote of it. Fetch me down 'Martin Chuzzlewit,' lassie, and read me that scene where Jefferson Brick and the Colonel take Martin

* These opinions were expressed some twenty years ago by a friend of the author's who returned from America, before the days of "Trusts" and the recent Chicago horrors!

to call on Major Pawkins. Begin at the place, 'Oh! the depressing institutions of the British Empire!' I think it was a remark made by Jefferson Brick owing to someone speaking of the head of the house as 'master.'"

I found the chapter and read it to him, enjoying his enjoyment and appreciation. It did indeed seem to me that the national characteristics of the great nation had not undergone any radical change. They were still boastful, still prejudiced; still worshippers of the almighty dollar, and still levelled *caste* with one hand and upheld it with the other.

The reading went on until supper time, greatly to my mother's indignation. She never liked to hear us laughing or arguing over literary matters. Her final interruption was rather a surprise to me.

"I should like to know," she said, "why this young man thinks he is at liberty to correspond with you. In my days it would have been considered highly improper for any girl to write or receive letters from a young man unless there was an engagement between them."

"Engagement!" echoed the Laird. "Hoots, woman! What are ye talking of? Don't ye know the man's an atheist and a follower o' Darwin?—at least he professes to accept the 'Origin of Species' as his faith. I'd like to see a daughter o' mine taking up with such a contemptible ass. If she needs must marry, let her marry a man o' sense and judgment, not a talking-machine like yon."

"The 'talking-machine' would be a splendid match for any penniless girl," said mamma. "You appear to forget that Sâba has nothing to expect from you, neither is she blessed with good looks or taking manners. It is flying in the face of Providence to object to any likely suitor. Certainly Dorian Giles has always paid her a great deal of attention."

"Dinna ye fash yoursel' about the lassie or who she may wed," answered the Laird. "As for her looks, she's as weel-favoured as ye were at her age, and I thought you bonnie enough to run the risks o' matrimony, despite the drawback of calling yon old selfish curmudgeon my father-in-law."

Thus the battle raged over poor Sâba's prospects, and she listened wearily enough. It all mattered so little; she knew well she would never marry, and these arguments were not likely to change her opinions on the subject.

Yet life was a somewhat dreary prospect as it lay before her unless she filled it with such interests as "Electra" or Ann Shottery had done. She had resolved to try her hand at writing once again, but at present her hours were fully occupied, and the little original work she did was more as practise than achievement.

She looked out over future years and saw them passing on in monotonous procession. The Laird a little older and perhaps more petulant, her mother more ailing and querulous, her grand-parents more selfish and exacting, the Beloved leading her life of martyrdom for sake of her little child—all the heroics and enthusiasms of youth dying out in an atmosphere of chill hopelessness. She would soon be amongst the grave and middle-aged, or so she felt on such occasions. And always it seemed to her that she had never had and never would have any assured place or position, never be needed very much or loved very much. It was these expectations that determined her to try and earn her own living; to make herself independent of that humiliating thing—a man's support. So she listened silently to the discussions on her matrimonial prospects. They might talk as they pleased, it made no difference—now.

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It struck me sometimes that the improvement in Aunt Theo's health was not maintained; that she drooped and pined in the dull foggy air of London, grew thin and pale and hollow-eyed once more. But the child grew rosy and strong and learnt to talk more quaintly, and was an endless delight and interest to us both. I counted the passage of the swift-flying weeks with increasing anxiety. If an Indian letter arrived I always asked if it meant postponement, but it never did. Soon he would be on his way, he would arrive, and then?—

Well enough we knew that talks and meetings and confidences would be at an end. My hatred of the doctor had increased rather than diminished. I felt I should not be able to endure the sense and sight of his ownership. He would be here at the end of the year, certainly by Christmas—the season I detested, and to which I always looked forward with dread.

We knew at last that he had left Calcutta, we knew the vessel was on the way. He was not on one of the

P. and O. boats, but he was coming as ship's doctor on a sailing ship for sake of a longer sea voyage.

I noted the name of that dreaded vessel; I looked for it as touching at various ports. There came no word or message, but silently as fate I seemed to see it steering its progress to British shores. Storm or tempest would have no effect upon it.

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There came a night when I said good-bye to her as if a journey were in prospect. It might be days before I should see her again. I had to picture a master in the little house; a man's presence in the rooms sacred to her and the memories of our days together.

I was more reticent of expressing feeling than of old, so I did not say what the change would mean, but well enough she understood it.

My mother and grandmother had been in unusual excitement over this arrival. It was "when Neal comes," "when Neal is here" constantly.

Christmas Day was to include "Neal"; presents were selected for him. The old aunt and uncle in Gloucester Terrace were called upon, and a dinner party for New Year's Eve arranged by them in honour of "Neal."

No wonder I hated the name. It was the 23rd of December when I said good-bye to the pleasant times at Edwardes Square; on the morrow the doctor would be there.

I spent part of the day in town with Ann, who was bent on Christmas shopping. She had begged me to go to them on Christmas Day, but mamma would not hear of it. The annual festivities must be kept at Pembridge Square; nowhere else.

Regent Street and Lewis and Allenby's brought back a flood of childish memories. I thought again of that first English Christmas, of that fateful parting—so short a time and yet so much was changed.

Ada and her grandmother were dead. The Laird had come home. The Pembridge Square life was over for me. Aunt Theo was married and a mother, and Sâba Macdonald—

She stood before that same shop window and looked at the tall sombre figure it reflected, wondering if she could possibly have been that child, with her quaint ugly frock and her ermine muff and her odd, old-fashioned ways.

"Do you know," said Ann's voice suddenly, "you have been staring for five minutes at that pink satin? What does it suggest to you?"

"A year for each minute," I said, as I turned away; and I told her of that child and her first sight of London's wonders.

We did not reach Kensington until quite dusk. I went in to find the Laird alone. He told me my mother had been summoned to the Square; something had happened—what it was he did not know. She had gone off in a cab with the servant who had brought the note. I wondered what the message was about. Was anyone ill? Could there have been an accident? My heart gave a sudden quick throb.

I don't know why I should have remembered the adage about curses "coming home to roost," but I did, and coupled it with those most un-Christian wishes that would have consigned my aunt's lord and master to any place or region which might mean eternal banishment. However, speculations were waste of time. I gave the Laird his tea, and told him of the crowds and the shops and the little happenings that always pleased or amused him. The evening wore on. I read out "The Chimes," and I played cribbage with him, and it drew on to supper time, and yet mamma had not returned. I began to feel uneasy and the Laird grew very cross. She had gone off with the keys and he could not have his "toddy," as he called it. This being an injury to be laid at the door of "curmudgeons" and such "vile rascals," it may be imagined what a pleasant Christmas Eve was Sâba's fate.

It was close on ten o'clock before mamma came home. I flew to open the door and saw that she was dreadfully agitated.

"Oh, Sâba! isn't it awful?" she cried; "a telegram came to Pembroke Square from the captain of the *Ocean Queen*. It said that cholera broke out on the voyage; ten passengers died, and among them was Dr. Danebury!"

I was speechless. I remember catching hold of a chair and standing staring at her, and saying it over and over again.

Doctor Danebury dead—dead—— Aunt Theo was free! Could it be true? Was this some trick of fate? And did granted wishes come under the head of "curses;" such curses as came home to roost?

If so, Sâba Macdonald might yet count on martyrdom.

CHAPTER XVII.

I WOULD have gone to her that night, but I was not permitted. It was too late; besides, grandmamma and mamma had been with her and left her as calm as could be expected.

"She has borne it wonderfully," was what mamma said. I asked few questions; I was far too startled by the unexpected tragedy to wish for details. The thought of her freed from her dreadful bondage far outweighed the circumstances of the freedom. I spent most of the night in wakeful speculation as to its results.

Oh! why had Sir Richard changed? A little patience, a little waiting, and they might have joined hands again over the broken fragments of a life's mistake. It seemed to me that even his blindness need have been no barrier. The man was the same man; the true heart might surely have pleaded for that fatality of accident; made him even dearer because of his helplessness and dependence. Would Mrs. Charteris change to him because of it? It was long since we had received any news, and I was quite ignorant as to the result of the second opinion called upon to decide if his sight was permanently injured.

At the earliest possible moment I started for Edwardes Square. My aunt had not come down to breakfast, but I went up to her room and saw her there.

She was calm and grave as I expected. To deny that this sudden release from anticipated misery was a relief would have meant a piece of hypocrisy of which she was incapable.

"I am sorry for the dreadful end. It seems so strange to think how he has braved the epidemic a dozen times—attended cholera patients over and over again—and yet almost within sight of England has met his fate through its fatal effects."

"It is strange," I echoed gravely. "I can hardly realise it as truth."

"Oh! it's true enough. The vessel is in quarantine; the captain telegraphed to me through the agents. I felt stunned at first; I have not slept all night. When your grandmamma came she was dreadfully upset. As this is Christmas time too, we can get no particulars; the posts are all wrong and the places of business all closed. Papa sent word he would go to the agents as soon as possible, but he thinks they won't be open to-day or to-morrow."

I had forgotten it was Christmas day—the day we were all to have spent at Pembridge Square in joyful reunion! I made up my mind to evade that ghastly festivity for once and stay with Aunt Theo if she would have me.

When she was up and dressed we went to the drawing-room to await my grandparents' visit of condolence. A sense of duty would bring them there, and well I knew what sort of visit it would be. Grandpapa's platitudes, grandmamma's tears and lamentations; hopes that "Theo would find herself left well off," and fears that Neal might have neglected to make a will, all intermingled with suggestions as to getting mourning at Jay's, and the sudden dreadful loss that would spoil their Christmas for them.

The fact that nothing could be done, learnt, arranged or ascertained seemed to complicate the news of this unexpected death.

I was thankful when they left and so was she, I am sure. Grandmamma's last words as they said good-bye were curiously characteristic of her.

"One after another! how they go. Death spares neither old nor young. You and I, Barker, may soon hear the summons. Let us hope we may be prepared."

I was looking at grandpapa's face. It was less fresh and ruddy, and a curious blue pallor tinged his lips, and if his "Tut-tut, Eliza," was petulant as ever, it was undoubtedly feeble and less confident.

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I spare details to pass on to a happier and calmer period.

The news was duly certified and noted in *The Times*, and condolence and sympathy poured in. Grandpapa's anxiety as to will and testament was set at rest. My aunt was left very well off, and with her new realisation of freedom seemed to creep back to health and beauty, and that blessed sense of peace which alone makes life's

happiness. For joy is wild and fitful, and rarely a homing bird for one nest; but peace will brood with folded wings over one loved resting-place and show no desire to exchange it for another.

There seemed little to do save just accept what had happened.

I hated to see those crape folds, and widow's cap on that graceful head, but she accepted both as grand-mamma's decision and a concession to public opinion.

In those first days she had asked my mother to let me stay with her, and it had been permitted. I went on with my copying, but always returned to the little house in Edwardes Square every afternoon. How quietly happy we were in those dark winter days; sitting over the fire with books or work; talking dreamily—sometimes sadly, but never hopelessly now—of life and its manifold meanings.

"I wish you could stay with me always, child," she said once.

"I would say 'So do I,' but for the Laird," I answered. "I am beginning to recognise duties instead of evade them, you see."

"I never knew you evade them."

"Oh! but, indeed, I did, and I am not specially fond of their obligations now."

"Sâba, I often wonder why you never speak of Dick now? You have not asked if I have any recent news of him."

"No," I said coolly, "you generally tell me; and there has been so much to occupy our thoughts—outside and beyond just—that accident."

"I have heard that the second opinion only confirms the first. His sight has quite gone."

Her voice was very sad and low. I heard her in silence. Hope had died hard within my heart, but I knew it faced its last hour to-night.

"Quite gone," she repeated. "It is dreadful to think of; in the very prime of life and manhood to be so martyred!"

"But—won't he have some consolation?" I said at last. "What of Mrs. Charteris?"

She lifted her head; her eyes looked somewhat puzzled.

"Mrs. Charteris?" she repeated. "What has she to do with the matter?"

"I thought—I mean, isn't he going to marry her?"

"Marry Mrs. Charteris! Good heavens, child, what put such an idea into your head?"

"You yourself. Didn't you tell me that night—in Scarborough—that he cared for someone else?"

"I think he does," she said quietly, "but I don't remember saying it was Mrs. Charteris."

"Oh! it's not—not Ann!" I burst out impulsively.

"No," she answered, "to the best of my belief it is not—Ann!"

"Then I can't make it out," I said helplessly.

"Don't try," she advised. "No one yet ever succeeded in playing Fate to another person's destiny. We each want our own way and will take it if we can."

I felt like one going through a previous experience—re-enacting a scene made partially familiar yet not "letter perfect."

Just then the door opened and Zoe toddled in—Zoe in white frock and black ribbons and the usual cry altered to "mum-ma" now—as she ran to be lifted up into her mother's lap.

"Who was it said 'the world makes men, but God makes mothers'?" I said as I watched them. "Wives have their day of bliss, but there comes always the time for shunting them to a siding. A mother, she has always her place; naught but herself can dethrone herself."

"Wise Sâba!" she said, looking at me with those deep, beautiful eyes. "Do you think motherhood is any more perfect or satisfactory a relationship than any other? Just while our little ones need us and are helpless, so long are we all in all; but in a few years we are not needed, neither are we 'all.' The mother-heart is destined to be wrung with anguish by every fault, sin, vice or grief of her sons and daughters. Her children are hers for a very brief time; she has to stand aside and see her sons go forth into the pitfalls of the world; to shudder in secret over the shame and the infamy her once pure-minded little lad will drink in with the thirst of curiosity. She knows what his own sex will teach him; what poisoned weeds he will gather by the wayside; through what mire and dust his weary feet will travel to the goal of manhood. She knows, too, that whatever of good or virtue she has implanted is for another woman's happiness, rarely for her own."

"But—her daughters?" I said, touching Zoe's dusky head as the firelight danced on its soft curls.

"Ah!" she cried sharply; "I am not sure *that* is not worse, Sâba; for every wife knows what she has endured, and what is the real meaning of man's passion; and while she lifts bridal wreath and veil from the virgin brow she also remembers the sacrifice she offers for the perpetuation of the race. Nature is cruel as Death, seeing that it but seeks to create and degrade, no matter what suffering the creation and degradation entail."

I shuddered. "There seems no joy anywhere, neither in birth, love, marriage, or motherhood," I said despairingly. "Yet the mothers were girls once. How is it that just that one tie makes such a difference?"

"Probably because it awakens the emotional side of our nature at the expense of all else. Girls never know men as men know them, until the tie which brings knowledge has forged fetters to imprison it. Sometimes for their own sake, sometimes from innate hypocrisy, sometimes for pity, they pretend that the prison is more delightful than any freedom, but also, Sâba, they recognise that women have a destiny to fulfil. Do you think my love for this baby is not tempered with the anguish of that knowledge? In her I see my own life to be re-lived; my own mistakes to be remade; my own poor starved womanhood to be re-mated. Instinct is no safeguard, and experience no friend. We live under purely artificial conditions, and the only duty our mothers have enforced upon us is the duty of wifely submission."

"Oh, dearest," I cried bitterly, "this is sad hearing for poor me. Of submission I have had enough and to spare; it was the diet of childhood and youth. Prejudice and ignorance have done their worst for me, and now you tell me there is nothing better to look forward to!"

"There is one thing," she said, "but I doubt if you will seek it, or appreciate it when it comes your way. It is a love that has been proved; no mere passion founded on beauty, fanned by desire. For a feeling so mis-called is just as likely an introduction to hatred as to love. I mean a great deal more—a sense of security, unity, comprehension; something to trust—something to depend on. Ah! child, if ever you find such a love as that you have found a pearl of price. It is worth all the world can offer in exchange!"

"It is so likely I shall find it!" I said bitterly; "but, indeed, I am ungrateful to complain. While I have the

Laird and you and Zoe, I am well content. You have known me long enough to know I am a very odd sort of person, and you see I have no girl friends to confide love affairs to me, or stir up the discontent that only a wedding and orange-blossoms are supposed to satisfy, so that side of the question has been left out of it. I consider myself a very bad candidate for matrimonial honours; men don't appeal to me in the least. But since we are on the subject, do you know that no less a person than Dorian Giles once honoured me with a proposal?"

And, laughingly, I told her of the "garden scene" in Ann Shottery's garden, ere my strange wooer betook himself to the Land of Freedom.

"He will be home soon," I concluded, "and I have never given him a decided answer. Do you think the affair is an artistic joke, or—what?"

"A man doesn't ask a girl to marry him as a joke, Sába. Of course, Dorian is an exception to most rules; he likes to be dubbed 'eccentric' for reasons of his own. But surely, child——"

"Oh! I haven't the slightest intention of accepting him," I said. "I want to put marrying and giving myself in marriage out of my thoughts. I am perfectly happy as I am—now."

She understood the "now," and the quiet pressure of her hand answered it.

* * * * *

My allusion to Dorian seemed prophetic, for on going home next day to say "good-morning" to the Laird, he said to me: "Do you know, lassie, that yon atheistical, free-thinking friend of yours has been here calling for you?"

"Dorian Giles! When?" I exclaimed.

"But yesterday," he answered. "Jean showed him in, and we had a long 'crack' together. He was most amusing, I grant him that; and what he said of the Yankees and their ways was enough to startle a sane body. I would not have believed it had I not possessed the word o' the great Charles Dickens for verification."

"But surely things are very different now from what they were when Dickens wrote of Americans?" I said.

"Different, maybe, but no whit honest or mair sensible. However, he's going to give a series of lectures—yon young man—in some big hall in the West End, so

we'll aye go and hear him, lassie. He is a gifted talker, I will no deny that, but sairly perplexing. It's all o' 'art' and culture. I ken Matthew Arnold, said I, and he's greatly gifted, but his school o' followers are mere braying asses. Do they even know what they want or mean? Culture is just the old Latin word *cultus* anglicised for the purpose o' application; and but ye knew Latin, lassie, I would not have to explain that *cultus* is a participle o' the verb *colere*. The meaning o' that is 'to take pains' or spend labour upon a special object."

"But that is just what Dorian Giles is doing," I said.

"Hoots!" said the Laird, "his way o' culture is no the Greek, nor the Latin; nor even that o' Matthew Arnold himself. It's all Mr. Dorian Giles. Little of duty or the welfare o' his fellows is in that young man's mind, still less o' patriotism or service. Such things go hand in hand with religion. To take care of life—*colere vitam*—is not a selfish regard of your own pleasures, but the paying due attention to health and sustenance. For why? Because life is a great gift from the great Creator and entails obligations."

I felt sorry I had not been present at that interview; proud, also, that the Laird had met his foe with an array of arguments tended to baffle his own technicalities of speech. *Colere*—the word had a charm of its own. I was content to hear a sermon upon it, and the Laird preached eloquently on occasion.

"I told him you were staying wi' your aunt," he concluded; "did he call on her?"

"No," I said. "Perhaps he thought it rather soon."

"Maybe, lassie, maybe. I wish your mother had not got it into her head that the young man was entertaining thoughts o' yourself. I wouldna' countenance such a thing, so dinna be foolish and inclined for his encouragement. Like to like. I aye thought it was yon literary friend o' yours that he was thinking of."

"Ann!" I exclaimed.

"Why not? She's bonnie and clever; aye, too good for him, I grant; but she'd need that sort o' husband, and he'd be the better o' that sort o' wife. 'Deed, I told him so, for fear his thoughts might be roamin' elsewhere. Many a young man owes a sensible marriage to the hint o' those older and wiser than himself."

"Oh, Laird, you are delicious!" I cried, laughing till

the tears came into my eyes. "Fancy Dorian and Ann Shottery!"

"Mair unlikely things have happened," said he. "And now tell me, lassie, when are ye coming home? I miss ye, and so does the wee doggie there—and so does the cribbage-board."

"Very soon," I said; "when Aunt Theo is less lonely and more reconciled to her own company. It's very dreary alone these long evenings."

"Aye, it's that," he said; "but I have to bear it, too. You've aye been at beck and call o' that family, my lassie; I dinna quite approve o' it. Your mother says ye were fain to make an idol o' that aunt o' yours; that's no' right, you know. You've your auld father to consider these times."

I kissed him and told him I would consider him and come home with all possible speed. I knew he had few pleasures in his life, and conscience pricked me for depriving him of even one small one. Then I persuaded him to put on overcoat and hat, and bring Skye, and walk with me to Ann's. The exercise did him good; he was cheerful as ever when we parted at her gate.

"It's a blessing I have my doggie for company," he said. "Your mother, she's always dancing attendance on her parents, and now you've taken to devote yourself to your aunt; and Ann yonder, she's aye taken up wi' her book-writing."

"But mamma is always at home in the evenings," I said:

"Aye, that's true; she's at home, and she does na' let me forget it—or her cantrips either! But, maybe, the auld man is no' so good-tempered as he used to be—eh, lassie?"

"Oh, indeed, he's much better," I said, hugging the frail old arm a little tighter.

"Well, well, he's masterful, any way; but man was meant to be masterful; ye mind that, lassie, and if ever ye get a husband remember he's the head o' the wife as Christ is the head o' the Church, and be more dutiful and obedient than your mother!"

He waved his stick and whistled Skye to heel, and trudged off briskly down the lane.

"If ever *I* get a husband!"—I laughed scornfully at the idea. My mental horizon held no such desire, and was darkened by no such possibility.

I opened the gate and went up to Ann's study. She had also news of Dorian. He had called on her after leaving the Laird. I asked a few questions, but she did not answer them in her usual frank manner; she seemed embarrassed, absent-minded. I wondered what had distracted her.

"Did Dorian Giles meet 'Electra'?" I asked suddenly.

"No. To tell you the truth he avoided her; but there was a good deal of 'booming' and paragraphing going on. She was well advertised."

"Were his lectures successful?"

"I fancy not. They couldn't understand him."

"I'm not surprised," I said. "He is a most perplexing individual. I wonder if he understands himself?"

She was standing by her writing-table putting together some loose sheets of MSS. "I am not pleased with this," she said suddenly. "I'm sorry you had the trouble of copying it. I shall have to do it over again—if I can."

I looked at her in surprise. "What is the matter with it?"

She drew up a chair to the table and seated herself.

"I have come to the conclusion, Sâba, that it is impossible for a woman to draw a man's character with any sort of fidelity to the real man; I should perhaps say, an unmarried woman."

"My dear Ann! Don't tell me you are going to get married as an experiment, in order to study a man's character 'from the life,' as the artists say."

"It would be a novel way of setting to work, wouldn't it?" she said with an odd smile.

"Decidedly it would. But you know a great many men, and you are quick at reading human nature."

"I have only known one man intimately—Dorian Giles. There is a contrast in types, is there not?"

"Decidedly."

"Well, I want to find out what makes the difference. When women attempt to draw men from imagination or from prejudice they draw from an impossible model. No man is the mere clothes-prop on which to hang one's own opinions, but that is what most women writers make him. Look at 'Electra's' characters for instance. No wonder they have been ridiculed. Look at Ouida again; with all the brilliancy and cleverness of 'Held in Bondage,' her male characters are gross exaggerations.

With women she succeeds better, though even then she hovers between two extremes—the impossibly good and the wholly bad! I might quote other instances, but it is only to say that women are too heavily handicapped in their powers of knowing life; of learning its vital truths; therefore, they create mere wooden dolls, and write mere platitudes.

“But Ann——”

“Oh! I know—you would quote the ‘Romance,’ and its success, but that’s only an instance of ‘*succès d’estime*.’ Look at Balzac, at Thackeray, at Dickens, at Hawthorne. A few strokes of the pen and the creation *lives*; is forcible, virile, human! What woman has done anything like that? Even George Sands had to live as a man lives before her genius could paint his portrait.

“Is the portrait so well worth painting?” I asked involuntarily.

“That depends on how one looks at literature. If we mean to give a faithful presentment of man or woman we must know them as *they are*, not as they seem.”

“The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life,” I quoted.

“Exactly; that is where men beat us. They have the whole world as playground; every phase and shape of humanity as models. If we get at all near the truth we only get it second-hand.”

“Hence your discontent with ‘Paul Leverson’?” I said, naming the great character in the new book.

“Yes. With his nature love would not come in the ordinary guise. There are degrees of love just as there are enormities of passion. Men do not all fight under the banner of the flesh; the best soldier is often the deserter from under that banner. When you are a few years older you will understand better what I mean. There are obscure depths in human nature over which love alone can hold a torch of enlightening; there is also clear knowledge, and compelling disillusion; the domination of the flesh and the purification of the spirit. But of such things what does woman know save by hearsay, or a dive through seas of degradation; and so it is that our pens are weak and our drawing faulty, and we despair over mental feebleness, as—I do!”

She pushed aside the MSS. and leant her elbows on the table and bent her head wearily on her hands. I had

never seen her in such a mood ; I could not comprehend it. I waited silently on her next words. It was long before they came.

"Don't waste time over my rubbish," she said stormily.

"Go home, Sâba, and write—your own book."

My own book! I stared at her, not fully comprehending how much was guess-work or actual knowledge.

"You are over-tired," I said ; "you have been working too hard. These fits of despondency and hopelessness are the worker's fate ; you have often said so."

"Have I ? Then it must be true. Or else——"

My heart gave a quick sudden throb. "Oh ! Ann, it's not possible ; I mean—you can't *care*——"

"Care ?" She lifted her head and I saw her eyes were filled with tears. "Care——?" she echoed, "what a poor little word to mean so much. All my ideas of supremacy vanquished, all my theories overcome, all my revolts and rebellions of no account ; and why ? Just because a man loves me, or says so ; just because I have learnt that to love and to suffer are woman's education as well as woman's fate ; just because my model has turned out a foolish, clay thing into which I cannot breathe life. And to create life is to live it. So, Sâba, I am going to live it, and——"

"Not marry !" I cried.

"To marry—Dorian Giles," she said quietly.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I HAD had many shocks and surprises in my life, but never anything that so utterly took me off my feet as that announcement of Ann's.

"Marry Dorian Giles !" I repeated, and felt my face grow scarlet, and all the world suddenly turn topsy-turvy as I tried to convince myself I was not dreaming. This was Ann's well-known sanctum, Ann's papers and letters, Ann herself speaking to Sâba Macdonald ; and Sâba Macdonald seeing only a stretch of garden-sward, an idle, listless figure, and hearing a voice whisper, "When I come back from America will you marry me, Wonder-child ?"

A little hysterical gasp escaped me. What did this

mean, or had Dorian only jested with me and coolly transferred whatever he had of heart or fancy to another? Everything seemed to be spinning round me. I said to myself, "Supposing I had believed; supposing I had *cared!*" And then I looked at Ann and wondered who or what I could trust in this queer whirligig of life; whom I really knew as the personal representative of a given identity, and who were only shadows to which my imagination lent substance of form.

"Is it so surprising that you can't speak?" she said at last.

"I never once suspected that you thought of him in—in that way."

"I am not quite sure it is in that way. But you see, Sâba, this life of mine is very hard and very uncertain. When I get one of my despairing fits I only long to throw everything I have written to the flames. I am so tortured by weakness, inability, despair, that it *hurts* me to be praised. Dorian will show me a new mode of existence; the obvious one. He will never interfere with my moods, or hinder my efforts, but he will be of incalculable benefit to both. Now do you understand? The world will be an open book. I may read it for myself, not wait on the tardy efforts of a translator. Money and the making of money will trouble me no more; art and beauty will fill my home and my life, and if such things don't make for happiness a woman is hard to please."

I was too bewildered to say anything. I told myself this was Ann speaking, but it was an Ann I had never met or known. I seemed to have lost my foothold here as elsewhere; to be faced by perplexity; confronted with the inexplicable.

Life was deciding events for me in its usual unexpected fashion.

"But do you think you will be happy?" I blurted out at last. "Are you doing this as a means to an end, or because you—you love him?"

"There may be something of both in the matter," she said. "I know that I was horribly afraid once that he would marry 'Electra.' Still it was a surprise when he offered himself to me. He was tactful enough to do it at the right moment and in the right way, and—well, that is all, I think."

To Sâba's saving grace be it said that she did not laugh,

though every moment brought an hysterical outburst nearer. She concealed both her mirth and her resentment and went back quietly enough to Edwardes Square, but once there—once in the seclusion of her own room—

* * * * *

I was still shaking with laughter and tears, when a sharp rap at the door was followed by Aunt Theo's entrance.

"Why, Sâba, I heard you come in, then laughing like a mad thing! What in the world has happened?"

I wiped my eyes and calmed myself by a great effort.

"It's—oh! it's so funny—and yet——"

"For goodness' sake don't go off again! Yet—what?"

"Dorian Giles has returned," I stammered out, "and he is going to marry Ann Shottery."

She said nothing for a moment, then seated herself at the foot of the bed and began to laugh also.

"Poor Sâba! What a hero of romance! And what a sudden change of mind! Have you seen him?"

"No-o; that's just it," I said. "I had made up my mind to say 'No,' and without word or warning he invites somebody else to say 'Yes.'"

"I always thought he was half mad," she said. "Perhaps this comes of too prolonged a study of the 'liberty of the subject;' but I am glad you can treat it as a joke."

"A joke? It's nothing else. Yet he certainly asked me, not Ann, to marry him when he returned from America."

"And he hasn't been to see you?"

"He called on the Laird and ascertained that I was staying with you, then he appears to have paid a visit to Ann, and the result——"

I began to laugh again. She stopped me sharply.

"Don't be foolish, Sâba. This is most unprecedented conduct on the part of any man calling himself a gentleman. Your father would be furious if he knew."

But I remembered the Laird's own words; his advice; my incredulity. Was he in any way the *Deus ex machinâ* of this affair? Had Dorian's impulse been goaded by discouragement on the one part and sound sense on the other?

Who should say or know? The Laird, or Ann, or Sâba, or the erratic poet himself?

"I don't think he would be at all furious," I said. "In

fact, he had rather a dread of Dorian as a proposed son-in-law ; that was my mother's idea. But Ann——”

“ Does she really care for him ? ”

“ As a means to an end, very much. She thinks no unmarried woman can draw a man's character successfully, so she is going to sacrifice herself to the faithful transcription of Paul Leverson, her fictitious hero.”

“ But, dear child, this is nonsense. No woman would marry a man for such a reason as that.”

“ Ann is no ordinary woman ; no more was ‘ Electra.’ It is curious how Dorian appealed to both. There was an unexpressed rivalry between them. Now Ann has scored. I should not be surprised if she set up a literary *salon* on the lines of Lady Medora, and she need only write to please herself, and to accepted canons of art instead of emulating Mrs. Henry Wood and pouring out a flood of trashy sentiment for the long-suffering British public.”

“ Ann has written two splendid books,” said Aunt Theo.

“ Yes, and I left her tearing her last into fragments because of that supreme discontent which attacks the artistic nature. Perhaps she had read some of it to Dorian and he expressed disapproval. Perhaps——”

A knock at the door interrupted me. The housemaid entered with a card in her hand.

“ If you please, miss, the gentleman is waiting. He asked for you.”

I took the card. I looked from it to Aunt Theo. “ The Philistines are upon me ! Tell the gentleman I will be down in a few minutes.”

“ Now you won't be foolish, Saba ; you are sure you are composed ? ”

I laughed softly. “ Quite, dearest. I never expected anything half so interesting and exciting as this interview promises to be. What do I look like ? ”

I had not yet removed my hat. I went over to the glass and took a survey of myself. I decided to go down just as I was.

“ I do wonder what the delinquent will say ? ” I exclaimed, turning suddenly round.

“ You won't know any sooner by staying here,” observed Aunt Theo.

Bowing to the wisdom of that remark I left the room with a serious attempt at composure.

He was standing at the window looking out at the

Square. As I closed the door he turned. My first thought was of some strange and subtle alteration in him. I could not define it, but it struck at the roots of my mirth and enabled me to face the situation with becoming gravity. He was stouter and heavier looking; his strange eyes had a new and strange expression. There were lines in his face and at the corners of his mouth that had not been there a year ago. He held out both hands to me in impressive silence.

"So we meet again," he said.

I felt my mouth twitch.

"Obviously—since you are here to see me."

He released my hands and smoothed back his long hair.

"Yes, I have come to see you. The supreme art of life is the supreme art of defying probable complications. Have you expected me?"

"Of course," I said innocently. "You wrote that you would come to see me as soon as possible. I heard from my father that you had called yesterday, so I knew you had not forgotten."

He gave me a quick half-furtive glance. I took a chair and he did the same.

"I never forget," he then said. "It is unfortunate, but it is true. You may remember I asked you to write to me. Why did you not do so?"

"You seemed to be always moving from place to place, and—well, I had nothing to say."

"You said—nothing—when it might have altered all my life for me. You were a child then. You have changed, expanded. No doubt your mind has altered with your growth."

"I hope so," I said demurely. "It would be rather sad to hold a child's mind in a woman's body, wouldn't it?"

"Ah! the woman's weapon! Your tongue is more apt at retort, Sâba. May I call you that?"

"Certainly, if you wish."

"I always liked your name," he said thoughtfully, "and yourself," he added, after a pause.

"You did me too much honour."

"Not at all. Had you thought so you would have taken me seriously. You never did that."

"Happily, no," I said.

"Why happily?" he asked sharply.

"Because you would have expected me to remember all you said."

He frowned. "Yet my words are treasured and prized by many wiser and more gifted than yourself."

"I am not at all wise," I said, "nor have I any special gifts."

"Are you to be one of those women who starve body and soul on some pretence of the value of renunciation? Your life used to be bounded by duty. Is it so still?"

"Why do you wish to know?" I asked. "My life is my own, as yours is yours. Surely their duties or their concerns only touch ourselves at present."

"Ourselves? I came here to make a confession, Sâba. Will you hear me patiently?"

"Of course," I said.

He settled himself down to the enjoyment of an artistically planned moment. I schemed only to spoil it.

"We have known each other a long time," he said softly. "As child, as girl, you were full of interest to me. I always told you so. Sometimes I thought a day would come when the interest would merge into something deeper; that you and I would astonish the world and be a joy unto ourselves. I may have hinted as much."

He looked interrogative, and I made a visible effort to recall the incident.

"I was perhaps too young to understand," I suggested, "but I remember you asked me to study certain poems of yours by way of enlightenment."

"And you did?" he exclaimed eagerly.

"No," I said, "I forgot all about them. Besides, poetry is a dangerous study. It is tainted with unreality; it creates discontent. I thought that probably your poetry would resemble yourself. It could hardly escape doing so, could it?"

"Go on," he said harshly, "it is new to me to hear such unbeautiful candour. I am to suppose that I, too, am 'tainted with unreality'?"

"But are you not?" I asked with affected surprise. "Do you really mean half the absurd things you say or suggest? For instance—that day in the garden at Ann's—before you went to America? You did not imagine I took you seriously?"

He gave a short sigh. Was it of relief?

"The occasion you recall seems one of my moments of

mental aberration. I had a vague idea that you expected——”

I grew scarlet.

“Please be careful what you say; I am not quite the ignorant child of those days!”

“I was about to say that you expected nothing, and so I thought to fill your dreams with the poesy of impossible delights.”

I felt somewhat puzzled. “You asked me to marry you when you returned from America,” I said with purposeful bluntness.

He groaned in spirit.

“Oh, Wonder-child!” he cried bitterly. “Where have you disappeared? That garden, that hot drowsy evening; your enchanting friend, your wonderful old father and your petulant, incomprehensible self! A dream—all a dream; all vanished! The hour and the scene, and the feelings and the child!”

I began to laugh. “Isn’t this rather foolish?” I said.

“If I had come from America to remind you of that question, what then?” he asked.

I considered the matter with becoming gravity.

“I have no precedent to guide me, you see. I never answered the question. I never expected you to repeat it.”

“Then you seize the privilege of incompetence.”

“Has the unexpected really happened?” I asked. “You are rather bewildering in your suggestions and denials.”

“And you in your prevarications. But it is amusing to be baffled, and we are drifting heedlessly on a sea of——”

“Of phrases?” I suggested. “But that was always your way. I have never been sure whether you took yourself seriously or expected other people to do it. I see America hasn’t changed you.”

“What curious fancies intelligent women have,” he murmured. “I am changed, Sâba—horribly, strangely changed. I never felt it so much as when I saw you come into this room and met your frank clear eyes. I could have almost descended to the depths of the discarded lover and said, ‘I was never worthy of you.’ I have despised that individual as dramatically and fictionally impossible. Any man is worthy of any woman at some period or another. We are more often vitiated by circumstance than by our own vices.”

He rose suddenly from his chair and walked to the window and stood there looking out at the dull wintry street, and the steel-grey sky.

I was enjoying the interview too thoroughly to wish for its termination. I kept silence, waiting till he should feel inclined for the confession he had come to make.

He wheeled round with an abruptness that was almost natural—and inartistic.

“Sâba Macdonald,” he said, “could you ever have loved me?”

I looked up at his strange face and the sudden glitter in his eyes.

“No, Mr. Dorian Giles,” I said gravely, “I could not.”

“I am glad;” he said, dropping once more into pose; “I should hate to think I had won a girl’s love. Women are different, they can take care of themselves. Listen, Sâba! I am going to make an experiment. I have reached a point in my career when an establishment is necessary. I must have a home and a mistress for it. I must have art and wealth about me to make life beautiful, for life without beauty is as worthless as day without night. Of love I say nothing. There are natures to whom it makes no appeal. I am one of those natures, but the things I need are not the things that content the ordinary man. To gain them I shall ask the aid of a woman who is not exacting, nor yet commonplace; who will live her own life as I shall live mine. You are not that type of woman, Sâba——”

“Thank Heaven, no!” I exclaimed, and asked myself how could this cold-blooded wooer have ever won Ann Shottery.

“How emotion tends to conventionality,” he said, *à propos* of my exclamation. “I am going to marry a genius, Sâba. Do you think she is sacrificing herself? To me it seems that the perfect blossom can only spring from the sun-ripened bud. A woman’s gifts are but half her own until a man explains their use and widens their horizon.”

“Who is the—this favoured person?” I asked gravely.

“A friend of yours, and in saying that I pay you an unexpressed compliment. You are dear to both of us; admired by both.”

“Ah! you mean ‘Electra’!” I cried joyfully.

"Strange, but I always thought how admirably you suited one another!"

"'Electra'!" he exclaimed disgustedly. "To me she was absolutely repellant!"

I longed to say something about "two of a trade," but I refrained.

"'Electra'!" he repeated. "A *poseuse*; a self-made celebrity; a woman without a thought or appreciation of anyone or anything save herself!"

"Oh! I forgot," I said meekly. "You would of course require the aid of appreciation; someone who would echo your opinions and voice your inspirations. Did you meet your *Ægeria* in America?"

"No," he said sulkily, "American women are detestably spoilt. They expect all men to fall down and worship them. And of art, they are absolutely ignorant."

"What is this 'art' you talk so much about?" I said suddenly. "Does it really affect one's life and surroundings, or is it merely discontent with modern furnishing and modern dress and plain matter-of-fact speech? I have heard you speak of it very often, but I cannot imagine what you mean."

"So I supposed," he said coldly; "but when you see what I shall achieve, what a lesson of culture I have to teach, how I shall revolutionise society and the world, you will understand me better."

"I hope so," I said quietly, "and I hope the world will be the better for your teaching."

"Of that there can be no doubt," he answered, with a return of the old arrogance.

"But again we have drifted from the main point. You have not told me the name of the fortunate lady who is to open your *salon* and do the honours of your house?"

"Her name—is that necessary? You know I have a horror of finality. To say, in cold-blooded words, 'I am going to marry so-and-so' would seem to place me on a level with any butcher boy who puts up something they call 'banns' and goes shamefacedly to church to listen to them. I have acted on impulse, the only real reason for action. I do not seek notoriety or the horrible bathos of what is called 'congratulations.' I and my motives are quite beyond the pale of ordinary comprehension."

"And yet you called to explain all this to such an unimportant person as myself?"

"Even foolish people have their moments of wisdom, Sâba."

I laughed. "Was this one of yours?"

"If you think it a stupid action on my part you lift some anxiety from my heart. It is always our noblest deeds that are misunderstood."

"You are a very bewildering person," I said. "We seem to have been playing at explanations without ever reaching one. Am I to consider myself the possessor of your confidence, and are you really going to become that prosaic being, a married man?"

He gave a little unaffected shudder.

"How crude and awful it sounds from your lips." He paced the room with slow and thoughtful steps; then paused, looked at me, and took up his hat.

"Marriage either mars or makes a reputation," he said; "also, on rare occasions, it can save one. Good-bye, Wonder-child, though you are no longer that, and I——"

He held out his hand. I gave him mine.

Even at that moment I was as far as ever from understanding Dorian Giles!

CHAPTER XIX:

WHEN we talked it over—Aunt Theo and I—we came to the conclusion that Dorian had really acted upon one of those "impulses" which, for him, held no guiding rule of action. One of his remembered phrases had been that "speech was only the perfected art of personal deception." Therefore he had deceived me, himself, and possibly Ann. Still, I had flattered myself I knew her intimately; I had seemed her closest friend and almost her only confidante.

It showed me that, after all, my judgment was at fault. I possessed no real power of reading character; I could form no accurate conclusions; I was not even sure whether I was liked for my own sake or only tolerated because of my tendency to idealise what I myself liked.

The world seemed rather a cold place to look out upon—its only warm and sheltering nook this fireside corner of Edwardes Square. Here, at least, I claimed love and confidence. To others I was merely the natural tie of some necessity, or use, or obligation.

My first love affair ! I said that, again half choked with laughter of remembrance. Did ever maiden have such an experience before ? To be "jilted" without even a "by your leave, madam, I have changed my mind." To see the unworthy suitor go "on with the new love" before he had made excuse to the old !

We talked of love that night as we sat in the twilight by the bright fire, and watched Zoe's quaint antics, or tried to bribe her restless feet to stillness.

Aunt Theo was inclined to think I had been basely treated, and I had hard work to persuade her that as I had never accepted Dorian's proposal—nor even alluded to it—I could make no claim on his unstable nature. He had been free to please himself and he had done so. But it was Ann who had surprised me ; Ann who had declared a hundred times that she was wedded to her work and would never exchange her life for that of prosaic moral matronhood ; Ann, who had treated all men with indifference ; Ann, so sweet, so wise, so good.

"There is only one thing about women of which you can be sure," said Aunt Theo ; "they will always commit just the one folly of which you think they are incapable. You, too, Sâba, you believe you are very cool-headed and very safe, but if the right man and the moment were here you would be just as foolish as any other of your sex."

The announcement held me dumb ; set me questioning as of old. Would I, indeed, be foolish enough—or was it wise enough—to yield up my individuality and queerness and unsatisfied desires to some unknown keeping ; to care so much for someone—still unknown—that I could place my hand in his and be content to tread the highway of life by his side ; to enter the "woman's kingdom"—mine by heritage of sex ?

Hitherto such questions had seemed but a vexing absurdity ; hitherto I had given instant denial to the mere thought. Why, to-night did they seem less absurd ? Why, to-night, did Sâba Macdonald acknowledge that love might be a power as well as a delusion ?

No answer. Once more a blank wall ; once more perplexity. If she could not understand her own sex how could she understand the other ?

* * * * *

I did not go to Ann's next day. If she wanted me she

would send for me and I had no more of her work to go on with. Besides, if she intended to rewrite her hero's character she would probably wait until it should become a life-study. I imagined I should hear how long the "engagement" was to last, and when it would reach the approximate end of all irrational engagements.

It was a cold, wet, miserable day. I even shirked my daily visit home and spent most of the morning in Zoe's nursery. Aunt Theo was busy writing letters.

About luncheon time a thick packet was brought to me addressed in Ann's well-known handwriting. I expected it was more copy. She must have changed her mind and was going on with the book after all. I unfastened the wrapper; I saw a number of sheets covered with my own handwriting. Astonished at their being returned, I began to read.

I read *my own words!* My own tangled efforts at making a book out of my own experiences!

This was what I had sent to Ann the previous day in place of the copy of her new story. In a red-hot glow of mortification I turned over page after page—all mine; I must have left her MSS. in my writing-table drawer and sent her this drivel of my own. What had she thought of it? What must she not have thought of it?

In my confusion I found I had overlooked a letter slipped in with the parcel. Eagerly I tore it open and read:

"DEAR SÂBA,

"You perceive you have betrayed yourself. You remember I warned you. Your case is by no means exceptional. When I began this chapter I was puzzled with a sense of unfamiliarity; I could remember saying certain things, but I could not remember saying them quite so well. I also have had enough literary experience to know that what comes fresh and first from the mint of the brain is infinitely superior to the laboured wisdom we teach ourselves, or are taught by practise. Perhaps you are not aware that amongst these pages is a chapter of my own, written as you feel *you* would have written it; that is to say, we have both taken a certain situation and expressed it from our own point of imagination. But, Sâba, I must tell you candidly that you have done your work very much better than I—with a freshness, a force, a simplicity beside which my efforts look stilted

and unnatural. *That* was the reason you found me in such discontent yesterday, and also in such a very bad temper. To-day I am heartily ashamed of myself. A man would never have been guilty of such smallness; he would have recognised the work of a brother-artist and acknowledged a master. But we women are pitiful, small-minded creatures, and for a space of time I was actually jealous. Forgive me, dear, and come to me as soon as you can and let us talk this over. I may be able to help you, and the help will be given gladly and proudly. We are all of us important to ourselves in the first stages of authorship; we expect the world to accept and recognise genius in what may merely prove to be a pretty trick of talent. Success may come with achievement, but our highest ideal was never yet achieved. It is *because* it inspires and escapes that we are kept in constant pursuit. To be content would be to become mediocre—of all pitfalls the worst and most dangerous set for the worker's feet!

"You have kept your secret well, child, and betrayed it by a mere accident. I hope you will not regret having done so. If, for a moment, I was small enough to betray a sense of rivalry, forgive it. That is only to say I am a woman, and have dreamt great dreams, and held great thoughts, and desired to do great deeds, and I know I have not done them; I never shall perhaps. Will you succeed, I wonder? Will you wear the bitter laurel with the better right to it? Perhaps you will, my Sâba. In any case rest assured that no one will grudge it you less, or desire it for you more than the writer of these words.

"Your much injured—and forgiving,
"ANN."

With the letter in my hand I dashed into Aunt Theo's room, and made confession.

"You know I always wanted to do it," I stammered incoherently, "and I tried, and I had one story published, and then felt ashamed of it and would send no more. Copying for Ann was an education in phrasing, concentrating, describing. Then I practised rewriting some of her chapters; putting the people into new shapes and turning them out; describing her scenes and situations in my words and noting the results, and in the end I have muddled part of my MSS. with what I was copying for

her. No wonder she was angry! Why, it would need an angel to forgive such an affront. And she must be an angel! Look at what she has written; her kindness, her sweet sympathy, her encouragement! Oh, dearest, what have I done to deserve such things at her hands?"

My aunt read the letter carefully.

"You are fortunate in your friend, Sâba," she said as she gave it back to me. "This is most generous; I can quite imagine her astonishment—even her indignation—but she has not displayed the small-mindedness of most authors. She acknowledges a worthy rival, and respects, not abuses, recognised talent."

My face was afire, my eyes burning. In this moment of exaltation, of pride, of gratitude, I knew what it was to live at last! All my brain was in turmoil. I could not understand how such a thing had happened; why Chance should have so befriended me!

I could have flung myself at Ann's feet in an abandonment of gratitude for those magical words, for the flood of light let loose on my dazzled senses; the glory and gladness of hope. This it was to live; work, and the creation and strenuousness of work! Full hours and days of lovely labour; lovely because beloved and achieved. All the future leapt into sight rosy with the glow of unexpected happiness. I think I felt that all the world might frown on me, but that Ann's praise, Ann's verdict on my efforts were shield and buckler of endurance. In time I should know, should perform, achieve, glow with pride of something done with all my whole soul's will!

Oh! blessed hour, in which endeavour passed from birth-throes of agony into the assurance of young life; young—but ready for the toil, the schooling, the experiment that should help it to maturity. Never perhaps should one so wholly sweet, so passionately humble of its own joy, visit the heart of Sâba Macdonald.

* * * * *

The pride and delight of Aunt Theo were as glad a tribute to discovery as Ann's own acknowledgment.

"I always felt you would do something, Sâba; you could never be a sit-in-the-corner, stocking-mending every-day young person! But I had a fancy it would be music that would claim you—not literature."

"All my youthful musical ardour was extinguished by

grandpapa," I said. "I could never clearly reconcile the perfected art with the despised artist; never see why amateur faults exceeded professional accuracy. Besides, I was never properly taught. Even Herr Franz was handicapped by directions of what I was *not* to learn; the difficulties of imparting technique where firmness of touch was confounded with the loud pedal and thumping! Oh! the agonies I have undergone!" I sighed with mock despair.

"You never told me how you managed to break off with those Tuesday performances?"

"Oh, that happened when the Laird came back. I had certain domestic duties that kept me at home, and as there was a veiled animosity between them both, I took advantage of it. After that American organ was introduced, the music became too terrible."

"And it still goes on," she said; "the same quartets, the same old fogies doddering in to play cards and pretend they hear the music at the same time; the same scrapings and disputes?"

"Yes—all just the same. I suppose it is really part of his life; he could not do without it."

"Does he ever take you to the Monday 'Pops' or the Philharmonic now?"

"No, never. Mamma has been invited sometimes and makes a martyr of herself in duty's cause, but Sâba is in disgrace. All previous favours have been abandoned."

"It is one of papa's odd characteristics—that refusal to excuse mistakes, or pardon an error; that is to say, if they touch his own comfort or convenience. He has a curiously hard nature."

"The Laird has a rooted dislike to his methods and himself," I said. "It is fortunate for me. If I had only had my mother to consider the old life would have gone on to this day."

"And yet there was discipline in that old life, and meaning. It has helped to make you what you are, Sâba—or may be."

I looked quickly up from my plate. We were finishing luncheon.

"And what of yourself, dearest?" I asked.

She grew a little paler. "It has come to looking back and being grateful. Things might have been so much

worse. It is the mariner who has escaped shipwreck who can best appreciate safe harbour and the lights of home. I might not have reached a stage of such quiet content had I not known the—other side of life.”

My thoughts took one of their flying leaps forward ; I saw days of happiness—an assured future for her. I still believed that the old love might know resurrection ; but I had learnt that some thoughts are best unspoken, so I said nothing. Then, after brief silence, she returned to the subject of Ann's letter.

“ When will you go to see her ? ” she asked.

I looked at the weather prospects through the window.

“ I should like to go this afternoon,” I said ; “ I want to tell her——”

“ Don't be too humble. You may rest assured she would not have said so much if she had not felt a great deal more.”

“ I can hardly believe that,” I said.

“ I wonder what you will make of your gift, Sâba ? ”

I looked at her face, so grave and sweet and beautiful under that widow's cap. I felt the tears swim in my eyes beneath the pressure of sudden memories.

“ I cannot tell ; I am full of wonder as to why I—just I, the Sâba Macdonald with whom I have lived and sorrowed and wandered, for eighteen years—should suddenly face herself as a stranger ? My head is in a whirl. I am too happy to cry, and too amused to laugh. And, above all, I can only keep thinking that I have done nothing—*nothing*. It all remains in the future, all vague, shadowy and uncertain. How do I know that I may not be a failure like so many others ? ‘ Electra ’ thought the world would fall at her feet after that first published work ; Dorian dreamt of fame imperishable when he brought out those strange, erotic poems ; and Ann, who *has* achieved, who has been acknowledged as great and gifted and wonderful, she has fallen into depths of despair ; she is going to make a baleful experiment in order to learn the realities of life, instead of imagining them.”

“ Marriage is the completion of womanhood,” said Aunt Theo. “ Pity 'tis—'tis true. No unwed, unmated spirit can divine the hunger of passion, the rapture of love. Such things may mean dangerous knowledge but—they are sweet all the same.”

I was silent. Of such things I knew nothing. What was love save the little tributes to experience filtered through others' knowledge.

Presently she continued the subject.

"When I read a woman's book I know at once whether she draws her types and scenes from experience, or is merely a copyist of other writers' experiences. Dickens felt all his own pathos; his unhappy child-lives; his pretty love idylls. Only what the heart has suffered can make another heart feel. Some sympathy is intuitive, I know, but the true note can only be touched by the practised hand."

"What hope for me?" said I suddenly; "only an onlooker at the game of life; no practised player!"

She smiled half quizzically.

"I won't prophesy your fate, dear child—even by light of what I know—or hope."

"Hope?" I echoed vaguely.

She was looking at me a little wistfully, a little—was it enviously? Oh! surely, surely not!

"You will have many trials and temptations before you reach the goal of your ambitions, Sâba. Sorrow has taught you something; happiness may complete—or nullify the lesson. Yet if you are wise you will await some experience of joy before you attempt reproduction, otherwise you will but paint shadow-land awaiting sunrise."

"But I think if ever I were very happy I should do nothing; that fact would be so novel and delightful my life would ask no more!"

"Ah! that's the way of women. They live so much in imagination because they are denied the harsher life of facts."

She looked at me with that long thoughtful gaze I had surprised so often of late.

"You will only be happy with one side of your nature, Sâba. Domestic affection is vastly different from brain exaltation!"

I put my arms about her. "Domestic affection, indeed!"

"Ah! child, your heart has always wanted to pour itself out on someone; you must have an idol to worship, or an ideal to idealise. Choked, baffled, suppressed, your childish soul found outlet in your affection for me. How

faithful and how fond—I know. Ah, well, it did us both good, I think, to care—and believe—and confide. And you have altered very little ; but I—my experience is as a dividing sea.”

Her hands dropped from my shoulders, and her face grew grey with sudden pain.

“ Ah, Sâba, Sâba ! ” she cried stormily, “ never make the mistake I made. There should be no lack in your life of beautiful and worthy things. There is no hateful obligation at the back of it. Take it and your youth and your gifts in your hand and for once humble yourself at the feet of the Giver. Do not say, as when you were a blind and foolish child, ‘ I shall never pray again. ’ ”

* * * * *

“ Well, Miss Marplot ! What have you to say for yourself ? ” asked Ann, as I faced her in very agitated confusion some two hours later.

I stammered out apology, contrition, gratitude. She let me go on without interruption.

“ You have spoilt my book for me,” she said as I halted over lame excuses ; “ at least, spoilt my conceit with it. And I suppose conceit is pardonable in a writer who has achieved large editions, and the after-glories of the ‘ yellow-back ’ ! ”

“ But, Ann,” I remonstrated, “ this is nonsense ; I am miles and miles behind you in literary skill or knowledge or ability. I could not dream of writing a *real book*—not—oh ! not for years perhaps ! ”

“ Write a sham one, then,” she said half laughing. “ Decidedly you are hard to convince ! Joking apart, Sâba, I meant what I said. You have a far finer and truer conception of my characters than I—their creator. Only that it would be a sorry gift, I am inclined to make this book of mine over to you, and say, ‘ Do what you like with it ! ’ But I think you will do better for yourself ; and I shall have the interest and excitement of the hen who sees her wondrous gold-feathered offspring make straight for the duck-pond while she fumes and fusses on dry land. Now let’s have done with hyperbole, and sit down and talk things over. ”

For an hour or more our tongues exploited the treasure-field of discovery ; she so generous and helpful—I so bewildered and incredulous. For, indeed, it seemed

that what I had most despised for simplicity she appreciated for truth; what I had hesitated to leave as a record of fictitious deeds and words, she declared to be painted with life-like fidelity.

Those were days of the beautiful heroine; the dashing villain; the self-renouncing hero; the eternal wedding-bells and country-dance-couples ending! Such things had annoyed me by a wilful perversion of truth for sake of a registered pattern. Life was not like this; girlhood was not a period of blissful dreams to be realised with the partner of a first dance; the meeting of a dark and handsome stranger in a cornfield; or the surrender of a heart to the hero of an accident. Such trivialities seemed to me commonplace. I refused to believe that church-doors closed on unending bliss; that a ball-room acquaintance need be anything but an acquaintance, and that accidents made the sensational episode of all heroic romance. So we argued and disputed over conventional theories and the glories of assured incomes, until the dusk and the tea-bell summoned us to quit her charming den.

When we were leaving the room I stopped her suddenly.

"I hope," I said in rather a shamefaced manner, "that you have not said anything about this to—Dorian Giles?"

"But I have! I even read your chapter on Paul Levenson as contrast to my own, and he agreed yours was the finer conception!"

"Oh! I can't believe *that!*" I said; "it was only an experiment."

"Then you can't do better than go on experimenting," she said. "I agree with Dorian that women's books are too mawkish and sentimental; they lack force, strength, reality. I should like to write one on entirely new lines!"

"You don't mean to give up writing?"

"Certainly not; only I shall do it from purely artistic motives—no hankering after 'terms.' Oh! Sâba, I am to have the most beautiful house; the most perfect study; a life of intellectual surroundings, undisturbed by sordid cares. Even my mother comes into the scheme. She is to live with us."

"He seems to have thought of everything," I said.

But I noted that in the whole delightful scheme there had been no word of love. I was still puzzled why she was going to marry Dorian. But when I heard of the "House Beautiful" that Dorian had discovered and

intended to make perfect as art and taste could make it, of what a charming life had been mapped out for Ann, I was less inclined to cavil at her disposition of herself.

Such things may have supplied all her nature demanded. Who was I that I should judge or condemn? Then her mother's delight and pride were undisguised. A son-in-law who would give her place in his plans, and refuse to separate her from her child, was indeed ideal. And in future Ann need not work for a living, but only as an artistic obligation. This was as it should be. The creators of art should be placed above the sordid need of things material! How was it possible to give one's best thought, one's best work, when debt and difficulty, the tax-collector and the butcher, clamoured for attention?

These were points duly argued, and with which Sâba Macdonald fully agreed. And though the "House Beautiful" might have been hers had she but possessed the worldly wisdom of her sex in such important matters, she refused to consider her friend in the light of a supplanter. Instead, she told herself how fortunate it was that she had never betrayed Dorian's impulsive proposal; never breathed the secret of that garden scene, or whispered of maidenly hopes concerned with the art of culture. But all said and done, Ann would be a very suitable wife for erratic genius. She was beautiful and clever and charming. She would love to surround herself with clever artistic people; whether as a background to Dorian's absurd brilliancies, or the central attraction of her own social efforts, she was bound to be a success.

That—Sâba Macdonald never could or would have been. And well she knew it.

* * * * *

"I was always so afraid Ann would not marry," Mrs. Shottery confided to me; "and though some old maids are perfectly content—or *seem* so—no woman can ever reach her fullest capabilities in sexual isolation; it is unnatural. No gift of brain or mind can warm the heart as human affection does. Ann will be a greater writer for being a happy woman and a happy wife."

I looked at Ann and wondered if that would be so? She seemed placidly radiant; calmly content. What her heart held was after all her own affair. She would have to live with Dorian Giles, not I.

In the midst of tea and discussion, Phil Lorrimer arrived and joined us. I had not seen him for long, though I had heard of difficulties and struggles and non-appreciation. At the present moment, however, he was brimming over with excitement and congratulations. To him, also, the coming event was gilded with artistic possibilities. To play at his cousin's receptions; to be introduced and known to her husband's wide and influential circle, these were joys brought near to him by so wise a choice. London had not taken him up as he had hoped. Critics had agreed that his voice and methods were beyond praise, but a choice of Wagner, and Schubert, and Brahms did not appeal to concert-givers, so engagements had been few, and audiences scornful. But soon all this would be changed, and Ann was the good fairy of the expected transformation.

It was a little bewildering, but I felt I need not waste compassion on the new state of affairs. Things were adjusting themselves perfectly, and the bugbears of debt and expenditure would cease to trouble this charming household. There seemed no skeleton at the feast. All was smiling, cheerful, anticipatory. If there was a sacrifice preparing, all signs of the rites and ceremonies were kept out of sight.

Phil Lorrimer took me back to Edwardes Square. He was quite gay and lively; he seemed to think that Ann was greatly to be admired—if not envied—for her cleverness in securing so brilliant a *parti* as Dorian Giles. I saw no reason to contradict him, and if I read between the lines of congratulation it only afforded me another chance insight into the artistic problem.

CHAPTER XX.

THE night was dark and foggy. I was thankful to see the well-known corner as we left Holland Lane behind us.

Figures passing or facing us had an unreal look about them. The lamplight was dim, the traffic seemed afloat on a sea of vapour. Hurrying past the railings on my left I brushed against a figure clinging to one of them, and uttering strange gasps. I stopped, and young Lorrimer asked what was the matter.

"That man—he seems ill," I said.

Philip Lorrimer touched the arm of the bent gasping individual.

"Are you ill? Can I help you?" he asked. Suddenly the head was lifted; in the dim lamplight I caught sight of a familiar face, of staring blue eyes and parted lips.

"Grandpapa!" I cried in terror at his ghastly appearance; "what has happened?"

He tried to smile; he tried to draw himself to the old erect position, but the awful look in his eyes sent a thrill of fear to my heart. His breath came in quick pants, like that of a runner at the end of a race; his usual rubicund colour was ashy grey, livid, deathly.

"I—I'm—it's nothing," he panted. "I walked too fast—the fog caught my throat."

"Fog!" said Lorrimer sarcastically. "My dear sir, it's not fog; you are ill. There's a chemist close by, take my arm and I'll get you there."

"Ill," gasped my grandfather, "nonsense! I'm as well as you are. I don't want a chemist. I'm perfectly able to get home."

"Are you going to Aunt Theo's, grandpapa?" I asked eagerly. "You are nearly there, you know."

"Yes," he said vaguely. "I'll go in and rest. Come, Sâba, I'm all right again; it was only a—a—spasm."

It astonished me to see the way in which he pulled himself together, the resolute air with which he put aside Phil Lorrimer's proffered arm; he walked beside me feebly, but disdaining assistance. We turned the corner and reached the house.

"Won't you come in too?" I asked my escort.

"No, thank you," he said; "I have to get down to the West End and in this fog I shall need all my time. I—I am glad your grandfather seems all right again." He shook hands and went off as the door opened. Once in the hall and under the gaslight I saw that grandpapa did look very ill; that curious blue pallor of his lips I had noticed on a previous occasion was plainly evident again. He pushed open the dining-room door, and staggered to a chair.

"Get me some brandy," he gasped; "that pain—it's coming back."

I rushed to the cellarette and took out the decanters. I knew there was wine; I was doubtful about brandy. But at that moment Aunt Theo hurried into the room. I told

her what I wanted and she unlocked another door of the sideboard and produced a bottle of Martell; she poured some into a wine-glass and took it to her father. He gulped it down, still holding one hand pressed to his heart.

"Oh!—Oh-h!" he exclaimed in a sort of tremulous whisper. "It's awful!"

"What? the pain?" asked Aunt Theo. "Dear papa, how ill you look! You ought to see a doctor."

"Nonsense! I don't believe in doctors. There, I'm all right again; it's only a—sort of spasm. The cold and this fog—and I was walking too fast and—lost my breath."

His colour had come back; he looked like his old self again and sat upright and smiled at our anxious faces.

"What a relief!" he exclaimed. "Thank God you had that brandy in the house, Theodora!"

She took off his hat and unloosed his heavy overcoat; then he came over to the fire and sat down in the deep leather armchair. She offered him some tea, but he refused.

"No, your mamma will be expecting me; I must go home."

"But you must have a cab," she urged; "such a dreadful night; you ought not to be out in such weather, papa."

"Tut-tut; I go out every day and in all weathers—that is one of the secrets of health; however, you may send for a cab for me. I won't walk back in this fog." His eyes fell on me.

"Good gracious, child, whatever are you staring at? I'm all right, a spasm—what's that? Anyone might have such a thing in this abominable English climate; even you or Theodora if you walked fast and swallowed mouthfuls of fog."

He laughed, a shaky discordant laugh, that jarred on my nerves; his strange looks and manner made me seriously uneasy. Seeing that he was bent on denying the nature of his attack, Aunt Theo humoured him. She chatted on familiar or casual subjects for the few moments that we waited; she took no heed of trembling fingers or nervous irritability of voice and movements. When the cab came she went with him to the front door. There he stopped her.

"You're not to say a word of this to your mother," he said anxiously; "it's a mere nothing; I'm perfectly well."

She would be uneasy if she knew, or insist on my seeing a doctor, and I won't have one in the house, fussing and dosing, and running up bills and interfering with nature. Remember, now—not a word to mamma.”

“Very well,” she said obediently; “all the same, papa, I think you ought to consult some good physician. Perhaps your heart isn't quite strong. I have seen people suffer with that kind of spasm in India and I don't think you ought to neglect it.”

He said nothing. Oh! wonder of wonders! He did not even correct that offending “don't think.” He simply got into the four-wheeled cab and was driven away through the foggy streets. But I think in that cold lonely drive he must have faced a truth undeniable; a man's life is *not* in his own hands, however careful he may be to fence himself round with precautions.

Aunt Theo came slowly back to the dining-room and sank into the vacant chair. I knelt down before the fire and held out my cold hands to the blaze.

“What does it mean?” I asked anxiously.

“The beginning of the end. That was a heart attack. I wonder how many he has had; it is worse than foolish to deny they are serious.”

I described how I had found him clinging to the railing and gasping for breath. She looked very grave.

“He ought to see a doctor,” she repeated, “then he would be warned what to do or avoid, but he is so obstinate; he will neither seek advice nor believe he needs it.”

We talked for a long time over this strange seizure and of what it might mean. I knew what I had faced in that first moment of recognition, and what he had tried to deny. There comes a fateful warning to which one cannot be blind or deaf in such a moment. With all his belief in himself and his ability to stave off accident or disease, poor grandpapa had faced a very dreaded spectre when with ashen lips and failing heart-beats he had clung to those area railings.

Did he really deceive himself? Did he pretend that though calling at next street, next door, that spectre would not lay hand on *his* knocker, nor show its ghastly face at his bedside? I wondered—we both wondered—and with the wonder touched once more on that old subject of possibilities. On the ground-work for faith and the actualities of the after life. Very solemn

and grave was that discussion. Death had been with us often enough and touched our life interests closely enough to demand earnest consideration. The marvel is that seeing death so near and living within its shadow as we do, humanity can ever push its memory aside and dance heedlessly over the green sward of its own graves. Yet there is mercy, too, in that temporary oblivion. The sunlight is so glad and wholesome a thing that it is easy to pretend there comes no shadow to darken it if only we refuse to acknowledge that it is darkened.

"I never think death itself so terrible," I said, "as the preparatory horrors—illness, helplessness; the slow fading of hope, the trouble to those around one. If I had any choice I should like to die in harness, as they say, with work completed, with no farewell, with just the sight of the door opening for me and the knowledge I should pass through it and see it close behind, in full consciousness of the summons."

"That was something of the way in which your beloved Dickens died; 'in harness,' as you say."

"God rest his soul," I murmured involuntarily. "Having set his hand to the plough there was no looking back. That empty chair, that pen laid down never to be lifted again; the great brain, the great heart—all still—at rest for evermore. I wonder if the love of truth, the love of humanity are with him where he is?"

"Have you ever regained your faith in things spiritual, Sâba," she asked.

"In things, yes; but not in creeds. There must be a spiritual as well as a material side to life, only it has been perverted and twisted into so many forms and shapes that the truth is hard to discover."

"And the Unseen is not easy to realise."

"No, it is all 'through a glass darkly;' nothing absolutely certain. That is why I would never blame anyone for refusing to turn their back on joy; its day is short enough at best, but of sorrow and of repentance we may be always sure."

"It is the strangest thing, child, that you should have such thoughts and feelings, brought up as you were."

"You must remember the natural reaction of which I told you long ago and that my first rational teacher was a Secularist. Besides—" and I smiled consciously, "what of hereditary instincts? Racial, for example."

She looked at me wonderingly. "How do you know anything about them?" she asked.

Then I told her of that memorable conversation I had overheard in my mother's bedroom while we were staying at Pembridge Square. "Ever since," I confessed, "I have thought that a Rajah's descendant might have something for which to blame or thank him."

"Blame, I should say; hereditary instinct ought not to be so strong as example. The Laird's simple piety—"

"Oh! I often wish I *could* share it! I go to 'the kirk,' as he calls it, and I know in my heart that his faith is surely rooted and grounded in what he calls the tenets of Christianity, but still—"

"Your question remains unanswered."

"Oh! if it were one question, but there are so many! Often I tell myself that only death will show me the real road to life. Here there is no certainty; no voice to answer; no hand to guide. Of course I know what clergymen would say and what the Church teaches, but my heart is a veritable nether millstone as far as they are concerned. I never argue or dispute now. It is so useless, and those days are over. I must fight my own way to the Truth, or wait till it is revealed to me."

"You were always a strange child, Sâba. If you take up literature seriously—"

"I should not dream of taking it up in any other way," I said gravely.

"Well, you will have to be careful of the seeds you sow. There is grave responsibility attached to such a calling. You would not like to think you had cast your tormenting doubts on to the shoulders of another human creature; one perhaps less fitted than yourself to combat them."

"No," I said; "but other writers have hidden their unbelief in Christianity, and yet written books accepted in every Christian household."

"Are you thinking of George Eliot?"

I nodded. "Some day the world will know what that work of Strauss' meant to the translator; the influence of such minds as Spencer, Huxley, Lewes."

"Who told you this?"

"Ann. Her uncle knows Marian Evans and some of her circle. She is a great genius and a great writer, yet she cannot accept things that the world accepts as truth of immortality."

"Her books would not lead one to believe that—'Romola,' 'Adam Bede,' 'The Mill on the Floss.'"

"No," I said, "that is why I brought her up to answer your suggestion of influence; not that I shall ever be a power as she is, but you see it *is* possible to believe one thing and write another. It is the same with speech; we don't always say what we think or mean what we say. I like to realise that. I like to think of influence concealed behind apparent indifference; of being a mental physician with finger on the pulse and inscrutable face that tells the patient nothing."

"How have you learnt all this, Sâba?" she asked wonderingly.

"I don't know. Some things seem just to come, and some grow by what I read and puzzle out afterwards. Life looks to me like a series of pictures and I am simply strolling through the gallery. All the strange creeds and errors and beliefs, all the absurd ambitions, all the dominating selfishness, all the self-wrought pain and martyrdoms, these I seem to see twisted and distorted into strange shapes and hanging on the walls. I *feel* so vividly that I cannot find words to paint my own sensations. Life is wonderful and life belongs to me; that is the one thing I realise. I should love to go quite away somewhere into a great lonely space and think it out and write it. Instead"—and I gave a short laugh—"I have to dust the china, and see to the linen cupboard; to be scolded by mamma, and to do Ann Shottery's copying, and play cribbage with the Laird. I wonder if one's circumstances are always at variance with one's mental outlook?"

"Yours always seem to have been so," she said. "Nothing surprises me so much, Sâba, as when I look back at you and that one year in which we were so much to one another; and then contrast that strange old-fashioned child with—"

"Am I so altered?"

"More than you yourself are conscious of; so altered that I do not anticipate a long continuance of those circumstances you have just described."

"What! the home circle? Why, it would need a magician's spell to break up that and sign my release."

"No doubt," she said, still faintly smiling as over some thought that pleased herself; "but even magicians pay life a visit once in a way. You don't know

your real self yet. All the pain and suffering and the mistakes and injustice of the world come as fresh revelations to youth; in reality they are old as the world; as life. They may be meant for examples, for education, for the benefit of nations yet unborn. We cannot tell; we do not know. It is always 'seeing in a glass darkly,' as you said."

I turned from the fireplace to her; I leant my head against her shoulder and said—nothing; but my heart was full of things I wanted to say, and could not.

* * * * *

There is wonderful sympathy in silence. Perhaps our thoughts went back, met, diverged, united; perhaps we grew to understand each other better. That we could love each other more I did not believe, because even then I was too ignorant to guess of what love was capable. I only knew long moments drifted by, and that the servant came in to lay the supper-table and brought in the letters of the last post—two for Aunt Theo, one with the Yorkshire postmark that I never saw without a faint sick throb of heart, a longing to know if indeed that accident was to her for ever a landmark in life's regrets. She opened it; at a glance I saw it was not the housekeeper's writing—larger, straggling, covering several pages of notepaper; it was an immediate incentive to curiosity. I watched my aunt's face as she read; it showed surprise and agitation. She suddenly looked up.

"Oh! Sâba, Dick has written this himself. He says his sight is a little improved; there is some hope; he is going to Germany to see some celebrated oculist there; he is in London at present." She glanced at the letter again, I saw the colour rise in her face. "He wants to come here to see us."

"Oh!" I clasped my hands. The news was joyful to me, portending as it did so much that was hopeful and unexplained.

"When?" I asked eagerly.

"To-morrow. How glad you look, Sâba!"

"I hate waiting for anything good," I said, "and of course I'm glad; who would not be? The last time I saw him——"

As I said it the picture was so vivid, so heartrending, that the tears rushed up and I could see nothing of the room or my present surroundings, only that staggering

figure and that agonised face and hear the hoarse cry, "I can't see." The picture was realistic, as most of my mental portraits were. I was recalled once more by my aunt's voice.

"He begs me not to be too hopeful; after all, this may not mean real improvement, but before the operation, which will be of a critical nature, he would like to see us both and say good-bye."

"See!" I exclaimed forlornly, "that is only a figure of speech, I suppose."

She put the letter back into its envelope. I was thinking of his first visit here; of how she had been lying weak and helpless on the couch upstairs and I had called him in; of what I had hoped and imagined for them both. Now she was free, and he helpless and suffering. Oh! why could they not join those broken threads together, take up life once more as the chastened, tender lesson of dead years; face happiness and secure it?

For even then I did not and could not realise that there comes an hour of finality to earthly passion, and from that hour, that death, it knows no after resurrection.

CHAPTER XXI.

I ROSE next morning with a strange sense of joy and expectation. I had slept badly, and thoughts and dreams had all been of the past. Old scenes, old dreams, old faces came back to me. I was with Ada, and suddenly it was not Ada, but some radiant, ethereal being, who pointed to a grey sea and held out her hand to take me over it. And I walked as on dry land, and she talked to me and told me that the first and only time she had been able to fulfil her promise was at a crisis of my life unknown to myself. "You will know soon," she whispered, and then released my hand and floated away, and I stood rocking and tumbling on the waves below, expecting every moment to be engulfed. Then the scene changed and I was taking off Aunt Theo's bridal veil and wildly entreating her to throw aside her ring and start off on a journey with Sir Richard, whose coach and horses stood in the street below.

And so with many another vague and vagrant fancy the

night passed, and I opened my eyes to wintry sunshine and thought with joy, "He is coming here to-day."

Aunt Theo and I made our feminine preparations for the expected guest. There was a bright fire and flowers everywhere, and as much arranging of the unpicturesque little drawing-room as if our visitor would be able to see it all.

I had suggested receiving him in the dining-room to avoid the stairs. "No," she said, with a little odd smile; "I want him to come to this room, for a special reason."

As she stood there in her sweeping black draperies and with that widow's cap crowning her lovely hair, I felt, with a sudden pang, that perhaps, after all, it was well he could not see her. The dress, however becoming, was painfully reminiscent of recent bereavement. It might even have a sobering and chilling effect upon the new meaning of freedom.

So I went about my own duties in silence, and when she laughingly asked me if I did not intend to change my black dress for something less sombre, I shook my head. "Why should I? He won't notice."

She said no more. About three o'clock a cab drove up and from the window I saw his man help him out and give him his arm. In the same manner he was conducted up the stairs and stood at the drawing-room door looking from beneath a disfiguring shade across a space which must have only meant dimness.

Then I heard Aunt Theo's glad, tremulous "Oh! Dick!" The attendant fell back and closed the door and they two stood hand in hand.

"Oh! I am so glad to see you again, to hear better news. Come and sit by the fire."

She did not release his hand, but gently guided him to the big chintz-covered armchair where I had pictured him sitting.

Was it fancy, or did he move his head and look over to the window? Was it possible he could guess or *see* who stood there?

I came quietly forward and spoke his name, and took his outstretched hand. I tried to see those tortured eyes, but the shade prevented.

"I hear you are better," I said in a strained formal way that was quite at variance with the throbs of my heart and the strange delight that his presence and his voice had brought.

"The improvement is so slight that I am afraid to count upon it," he said slowly. "But hope dies hard sometimes. Now don't let us talk of myself. Sit down opposite so that I can fancy I see you, and tell me all you have been doing these dark and weary months."

But for once it was not Sâba Macdonald's tongue that was so eager to "clack." She was strangely silent. Now and then she caught herself closing her own eyes when she spoke in order to try and realise the effects of conversing in darkness. After the first formality and strangeness had worn off he seemed to be quite his old self.

A quarter of an hour had passed and I was trying to think of some plausible excuse for leaving them together, when Aunt Theo suddenly jumped up. "I will go and fetch Zoe," she said. "She hasn't forgotten you, Dick, or those mornings on the sands."

I thought it was cruel to remind him of that time and then leave us alone to face its memory. As the door closed on her I was conscious of a sudden utter blankness as far as my brain was concerned. I could think of nothing to say. He was equally silent.

I bent forward and stirred the fire for mere sake of doing something; a hope that handling the poker and arousing the blaze might bring inspiration.

As the noise ceased and I was about to resume my chair, he suddenly stretched out his hand. "Come here, child," he said rather faintly.

I put my hand in his and the action brought me to my knees beside him.

"I have something I want to say," he went on, "to say to my best little friend."

My heart gave an odd quick jump. I felt the hand he held so closely begin to tremble.

"Sâba," he went on, "are you convinced yet that certain things in life push us steadily, surely, forward; that there is no going back? Do you think I came here to-day with that old purpose for which you laboured so strenuously, or—to tell you the truth?"

"The truth?" There was a very feminine tremor in my voice as I looked at his grave and altered face.

"It is what you set the greatest store by, is it not?"

I remembered my hand was still in his and gently freed it. "Don't move away," he pleaded, "I want to feel

you are near me. I want to tell you a little story. I have Theo's permission."

"Then it is all coming right," I said to myself, and remained kneeling there beside him, with both hands clasped and my eyes on the fire in a strenuous attempt not to look at his face.

Noting I made no reply he laid his hand gently on my shoulder. "In all this dreary time," he said, "I have had but one hope. That pity might open your eyes even as it has wrung your heart. Sâba, you strange child, do you remember that night in Ann's garden when you told me the plain truth of what you had been storing up against me all those years?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Did you never guess afterwards the reason why I had—changed?"

"Changed?" I echoed. "Oh, don't tell me *that!*"

"I must tell you; I am desperate. It isn't my fault, nor hers, nor altogether yours. But, child, the years have turned the old feelings into something calmer and more steadfast. We both know it. It is only you—you who won't be convinced."

A sudden warmth swept to my face. I felt as if some hand had torn down a screening veil and revealed shame and dread, and yet a sudden bewildering joy.

"Whether I am convinced or not, what difference does it make?"

Was that my voice, so harsh and strained? I hardly recognised it.

"It makes, or might make, all the difference to me," he said. "I don't want to appeal to your pity, but I should like to know if—if, supposing this had not happened, I might have had—I might have asked *you* the question you have so persistently tried to make me ask another person?"

"Ask *me?*"

Was I dreaming? Had I understood? Was this only another of those mistakes of which my life was so full?

"Remember," he went on unsteadily, "that if you had been like most girls—gay, frivolous, self-engrossed—I would never have said what I am going to say. But your home and your life are uncongenial. I have an idea that I could offer you one wider, more suited to you. At least

you would be free to follow your own tastes and the bent of your genius."

I gave a little choking gasp. "Genius," and I, lonely and self-abashed, stumbling so foolishly along life's highway with head in the clouds and eyes that saw nothing real and wonderful close at hand.

"Don't answer me yet," he went on. "I had hoped the idea was not new to you. Did you never think, child, that it was you I loved—you? From that night in the garden when I first saw your true and faithful soul and recognised *how* faithful it could be, I had no thought of anyone else. The old love was dead; utterly and for ever. In its place grew up a new frail plant of hope. Your likeness to that old likeness, your fidelity to that childish idol, these things, Sâba, touched me to my heart's core. At first I only thought of you as an interesting study. I would not let myself believe that I could grow to love you as I do, and then I betrayed myself to *her*. She was wise enough and noble enough to advise me to let the little seed grow and not uproot it. And perhaps in time——" He broke off abruptly, and I saw him clasp both hands to his eyes.

"Then *this* happened. But there have been times when I was glad of it because—because, Sâba, you betrayed some feeling, some interest in me at last. I said, 'Perhaps she will pity me, so that if she ever knows what I feel she will not think me fickle, or unstable. She will have learnt the woman's lesson.'"

There was a moment of dead silence. I was too bewildered and too amazed for speech.

Loved me! He loved *me*! As I thought of it a warmth like sunlight suffused my veins. Unused to vivid emotions, I was mutely conscious of terror rather than joy. All I had fancied, imagined, planned—mine! All I had hoped or dreamed, mine—for a word!

Where was my sense of disloyalty, the one love for the one life? Where the anger at falsified ideals that had marked our first real acquaintance? The scents of that garden of Ann's, the moonlight, the quivering leaves, the throbbing music—they all swept back on a wave of memory, and with them the sense of shame at childish rudeness; the grave rebuke of one grave kindly voice.

What dropped from my eyes in that vivid moment? Surely something beside which his mere physical blindness

meant clear sight; something which left me trembling, unnerved, ashamed, yet awake at last.

All the glory and joy of life had been at my side and I would not see, would not recognise, would not accept.

"Are you never going to speak?" he said at last, "Not even to say you are sorry for me?"

"Sorry!" It was hardly Sâba's voice, but some incoherent whisper, coming she knew not whence. Had she not indeed been sorry, wept and agonised over that awful catastrophe? Told herself that had she been in Aunt Theo's place a life-long ministry and devotion would have crowned those sad years' waiting.

"Sorry!" How poor a word and yet how true a one! Sorrow, pity! Where had she heard of their kinship to another emotion? And was it *that* she felt, this mingling of joy, pain, doubt, terror—things that are not facile to feminine nature in its early stages of feminine ignorance?

Amidst a whirl of confusion she lifted her eyes to that face, so pathetic in all it conveyed of patient and suffering masculinity. Could it be that she—she, the despised, the "queer," the insignificant Sâba Macdonald, was being honoured by his preference, offered his devotion? Could at last even realise that joy of "self-sacrifice"? Only this was no case of self-sacrifice. Well enough she knew that. Halt or maimed or blind, or just himself, this one man was sacred and dear to her as no other man ever had been, ever could be!

Yet she could say nothing. Her eyes sought his face, met only the pathos of closed lids under that disfiguring shade, saw once more that outstretched hand claiming or seeking possession. "What can I say? What must I say?" she thought.

"Are you never going to speak, Sâba? Are you offended or hurt beyond forgiveness?"

"Oh *no!* only——"

"Only you are disappointed in me. Perhaps you see not only failure to loyalty, but selfishness in what I ask in its place. A blind man's love—what can that mean to girlhood such as yours? And yet he would give you very faithful service if you would but believe it."

The hand touched mine with a gesture so humble and beseeching that heart and soul seemed to melt into one wild sob. I caught the hand. I leant my cheek against

it, and then my lips. "Oh! it can't be true, it can't be true! How is it possible you should care for *me*? It's not as if, as if——"

I was sobbing like a child, my head down bent on those clasped hands that rested on his knee.

"Ah! don't cry like that, it hurts me to hear you. I don't want to make you unhappy, others have done that long enough. I don't wish even to change our relative position unless you feel you could come to me freely, of your own bounty and sweet compassion. I have thought of you always and only in these dark weeks. I remembered that day of horror, your tears, your words, your sympathy. Then with the first glimmer of hope I—well, I am here speaking it all. Haven't you any comfort for a lonely man—you who can love others so faithfully?"

"Comfort?" I lifted my head and dashed away the tears. "But it seems all so impossible!"

"Oh, foolish child, have you not heard me say that that old love is long dead and buried, or rather, whatever was best of its lingering memory re-lived in you; your likeness, your power of recalling life from that death? She guessed from the first when she saw us together."

"Impossible!" I persisted. "I did not know myself then!"

"Do you know yourself *now*, you little infidel?" He rose suddenly and impetuously; very impetuously for a blind man it seemed to me. The action brought me also from my knees.

"Shall I tell you what you do need, Sâba Macdonald?" he said. "Someone to take you in hand, master you, guide you, *love* you."

As he said the words he pushed up the shade from his eyes, and—miracle of miracles!—*looked* at me!

I gave a little gasping cry. "You can *see*! Why, your eyes look just the same! Oh, why, why——"

"Why didn't I tell you? Because I wanted to give you a chance for your favourite virtue, self-sacrifice. But I'm disobeying orders by this action, so——"

He caught my hands and drew me nearer; those grave dear eyes searched my face with a masterful joy I had never seen in them before.

"Do you love me, Sâba?"

"I—I don't know!"

I was struggling with tears and laughter in helpless

confusion of senses; struggling to find myself equal to facing this extraordinary situation.

"Don't know!" he echoed. "Then you must, and *shall!*"

In some masterful yet wholly tender fashion his arms were round me, drawing me to his heart as his influence had drawn me to himself; and in that moment I learnt that I *did* know, that I had known, though I had chosen to deny such knowledge. The beauty and completeness of life sealed my dreams at last . . . lifted my soul heavenwards with my lover's kiss.

* * * * *

"But why did you not tell us you could see?" I asked after some confused moments, in which assuredly no Sâba Macdonald of previous acquaintanceship took any part.

"Because—I thought pity would prove my strongest argument," he said. "And after all, sweetheart, my sight is not absolutely restored. There is great doubt as to this improvement being a lasting one, and I shall have to wear glasses. Do you mind?"

Was that joyous laugh mine? Was I really listening to questions that gave me importance in a man's eyes—and this man of all men?

"Do I *mind*—anything now? Why, Sir Richard——"

"Good heavens, child, never let me hear you call me *that* again. Say Dick at once."

"I am not used to such familiarity."

"Then the sooner you get used to it the better."

"I was going to say, Dick——"

He interrupted that sentence again, and again sent my wits into hopeless confusion.

"Well, proceed."

"I don't mind anything so long as you are content."

"Had I been condemned to lifelong blindness, what then?"

"It would have made no difference."

"Didn't I say you were devoted to self-sacrifice? I believe you would appreciate leading me about on a string!"

"Oh! for shame!" I laughed. "You mustn't bring up my old foolish vanities and mistakes."

"No. I shall try and give them scope in another direction. I hear you are bent on emulating the example

of the once famous 'Electra' and your gifted friend Ann Shottery. Is that true?"

I grew crimson. "How can I tell? I only tried and——"

"The trial seemed successful."

"How do you know?" I asked in surprise.

"Theo told me; she seemed to think you had found your vocation at last. Tell me truly, Sâba, would you sacrifice your gifts to me, or me to your gifts?"

"The fancies—the dreams, the whole world seem as nothing now—since I know that you——"

"That I love you, my heart. Ah! God knows I do, Sâba, but not selfishly! You shall come to your woman's kingdom freely, and unshackled by any command of mine. Your nature shall develop as it ought to develop. I am not blind to its possibilities. You shall come to me when you please and give me just what you can. Does the thought make you happy at last?"

I lifted my eyes, yet could not see for the tears that thronged so swiftly. I tried to speak, but my full heart could find no words. Of love so generous, so devoted, was I in any degree worthy? I knew I was not, but I felt that the gift was too dear and beautiful and desired to reject. Besides—I had loved him all the time!

"I cannot imagine how I could have been so blind," I stammered. "To think that it should be me—me and not Aunt Theo, and you say she guessed it long ago?"

"She was wiser than either of us."

But I cast my thoughts back to a night of mental records. I could not be certain that she had guessed it. I felt that if there had been any question of renunciation it was *she* who had undertaken it. I who had failed.

* * * * *

Sâba Macdonald's history stops abruptly on the threshold of life's great joy. With her crossing of that threshold, her fuller knowledge, her wider sphere of love, the outside world has nothing to do. As child, as girl, as dawning woman, she has been glib enough; now she stays both tongue and pen. Into that new sanctuary no prying eyes shall penetrate.

It was long before she grew calm enough to face its mysteries, to believe herself capable of bestowing happiness as well as receiving it. Long before that shy, strange,

abashed creature, released from self-formed fetters, dare trust herself to face life freely and hopefully.

Long before she could persuade herself that in so facing and accepting it she did no wrong to another life; before she realised that humanity's limitations do not make it less lovable, even if lowering its standard of perfection.

But a day came when such things were made plain, when youthful errors faced her as condemnation. When she knew how narrow had been her outlook on life, how circumscribed by self and selfishness. She had lacked humility and gratitude and all the gracious joys of charity, the charity "that thinketh long and is kind." But such things were Love's lessons, and at Love's feet were learnt at last.

For Love is the one Divine gift that widens human sympathies, enlarges human comprehension, and brings the soul in fear and trembling thankfulness to the feet of the Great Giver!



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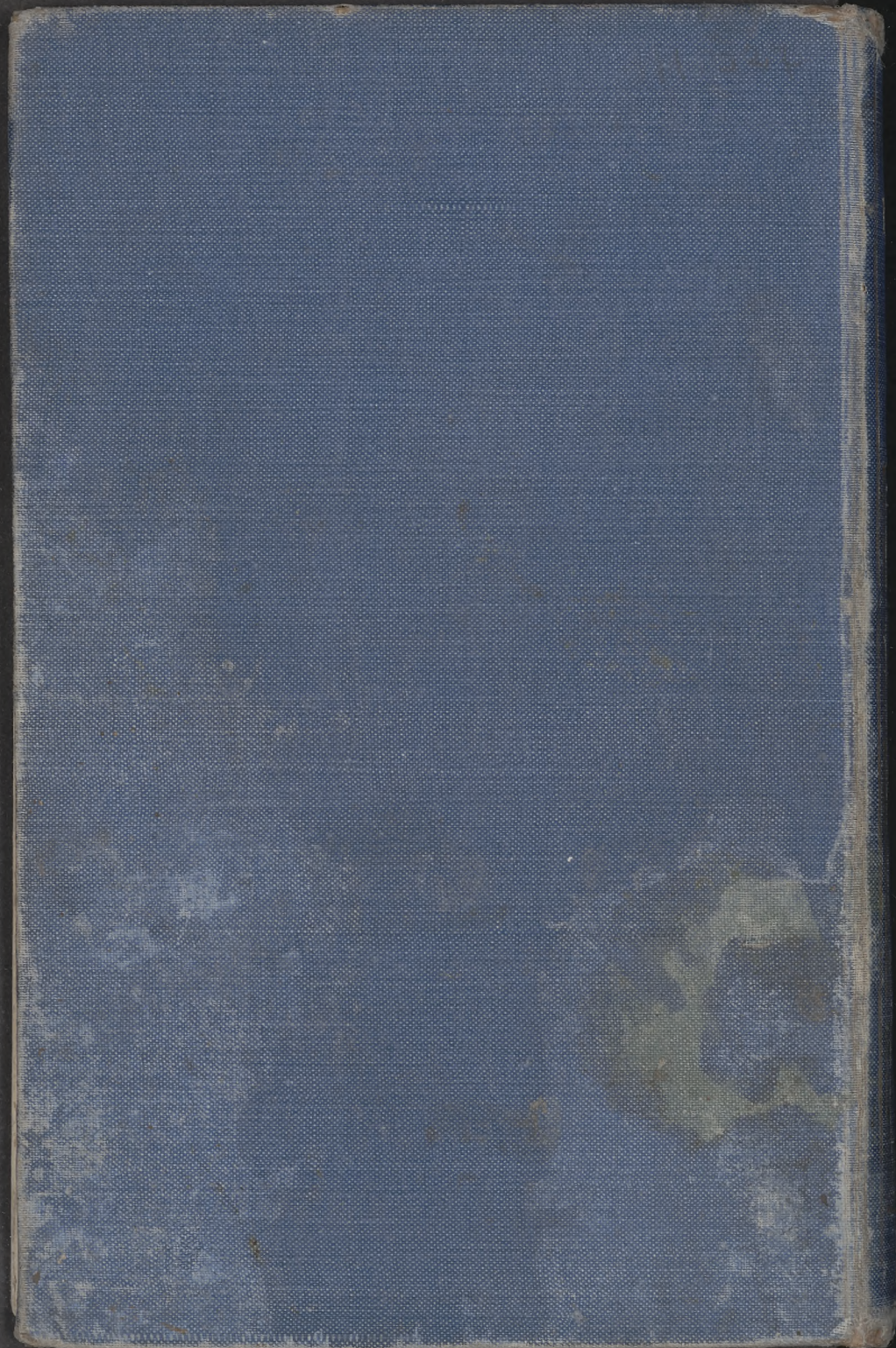
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