

RETRIBUTION.

BY

MRS. C. L. BALFOUR,

Author of "Burnish Family," "Drift," &c.

"Heaven is most just, and of our pleasant vices
Makes instruments to scourge us."

SHAKSPEARE.

FOURTEENTH THOUSAND.

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RETRIBUTION.

CHAPTER I.

PERPLEXITIES IN A PROSPEROUS LIFE.

THE world called Mr Tregloss a prosperous man. And the world was right;—to a certain extent Mr Tregloss considered himself a prosperous man, and regarded with no small degree of complacency the ample fortune which he had built up out of, as he would say, scanty materials. Yet in the midst of his successes, Mr Tregloss had had his vexations. They came, as vexations always do, from unexpected quarters, and they found out and wounded the vulnerable part in a nature not generally susceptible. Indeed, rightly considered, has not the old heathen story of Achilles, with the two little finger-marks in his heel, where his mother held him when she plunged him in the river Styx to make him invulnerable,—has not that fable a deep meaning, capable of wide application? Harden ourselves as we may in our contact with the world,—nay, let even a good tough fibre of self-conceit brace us up to an unbending rigour of mingled stateliness and defiance,—yet there will be some little spot where a shaft may enter, and, striking deep, wound all the more keenly that the quivering flesh is surrounded with so hard an integument of invul-

nerability. Yes, yes ! there's many a stately Achilles limping with the torment of a hidden wound among us.

Now Mr Tregloss had given himself to business from his earliest years, with all the resolution of that strong Cornish character that he inherited from his ancestors. He had not allowed himself any relaxation in his pursuits. The sacred delight or duty of love and marriage he had postponed in early manhood, quoting often the words, by no means the wisest that Lord Bacon wrote :—"Great spirits, or great business do keep off this weak passion." He had provided very handsomely for a sister some years his junior, who had married a gentleman of good, but not wealthy family ; and the only son of that sister, when she became a widow, he had intended to make his heir. The young man, however, had thwarted him in many ways. Brought up in great luxury and indulgence, and being without the strong purpose which the uncle had found in the pursuit of wealth, the nephew ran a course of reckless dissipation that hurt the pride far more than the principle of Mr Tregloss, and that had ended before the commencement of our story in an entire rupture between uncle and nephew. To add to these family annoyances, Mrs Viningley, the mother of the young man, had married again very foolishly ; and in a paroxysm of annoyance at these mortifications, Mr Tregloss did, what many a bachelor on the shady side of fifty does—he married. And as he never had thought of making any woman his wife since the time when he was about nineteen, and when he nearly lost all the heart he had to a pretty girl of seventeen, he now married one who in looks and age resembled his first youthful love. The world, with which Mr Tregloss wished to stand well, might have laughed openly at him (secretly there were plenty of grins), but his young bride had a good fortune : she was the orphan

daughter of a rich London tradesman, and was to have been Mr Tregloss's ward; but he proposed, and received her at her father's death-bed—a mere child, all tears and compliance, and thus merged the name of guardian in that of husband.

Once married, Mr Tregloss became suddenly as anxious about his family name as if the peerage of England were concerned in its transmission. "And why not?" he asked himself, "an old Cornish name, older than all these upstart Saxons and Normans and what not—why should it die with me?" He had intended that his nephew should marry, and that a son of his should bear the old name; but now he would not have his nephew mentioned. He had done with mother and son. In his hearing they were not to be spoken of. There would be inheritors of the family name in the right line. He himself should found a house.

Great was the consternation when, at the end of the first year of his married life, young Mrs Tregloss so far forgot what was due to the family name, and came so far below what was expected of her, as to present her husband with a little mite of a sickly girl! Why, Mr Tregloss had actually drank the health of his unborn son more than once, had decided on his name, and entered into the question whether he should be educated at home, or at a public or a private school; and lo! here came the very poorest little specimen of feminality ever seen. An offence altogether in sex and size. But with a discretion not always displayed by feminine humanity, the little lady, so coldly welcomed into this queer world, departed from it.

However, there's hope in all such disappointments. Mr Tregloss removed from his country house on the banks of the Trent, to his spacious villa at Chiswick, within an easy

distance of the metropolis. He did not again drink to the health of his expected son, but he hoped for him, and fussed concerning doctors and nurses, and altogether, as "Squabb," the cook, irreverently said, "went about clucking and cackling like an old hen who expects and proclaims that her egg will be the last and best ever laid."

It was strange to the whole household to note the change that had come over their master. A proud, grave, pre-occupied man, who for years had voted women and children to be a sort of necessary evils that he was more than content to be free from, now so fussy about his wife—and yet awkwardly so; for the habits of a life are not easily overcome. He read many treatises on "Infant Management," "Infant Mortality," &c., and came to the resolution that as Mrs Tregloss, despite all the luxuries that surrounded her, was very delicate, some healthy nurse should be brought into the house to sustain his son.

Yes; his son. This time there is no disappointment. All the womankind in the house venture into the dining-room with their congratulations as soon as the fact is known. Servants who never dared to lift their eyes or wag their tongues in the awful presence of the master, came with a simper and a curtsy to offer their congratulations, and were received with marvellous condescension. If health could really be bestowed by wishing it over glass, tankard, and bowl, the son and heir of Mr Tregloss would have possessed a stock to last for life, for there was drinking in the kitchen and the dining-room, at the stables and in the gardener's cottage—nay, even the sacred precincts of the sick chamber were not wholly uninvaded. There, in a pretty sort of boudoir ante-room, sat Mrs Dossett the nurse, and Flutterly the lady's maid, in easy chairs on each side of the fire, while between them, resting on an

ottoman, was what a man would call a trimmed-up basket—(*Berceaunette* is a word masculine lips seldom pronounce)—all muslin, lace, and pink ribbons, where a tiny callow head reposes, and two little dimpled fists seem inclined to battle with the frippery. As both women nodded and whispered over the babe, and glanced now and then across the slightly shaded room through a door that led into the dim and curtained retreat of the new made mother, there was a quiet passing from hand to hand of a glass, that each, as they put it to their lips, tasted with a mincing air of apparent repugnance, protesting they only took it on such very extraordinary occasions as the present. Mrs Dossett said, sighing, "To keep up her strength," and Flutterly whispered, "To obleege you, my dear mem."

A third woman now entered the room by a door from the staircase, shown in by the cook. She was very poorly clad, and very pale, and looked half inclined to run away again. Both Mrs Dossett and Flutterly, as understanding the superior dignity of their social status, looked at each other confidentially, and then at the young woman loftily.

"The baby's nurse," said Squabb, the cook, pushing the young woman forward—and adding, "sent by Dr Sootherly."

"Married?" whispered the nurse to Flutterly.

"Certently, Mrs Dossett, or I'd never a' stayed," was the reply, drawing herself up with a rigidity she thought dignified.

"Poor?" continued Mrs Dossett.

"Certently," again said Flutterly, adding "Them kind of nusses always air."

As she spoke, she rose, and glancing into the adjoining room, drew the middle door nearly close, and then began to make enquiries.

"Any luggage?"

"No."

"Sent for rather sooner, Mrs What's your name? eh! than you expected, Mrs ——?"

"Oh dear," said the young woman, dropping into a chair, trembling violently, and bursting into tears; "my baby, my poor baby."

"Goodness gracious me—why whatever on earth are you going on like that for?" said Mrs Dossett, in unfeigned astonishment; "such a situation, such a hinfant, the best of food, and drink, and wages, and no end of presents; you're in luck, I can tell you; crying, indeed, like that."

"Oh, but——"

"There," said Flutterly, returning, after having stepped into the next room, with a glass in her hand, "drink that, and let me advise you, Mrs Thingumty—what is it?—not to be giving way to fieldings. I've an art which is as melting as ever any of the most tenderest can be. Indeed, I can safely say my bringing up was most refined; but I never giv' in, no never; I've a spirit if I've fieldings."

As Flutterly pronounced this stately speech, she continued to hold the glass just under the young woman's chin, so near, indeed, that her tears were ready to fall into it. She put it aside with her trembling hand, saying hastily, "No, no, I can't—I won't take it; if it was not for that, I needn't be here."

At this moment, there was a ringing of the dining-room bell, much louder than Mrs Dossett, intent on enforcing her authority, approved.

"Muffle all bells," she said, turning with decision on Flutterly. "Yes, if it's the master's bell, no matter. Bells is bells, and nerves is nerves, and I know my business, Mrs Flutterly, and my place in families of the fust distinction."

Both the nurse and the lady's maid were somehow not improved in temper by their recent hobnobbing, and secretly Mrs Dossett did not like the lady's maid questioning the new nurse, so they each stood upon their dignity, and mutually staring at each other, they tossed their heads; but then, recollecting their gentility, and the courtesies of the sick chamber, they both dropped a low curtsy, and in a tone none the less tart that it was subdued, saying, "No offence, I hope." "Certainly not, mem." The one waddled to her easy chair, and the other, beckoning to the still weeping woman to follow her, swept out of the room.

The ringing was repeated; it was the library bell, and the footman, encountering Mrs Flutterly in the hall, looked past her with a stare at her companion, and said, "If your name is Compton, you're wanted in the library; there's a man there says he's your husband." Without waiting for another word, the young woman ran like a lapwing past Flutterly, across the hall, and through the door the servant opened, and without noticing any other object, ran at once into the arms of a tall, shabbily-dressed young man, who was standing in the middle of the room, and who, as he clasped her to him, said in a husky voice, one word, "Forgive." He could get out no more, or he would have broken down entirely.

Mr Tregloss was seated in his great library chair, his reading-easel on one side and a writing-table at the other, in delicious luxury; his slippered feet reposing on a large soft hassock. But his countenance by no means corresponded with the air of tranquil comfort around him. He had pushed aside both easel and writing-table, and now sat forward in his chair, stretching one hand towards the often rung bell, and raised the other in a threatening attitude; his face was very red, and the veins in his forehead were so

swollen, that their course might be traced on the shining bald head that was tossing in anger.

"What do you mean, fellow? Here, Martin, Tim, some of you go for the police. Go, I say. Is this—this scoundrelly canting fellow—an impostor—a thief, for anything I know—to come here with his talk about his wife? Go, I say."

"Pardon me, sir," said the young man, "there's no need. I am going. I only explained, sir, that I came for my wife."

"My child's nurse, fellow, sent by Dr Sootherly?"

"My wife, sir."

"Don't bandy words with me."

"Don't presume to speak to master," chimed in Flutterly.

"Oh, sir," said the young woman, "it is my fault—all my fault. I was unhappy—that is, impatient. George was unfortunate; he was not himself, I'm sure; and when he went away so, and did not come back—in my misery they persuaded me. Oh, I was very wrong! to go to Dr Sootherly, and offer myself as a nurse. I only went yesterday, and never knew how hard it would be to part from my own child, I was so excited."

"And more shame for you," said Flutterly, indignantly. "Excited, indeed! You're not fit not to be a nuss, not you. Why, sir, she owned to drink having brought her here just now; I was a questioning of her, not over-liking her ways and her looks."

"Drink!" interrupted the young man. "Yes, I own it; I made her home miserable, and drove her mad by my desertion."

"None of your cant; no scenes here," shouted Mr Tregloss.

"Please, sir, here's the policeman," said Martin the butler, coming in panting for breath, and ushering the blue-coated functionary of the law into the library.

In the moments that had elapsed since Mr Tregloss had called so furiously on his servants, that gentleman had been visited by a little touch of reflection, and the question that popped into his head now was, "What charge can I make?" The man and woman before him were both in the same story, that they belonged to each other; and unless there had been some deception, even the rich Mr Tregloss could not pretend to detain a married woman against the will both of her husband and herself. Besides, as Flutterly remarked, "She was not fit to be a nurse." He could not have his house invaded, and his child's health risked, by such a person. So, assuming his loftiest air, he said to the policeman—

"Clear my house of these people instantly. I decline to make any charge. Go."

The wife had clung to her husband's arm, and the latter, holding her tightly, and bending his head respectfully to Mr Tregloss, said—"All I asked, sir, was to be permitted to take my wife, and go."

"There, fellow, no words," said Mr Tregloss.

"Take them away, policeman," said Mrs Flutterly; "take them away. Such riff-raff a pretending to come to nuss our dear, precious, angel of a young master! Why, I declare if it doesn't beat the globe."

What Flutterly meant by "beating the globe," no one ever inquired; but it was her usual climax when her oratory had risen to the perplexing altitude of the superlatives. Like some wiser folks, she found the high latitudes of talk embarrassing, and so rounded off her period with what she evidently thought was a poser.

Meanwhile the young man and woman, attended by the policeman, made their retreat from the room and the house, leaving Mr Tregloss panting, and his servants, taking their cue from him, acting all sorts of gestures of indignation.

"Air you really going to let them off? Ain't you going to punish them—the good-for-nothing, low, drunken—yes, that they owned, too—drunken wretches?"

"Silence," said Mr Tregloss. Then he added, as if to himself, "The profligacy of the lower orders is disgusting—disgusting."

At this moment, a carriage drew up to the front door, and the retreating Flutterly stepped back towards her master with the words—

"Oh, here's Dr Sootherly, sir; hadn't he better come in and see you, sir, about that creetur which he sent, and which has been allowed to go;—though what prisons is for, or laws is for, if they kind of owdacious cattle isn't to be took to, passes me."

"Yes, yes; Dr Sootherly by all means," said Mr Tregloss, waving his hand impatiently; but before the Dr could cross the hall, in came Mrs Squabb, the cook, with a message from that awful functionary, the nurse.

"Please, sir, Mrs Dossett won't be answerable for the consequences, if the bells isn't muffled."

"Then why don't you and Flutterly, instead of talking, muffle them?" said Mr Tregloss, adding, "Who dares ring?"

"Please, sir, if I may be so bold, it was your bell what has rung, and is a tang-tanging like a race-hoss of a echo through mississ's room."

"Law-to-goodness, Squabb, don't be a tormenting master so; ain't I going to see to the bells? I told Mrs Dossett so; but them drunken ruffians has so put me out, and what with the night I've had, and the—"

Mr Tregloss chafed at all this tumult in his usually orderly dwelling, and would have silenced intrusion with his wonted stiff coldness, but for once the womankind had their own way. It was a feminine Saturnalia, and they all, down to the young scullery-girl, who had been hired but a week, were—to use the coachman's expression—"so up in the stirrups about the young 'un, and had so got the whip-hand of master, there was no stopping of 'em."

Dr Sootherly did not prove an ally that could reinstate Mr Tregloss's authority, for he was accustomed to rule the feminalities by the tenderest softness of speech and manner. He was a little, fair, dapper man, with a scented, trim, creamy smoothness of dress and manner, that reminded one of almond soap. He glided into the library with the softest step, saw all the discomposure of the master and servants without the slightest appearance of thinking it unusual; and when Mr Tregloss told him, in a hurried manner, and with a half-implied censure, of the strange conduct of the nurse he had sent them, and whom, indeed, the doctor had observed leaving the door, and divined the cause, he said, with the utmost calmness, "Nothing unusual in that. These people are always troublesome; evils to be endured. If I send you another to-day, she may be claimed, if she is married, before the night is over."

"Then what is to be done, doctor?" said Mr Tregloss, aghast, and beginning to feel his fatherly anxieties rather irksome.

"Patience, my dear sir, pa-ti-ence. I'll tell you." This was spoken in the most deliberate way, the two white hands stretched out deprecatingly, and the voice lowered to a sort of lullaby. "We must not be hasty. You were so very—what shall I say? so *exigeant*, that I sent for this young woman at once—I had seen she was a young healthy person."

"A drunkard," interposed Mr Tregloss.

"Hum, ha—pa-ti-ence." The Dr divided the syllables, and breathed through them as he spoke.

"Sad vice—lower orders terribly addicted to excess; but I was about to say, with all deliberation, that perhaps the hospital is the best place to procure a nurse."

"The hospital!" said Mr Tregloss, amazed.

"Oh, not a sick hospital, a maternity."

"Oh, I understand, certainly." His hand was on the bell, but the doctor stretched out both his, and putting them in an allaying manner on Mr Tregloss's arm, added—

"Leave it; the infant will take no harm for a few hours—and I'll send a note by Mrs Tregloss's maid—a confidential person, I think, eh? and she can see and select from the matron and surgeon's recommendation. No difficulty in life; if one does not suit, another is soon found."

"I should have liked a widow, doctor, or a woman whose own child had died; somehow I fancy one takes something worse than the plagues of Egypt into one's house when nurses come in—but Mrs Tregloss is so delicate."

"De-ci-ded-ly—quite out of the question for her to nurse, if the child is to thrive."

"Then we'll send at once," interposed Mr Tregloss, with an access of impatience.

"I'll just look in upstairs, and see how all is going on, and then—"

Gliding with his soft step out of the room, he left Mr Tregloss to expend his energy in breaking up the fire, rubbing his hands, walking restlessly up and down, skirmishing with the newspaper, commencing attacks on the bell, and then hastily remembering the order for quiet, recoiling from its

touch ; and performing all those exercises that an irritable man, unsettled from his usual routine, generally resorts to.

While Dr Sootherly is talking to his patient and her nurse, not forgetting (cautious functionary that he was), all due respect to Mrs Flutterly, the confidential maid, who could be either his useful ally or subtle enemy in that house ; and while Flutterly—bridling with the thought, “Dr Sootherly said he could trust to my judgment—I should think he could!”—is putting on her bonnet and shawl, and sallying forth to the hospital, we will anticipate her visit, and introduce our readers to a House of Life.

CHAPTER II.

A PEEP INTO AN INTERIOR.

IN a populous district of the Surrey side of the metropolis—not particularly celebrated for either pure air or water—certainly not for quiet—there stands a massive, commodious, square brick house, with clean door-steps and spacious portico in front, and outside blinds to the windows, which are most numerous at the sides of the building. It is quite curious to think, or it would be if the passers-by knew or cared about the matter—how many eyes first saw the light from the fourth window of the left side of that mansion. That window lights a private room, midway between two of the wards, sacred to sorrow and peril, life and joy.

It is a solemn thing to pass an hospital and think of what is doing and suffering within. The majority of passengers have very little time and no inclination for such thoughts—and many have the blessed gift of thinking only how such

institutions comfort and cure. And if, indeed, to some minds the surgeon's knife is present in shadowy horror, like Macbeth's dagger—and a ghastly groan seems to throb on the air, and to vibrate through them, as with a cold shudder they pass on, no such thrill quivers in their nerves as they look upwards at a house of relief and refuge for poor mothers. That is scarcely an hospital—it is a nursery rather, and a cheerful glow comes over the kind heart, and quickens its generous beat as the thought arises of the good wives and mothers aided in a pressing exigency. The erring or the wronged one—helped for once to retrieve, if possible, the first stumble—a task of all others the most difficult. Not one, perhaps, of the hundreds of human beings passing that “House of Life” thinks of the inmates with the compassion felt for the sick in other hospitals. And yet when a happy mother recollects the preparation in her own loving home for the new arrival, how it was indispensable that she should get acquainted with nurse before-hand, and how the kindly greetings of the doctor whom she had known from childhood, were so cheering; and how some sister Anne, or cousin Jane, or anxious mother, must be sure to be ready; how the fond husband must be more punctual than ever on his return from business, or must be sure to leave exact word where he may be found at any hour of the day; how all disturbances as far as possible must be removed from house and street: the cosy bedroom, the quiet tread, the shaded light, the still voices like dew, the looks of love like soft sunshine, the care and comfort within, the muffled knocker and the heaped straw without,—and with all this, the anxiety, the risk, the pain that is inevitable. Then, oh reader! think of the poor mother caught in the fierce grasp of a new agony—with a dim, indefinite horror creeping over her, which she must struggle

with and hasten to leave her home. Her thriftily prepared bundle is ready—where is her husband? It may be, in the best cases, ready also, with his strong arm to support her tottering steps, and wiping the big drops that start on his own brow; it may be far off at work, and no word of farewell can be said; it may be alas! in the public-house, and unable to steady his own steps, or to comprehend, much less to sympathise. Perhaps there's money for a cab, and the journey to the friendly door is soon made, long as it may seem. But often there is a bewildered tramp, one hardly knows how, through the streets—every step as though on a burning ploughshare. "Will the place never come? Will the walk never end?" Yes, there's the door at last. Then the parting, mostly silent, for the woman stifles her breath, and the man—if he be a man and not a brute—a sob. Sometimes, though, there's a charge—"Take care of little Tom while I'm away," is gasped through shut teeth by the mother. "Aye, aye, keep up your spirits," is the hasty rejoinder as the father and husband rushes out. "But these are poor people, used to hardships," you say. It may be so; but there has been many a tough tug at the heart strings in that hospital entrance-hall, rely on it.

The door is shut, the patient is helped upstairs. All is strange. Cold faces, used as a matter of business to *see* pain until they almost forgot what it is to *feel* it, are there. All is calm, orderly, business like. The nurse has plenty to do, and does it well. But the poor patient closes her eyes to shut out the faces that look so indifferent, or so hard to her, and she yearns to lay her head for one moment on her mother's bosom, to clasp her sister by the hand. Nay, an old acquaintance, or a despised gossip, would be a light in her darkness; some one she had once known, to bear a dying message to those she loves—for die she thinks

she must of that very strangeness, if of nothing else. Used or not used to it, depend upon it poverty is a bitter draught, and its worst dregs are wrung out by poor women. Bodily pain has however one advantage, it takes the fine edge off mental anguish; or if the two subsist together, they help to neutralize each other, for pain, say the philosophers, "cannot go beyond a certain point;" and comfortable people who know practically nothing about pain, think that is a very consolatory assurance. Those who have a prescience, however dim, of what a great pyramid may be piled before that point is reached which goes no further, are not particularly cheered by the thought of the long progress before reaching the sharp conclusion.

To return to our hospital; one thing is certain, that notwithstanding all troubles, recovery there is the rule, and death the rare exception; that cleanliness, order, and rest, which could not be had in a crowded London home, contribute both to comfort and health; and the first misery over, all ordinary cases do well, and many a mother pays far more than one visit to its sheltering walls. Certain it was that the visitor who entered one of the upper wards on that October day, 183—, the exact year, beyond a score back, is of no consequence—could not think it a very melancholy scene, for the room was airy and cheerful. Six clean little beds were ranged around—two between the spaces of the three windows—the others, two on each side of the blank walls. The fire-place, with just enough fire to be pleasant on a cool day, faced the windows. A high iron fire guard fenced in the fender, and forbade a selfish appropriation of the warmth. Clean deal chairs were ranged about the room, and a large deal table, as white nearly as ivory, standing on a floor scarcely less white in the middle of the ward, completed the furniture; except that at the

foot of every bed was a deal box or locker, painted white, which held the clothes of each patient, and, being lower than the chairs and, moreover, allowing a lean against the bed, were in great favour as seats for the convalescent. Of the six patients all were nearly recovered, one only being unable to sit up. Three common, hard-featured women, looking, probably from hardship, older than they really were, were lounging on the lockers, or half reclining on the beds. They were talking in a low, murmuring voice, evidently grumbling—"to think of there not being a single drop allowed! it's a burning shame—that's what it is." "Oh but we can get it on the sly, if we've only the money," said another. "Ah," rejoined the third, "that's about it. The money's the plague, or else 'night nus' would a' brought it, but we're shut in here, and no gettin' anything comfortable." From these and other mutterings it was evident that gin and gratitude were both scarce articles just then; not that the two have any affinity;—indeed the name of the former, to say nothing of its actual presence, is apt to annihilate the latter.

There were two other patients seated close together at the table, conversing in a low, earnest tone. They were both young, and one was really beautiful. Yes! despite the hideous night-cap that half covered her delicate face, and the coarse black shawl that wrapped her form, it was easy to see that nature had been at one of her old democratic tricks, and in spite of fortune and social distinction, had chiselled in exact proportion the fair Grecian brow, nose, and lips—darted a gleam of lambent light into the deep blue eyes—decorated with rich pale golden hair the well-arched head, so hidden by the slouched linen cap—tinted with the faintest rose the transparent skin—rounded the white throat, and set it on the shoulders with so just a

poise that a duchess might have envied its pliant grace and somewhat haughty curve. The thick rough shawl and rusty gown were even more disfiguring than the dowdy head gear, yet they could not conceal the fact that the form they draped was tall, and as yet slender, from extreme youth. The exceeding beauty was so manifest, that the eye of the observer would not be likely to gaze very anxiously for the soul's manifestations. It was a face that revealed only its outward beauty. The delicate eyelids, with their long fringes, drooped over the eyes directly they began to kindle. The mouth wore its constant and symmetrical curve, and the brow its cold serenity. The young woman who was talking to this calm beauty was small in person, voluble and energetic in speech and gesture, though the unmistakable evidence of great recent suffering was shewn in her pallid hue and the sharpened outline of her naturally round face. Her dark eyes seemed full of feeling, ready to flash with mirth or melt with tenderness, while her face varied its expression with nearly every word she uttered. On her lap, lay an infant half dozing, and she held it as she spoke. Her hands were fondly smoothing its little bed-gown, or dallying softly on its wax-like fingers. "Oh, Mrs Smith, I'm astonished how you can be so dull and so cold-like when you've such a dear, sweet, beautiful baby as this. To be sure it's very hard to be a widow—very—and you so young; but God sent this dear darling to be a comfort to you—to be sure he did; and you to wish him dead as I heard you. Oh, it's dreadful. I wish he was mine," she added, weeping outright. "I wish he was," was the reply, in a low but hard voice, "for I know not what to do with him—where to go when I leave this. You know nothing of me, Mrs Stubbs, and why do you accuse me?"

"I know, I suppose," fired up the little woman, "what a woman's and a mother's heart is. I hope I know that. Have'n't I been married five years, and my husband one of the best of men, only he has his little faults—but that's one's affair that I know of"—here she looked round deliberately for a moment—"and I always said, and I'll stand to it, if Adolphus, that's my husband's name, had children, he'd be a different man. I don't mean that he isn't a good man, but I mean that he'd stay at home more. He's very clever, poor fellow, that's his temptation. Well, and at last you see I had a hope; and to think of leaving my Adolphus and coming in here—I fancied the quiet of the place would be best for the baby—and then to lose it after all, and Adolphus never yet been to enquire after me, nor yet written. And if he should come, and of course he will, only to think of having to tell him that my little girl, my child, that I've wanted for years for, is dead! And to see you grieving over life, in your dreadful still way, as much as I do over death, oh I can't contain myself, that I can't."

"Hush, hush."

"I won't hush! I tell you I can't."

"But I've promised you shall have mine to nurse, if I get a situation in a nursery—"

At that moment, the door opened, and the nurse came in, saying—

"Let's see; it's you, Mrs Smith, that wants to go into a gentleman's fam'ly as nurse, is'nt it?"

The young woman lifted her head with sudden animation and said, "Yes."

"Ah, Mr Munroe has been a praising your baby, and I'm to take it down into the matron's parlour. We've got a very smart body there, come from some lady out o' town somewheres. She's in a grand hurry. The ladies' maids

always makes a bigger fuss than the ladies themselves. There, be quick, and give him to me, and put yourself a bit strait; she'll want to see you, though she declined coming into the ward. Let's see, you're a widder?"

The young woman bent her head, but, if she was about to speak, Mrs Stubbs prevented her by saying—

"Well, it seems to me a sin and a shame, fanning that pretty dear through a passage and down stairs; there'd be a pretty fuss if their own child was taken out so, and only a fortnight old—pretty dear."

"Never you mind, Mrs Stubbs," said the nurse pompously, "gentlefolks is gentlefolks, and 'as a right to their ways, if they can afford to pay for 'em;" and so saying she swung out of the room with the baby hastily muffled up in her arms.

"Well, I'm sure," said one of the women who had been bewailing the want of her grand catholicon, gin, "if you're not a precious fool, Mrs Stubbs, I never seed one, and I should think I've looked on enough in my time to know the breed pretty well."

"Fool indeed! and why?" said the little woman, good-temperedly. "Why? a taking off that ere big, thick shawl of yourn, when the child's own mother, that's far better and stronger than you, has never moved a fold of hern, nor would'nt put herself in danger for a moment to save its life—not she—the proud 'stuck-up thing.'" The two matronly cronies of this virago laughed and nodded their heads approvingly. Meanwhile the subject of their remarks had gone to a chair at her bedside, in the far corner of the room, and either did not, or would not, hear the abuse that was none the less liberally bestowed because obliged to be spoken in a low voice.

Mrs Stubbs, meanwhile, without heeding their jeers, was

following the promptings of her nature, and that led her to the bed of the last comer in that ward, where, smoothing the pillow, and administering the composing draught, the busy little simpleton's heart found comfort.

In the matron's parlour, Mrs Flutterly was seated, having presented Dr Sootherly's letter. The hospital surgeon had given his testimony to the health and efficiency of the widow Smith. The aged matron and her niece, the latter really acting as matron, had added their confirmation, and were presenting the last report of the institution—a subscription in such cases as the providing a family with a healthy nurse being expected—when the infant was brought in and duly examined. The lady's maid touching with her gloved hands Mrs Stubbs' poor old shawl, as if afraid of it, though it was as clean as it was coarse; and beyond a passing glance at the infant, noticing much more the shabby clothes which so contrasted with the little heap of lace and lawn that she had recently left, that she said loftily to the matron—

“I can't never be expected to understand the looks of this child, it's so very different from ours; to be sure, that's only reasonable, as it should be; but if you, sir, say it's healthy, and the mother, and will give me a note to Mr Tregloss to that effect. The husband is dead?”

“The young woman is a widow,” said the matron.

“Ah, that's a good job, for the husbands of all the baby nurses as I've known, comes a worritin and a tormentin to the house, and it takes no end of half-crowns to buy 'em off, and it generally ends by their coming drunk, as one did this very morning to our house, and demanding the wife, and walking hoff with 'er.”

“When ladies do not nurse their own children, there follows all sorts of inconvenience,” said the young doctor

as he walked away, apparently tired with the airs of Mrs Flutterly, who muttered—

“Ladies indeed nurse there own! oh, that’s not to be expected. What’s money for, mem, if them as hev it air to fatigue theirselves, and get their dresses crumpled, and their figgers spilled?”

“Will you see the woman,” interposed the matron, without referring to Flutterly’s remarks. As this was necessary, the lady’s maid with mincing steps mounted the staircase, saying to the nurse who preceded her—

“Not into the ward, pray. You can call her on to the landing-place, or anywhere; what the doctor ses is quite enough, only I must see her and take her back with me.”

“We have a dining-room on this floor for convalescents,” said the matron’s niece, who had followed; and turning to the left at the top of the stairs, the door of a room was thrown open, and there, already seated, was the widow Smith.

Her disfiguring garb was much more apparent to the eyes of Flutterly than her natural advantages, and she made her mental comment as to the circumstances of the wearer. Her enquiries referred merely to health. “You’re able to go at once, and you won’t have to do much packing, I s’pose?”

“At once?” said Mrs Smith.

“Yes,” they’re a waiting at Swillinberg House—that’s Mr Tregloss’s mansion—they’re a-waiting for my immediate return. You can get ready and come, and your things can be sent after you.”

“Have you got any one to take your baby?” said the matron’s niece.

“Yes—Mrs Stubbs.”

“Ah, I heard she wanted a nus-child,” remarked the

nurse, "and her own a-dyin' gives youn a better chance. I shouldn't wonder as she takes to it as if it was her own."

Mrs Flutterly waved her hands impatiently, as if she thought all discussion about the disposal of the woman's baby quite superfluous; indeed, whether it lived or died could be no matter to any body, except, indeed, if it did die, the mother would be lucky.

There was an immediate bustle on the part of Mrs Smith, who instantly returned to the ward where Mrs Stubbs, who had often so comforted herself before, was nursing the baby at her own kindly bosom, and who heard with evident satisfaction that her offer to take it would be immediately accepted. The contents of the locker turned out into a bundle handkerchief comprised all the packing needed by the young widow; while the other women gathered into a knot, and each clasping her baby, said — "Ah, would I leave you, my precious? No, not for oceans of gold!" which strange figure of speech was far more true than if they had said, for drops of gin—for Bacchus would assuredly triumph over Mammon—and the poor souls in their hearty despising of the temptation they saw another yielding to, forgot that which would most likely overpower themselves. But, in this, they did no more than wiser folk do every day.

As much to prevent any ill-natured comments on the leave-taking of the mother from her child, Mrs Stubbs tottered with it to the outside of the ward-door, and there held it up to the young woman, saying, "I'll take every care of it, Mrs Smith, as if it was my own blessed little precious—that's been dead a week come Friday—and I shall go out to-morrow, for I'm miserable about Adolphus—miserable. Not that I'll fret to hurt this dear baby; let's

see, the child was half-baptized on Monday, his name's—what? I forget."

"Lawrence."

"Ah, I shall call him Lorry, that sounds more like a baby's name; there, kiss him, and mind my direction—5 Mount Pleasant Street, West, Vauxhall Road—you won't forget; and where's yours?"

"Make haste," said Flutterly, coming on to the landing, and, catching the enquiry for the address, added—

"Mrs Smith, you'll tell this person as she mustn't think of bringing the child to Swillinberg House; it ain't allowed. I manages the domestics, and no followers is my rule; so, good woman, remember."

"Oh, I'm not likely to come, I can tell you," said Mrs Stubbs, colouring up.

"You can write, or get some one to write for you," said Mrs Flutterly, adding, "I hope we shall have no nonsense of fretting."

The mother bent over the child so assiduously pushed up to her face by Mrs Stubbs, and gave it a calm, mechanical sort of kiss as the word "fretting" was spoken by Flutterly. There was a sigh heaved by Mrs Stubbs, that implied a doubt whether the poor, dulled, or hardened heart, that beat in Mrs Smith's bosom had enough of nature in it to "fret" after anything.

In a few moments, the parting was over. Mrs Flutterly, followed by the widow, got into a fly, and, directing the driver to lose no time, began at her leisure to question the widow, her chief question being about her husband; and she heard, much to her satisfaction, that he had been dead four months. She also elicited that the widow was very poor, and that the bundle with her contained all she possessed in the world. But these communications were

not made freely. The words seemed dragged out. It was evident, whatever failings the young woman might have, talkativeness was not one.

An hour's drive brought them to Swillinberg House. Mr Tregloss had remained at home all day; and now, before the new arrival was ushered up stairs to her nurseling, he had given orders that she should come into the library.

Traces of the morning's agitation were still on Mr Tregloss's face. He looked flushed and nervous. The rusty black garb of Mrs Smith attracted his notice, and he instantly said—

"Oh, you're not in trouble, are you? I can't allow any nonsense of that kind. What's your name—what's your husband?" The utterances were made in a hasty, impetuous manner.

"I have no husband."

"She's a widow, sir, if you please," said Flutterly, blandly, handing a note from the doctor as she spoke.

"Oh, a widow," said Mr Tregloss, glancing over the doctor's certificate of the woman's healthy efficiency for her office; "that's satisfactory. So Mrs — oh, Smith, is it? Ha! I don't like that name. I shall call you, let's see, I shall call you after a nurse I had when a child—Foster. Well, now, Foster, if you take care of my son, great care—I expect all in this house to see to it that great care is exercised—you'll have liberal treatment—liberal, and I shall be your friend."

This was said with an air of lofty condescension, and then Mrs Flutterly took her charge up stairs, and Mrs Dossett was duly informed of all particulars, while the widow was laying off her bonnet and shawl, in a room that opened out of the same landing as Mrs Tregloss's bed and dressing-room, and that was designed for a nursery.

As the important ruler of the sick-room had had no share in hiring the nurse, she chose to indulge in a little ill-natured suspicion, saying—"A widder,—oh, there's plenty as gives themselves out for widders as 'ud be fine and puzzled if their marriage lines was asked for—widder, indeed!"

Perhaps this doubt did Mrs Smith, or Foster, as in obedience to Mr Tregloss we must henceforth call her, good, by enlisting Flutterly in her favour, the lady's maid feeling bound to stand by the person she had hired, and thinking her discernment reflected on by Dossett. Indeed, as is mostly the case, there was a sort of civil war carried on between the two chief functionaries of the sick chamber and the dressing-room. And though when Foster had removed her heavy bonnet and rusty cloak, and put a little cap on her head that failed to conceal the folds of her abundant hair, her looks would, under other circumstances, have been an offence to Flutterly—now, out of the spirit of contradiction to the old nurse, she was received most graciously; and when Mrs Dossett, looking at her, said, "Why, bless me, you're a mere gal; you a widder, indeed; why you must ha' married a'most afore you finished shedding your teeth. Why you can't be above seventeen."

"Law, Nurse, how you talk; goodness gracious—seventeen, indeed—now I should think Mrs Foster was about my age, or a little less perhaps; about five-and-twenty; I'm two years older than that."

"Oh, you're seven-an-twenty! Mrs Flutterly; ah, your years don't favour you."

"Some people ain't no judge of age. When the hi sight is as good as gone, how can anybody tell, pray? But there, I must bring a good tumbler of something to keep the cold out, Mrs Foster, and make you warm and comfortable before you take our baby, and cook shall send you

up something nice—what shall it be, eh? There's our baby," drawing up the embroidered curtain of his little cradle, and displaying him. If a pang shot through the heart of the young woman as she looked at the innocent supplanter of her child, she made no remark, but gazed steadily on the infant for which she was to perform the maternal office.

While she settles into her duties, we may leave her with her prosperous nursing. In a few days all was restored to its wonted order in Swillinberg House. Money had been advanced to Foster, to clothe her according to the ideas of nursery fitness prevailing in Mr Tregloss's establishment; and, though in her secret heart Flutterly was annoyed at the appearance of the stranger so suddenly taken, according to the strange customs of society, into the bosom of the family (indeed in that matter it was an exchange of bosoms), the quietness of the young woman propitiated the lady's-maid. She knew very well that Mrs Tregloss was to be managed by a little well-prepared and well-applied flattery, and Mr Tregloss by great outward deference and obsequiousness, and she observed that Foster was by no means skilful at either process.

While things are thus adjusting themselves at the mansion, we will return to little Mrs Stubbs, who, by the rules of the hospital, as soon as she obtained a nurse-child, was required to leave, though she was far too weak really to make the attempt to reach her home. But her anxiety about her husband was so great that probably her health suffered more by passive waiting than it would by making more active efforts at obtaining the solution of her constant mental inquiries—"What can be the reason Adolphus has not written to me, or sent? Something must have happened to him, poor fellow."

CHAPTER III.

WOMAN AND HER MASTER.

ADOLPHUS STUBBS was one of those persons to whom "something" is always "happening." He was an ill-used, unappreciated man. He was very well inclined to make this world his tavern, or his dancing-saloon, or his spouting club ; but unhappily, as he was unwilling to make it his workshop—and fortune, malignant jade! had not made it his gold mine, with a vein in full work ready for him, he was frustrated perpetually in his intentions. Moreover, by some strange fatality, every advantage that is reckoned a blessing in any other man's lot, somehow became a curse in his. He had a good person—big black eyes, and great black whiskers, and was so tall, that a critical milkwoman once described him as being "as hairystocrakick as a life guardsman," a compliment peculiarly pleasant to him, as he boasted of being a democrat. For every body knows democracy is never so mollified and flattered as when it is taken for aristocracy. Moreover, his personal attractions were aided by gifts sometimes thought mental indicators—a good voice and good memory. He had been reared by a widowed mother, who worked night and day for years, so that her darling Adolphus might not work at all. When, at last, she bethought her that the priggish, or nothing-to-do qualification of gentility, was really very expensive, she sought out something that would be as gentlemanly as possible for him ; so he became a copying-clerk in an attorney's office ; spending his earnings, scanty enough to be sure, on his dress, his mother still maintaining him, and having, as a reward for becoming his laundress

and valet, the pleasure of looking out of the window after him on Sundays, when he sallied into the park. To think of asking him to walk to church with her!—why, her humility never expected such a thing! The very idea was scouted as preposterous. Meanwhile the orphan daughter of a neighbour came to lodge with her—a milliner—smart, as befitted her art; pretty, as endowed by nature. She heard (this little Kate, the milliner) Adolphus's praises every day; she caught a glimpse of his raven curls every night; for though his hours were late, she worked long hours too, or how could she live? Ah, was it to be wondered at that when Adolphus asked her to walk with him in the park, and she adjusted her smartest little gown, and her bewitching marvel of a summer bonnet, and reached up to his arm, and tripped at his side, looking up so high, so high to his face,—her heart, rather a disproportionately large concern, fairly lost its balance, and toppling over, fell really and truly in love. Adolphus was not likely to meet with any such foolish mischance. A good, heavy ballast of selfishness kept his heart steady and cool. He was flattered, though, by the prettiest girl he had as yet known really falling so prostrate at the feet of his loftiness. It was satisfactory, as confirming his good opinion of himself, and creditable to her taste and discernment. He had long been a talker, but never to such a listener as this little Kate. And as she heard him repeat pieces out of the plays he had seen—for he was sentimental and a play-goer—he really fancied her upward look was charming. What a capitally good substitute for love is gratified vanity? And yet, like Brummagem substitutes for silver, it must be used with care, or verdigris will gather, and you have, like purchasers of these imitations, not only a spoon, but a poison. Well, after amusing himself a considerable time, maintaining his

dignity by a proper amount of carelessness and indecision, always duly increasing in proportion to her tenderness and anxiety, the death of his mother at last fixed the handsome Adolphus. What was he to do? Every button on his shirts pleaded with him to take a wife, and their plea was irresistible. So he took Kate, certain "She'd be as good as a dog to him."

Oh, happy little milliner, with your huge prize! A pretty life-task is yours. First of all to smoothe the rough road—to remove every pebble, to put soft wool slippers on the darling's feet, and then to coax and beg him to step aright; and if he does so, what a shout of joy hails the prodigy.

How gaily the little creature worked; love-strengthened and inspired, I should say if I were genteel and sentimental. Her caps and bonnets were so pretty, for all her fancies brightened with her happiness, that she had soon an excellent business. But, alas, copying didn't agree with the health of dear Adolphus, so he gave it up; and though he afterwards had, at intervals, tried many things, still no occupation agreed so well with him as doing nothing. Yet that was toilsome, too, for it involved, in Adolphus's case, attending a certain forum, next door to one of the finest taverns, where a debating society held their deliberations; or visiting the Rotunda, in the Blackfriar's-road, where, at that time, a predecessor of our modern secularists held forth. The "Devil's Chaplain," as he was called, did duty diligently, as became the servant of such a master. Or Adolphus would be listening drowsily to the weekly homily which a free-thinking gin-spinner of Holborn dispensed at Moorfields every Sunday. Clever man, that gin-spinner. Not content with making the bodies of his disciples succumb to his spirit all the week, on Sunday he made their spirits

succumb to his body of divinity (for there was certainly no soul in it). Then there were the edifying mysteries of socialism (Owenism as it was called then) to fall back upon in spare time. These matters, with cigars to assist mental digestion, and a concert or a play, now and then, as a stimulant, kept life from becoming stagnant, and gave plenty of employment early and late to the little milliner's fingers.

'Twas curious to hear her logic on the subject. "Adolphus was so clever that he was wanted at every meeting. Oh! they can do nothing without him. How could he stay at home of an evening; wasn't it dreadfully dull for him when she was always at work? And as to that copying, why it was not only killing him by inches, but to think of *his* talents wasted in copying!" But at length, notwithstanding all her efforts, poverty made just a rent sufficient to let in a glimmer of painful light upon the mind darkened by one huge idol. "Ah, there's something wrong, certainly; but he'll be better; he is young yet (to be sure she was two or three years younger); it's natural to a young man to be a little, just a little thoughtless—every day will mend that." One day she saw Adolphus notice the child of a neighbour, and the sight flashed at once a new idea into her mind. "Oh! if she had a child her home would be cheerful then." Year after year passed; the once decent, thrifty home began to look bare and desolate. They moved, for cheapness, into a dingier street, and Kate fell ill. She was fairly angry with herself for doing so, but she was conscious, meanwhile, that she nearly lost her life by being neglected, (though how could Adolphus help that, he couldn't turn nurse, *he*, a man!) so when, at length, after five years of matrimonial blessedness, Kate's desire for trying a childish experiment on her husband, as a means

of curing any little defects of character that he had manifested, was in the way of being realised, she resolved—fearing not for herself but for the child—to get admission to the Hospital; and as she took all the trouble on herself of getting the letter, and appearing before the board, Adolphus consented to her plan, provided it was kept a secret. In fact, new prospects were opening before him. He was just then preparing a maiden speech, on the great question of human irresponsibility, and he was studying very attentively the attitudes and voice of a favourite actor, great in the brigand and banditti line at the Surrey Theatre, intending to give an improved copy on the platform of the Rational Hall. How could he condescend to such matters as just then troubled Kate? All he did—and, for an irresponsible being, it was the best plan—was to withhold his veto, and leave her to settle the matter as she chose. A decent pride kept Kate from telling any one about her plan. She went away, brave heart! alone in a cab, her husband being absent at a grand discussion; and those of her neighbours who troubled themselves about her doings, and noticed the little house being locked up, said they “supposed she had friends in the country, and was gone to them during her trouble; and right too, for her husband was a pretty beauty, and no mistake.” This compound did not seem to convey a very complimentary opinion of Adolphus.

Reader, if you have ever been sick among strangers, who felt no particular interest about you, you can understand what an aggravation to her inevitable sufferings it was, when the infant-life sighed itself away upon her bosom—fell blank, like the petals of an unopened flower, that no letter came from Adolphus—such beautiful letters as he could write!—and no call, although she worried the nurse with reiterated enquiries. And when the day came that

she was permitted to go into the reception room, though hardly able to crawl there, the hope of seeing him strengthened her; but no Adolphus came. So when the events recounted in the last chapter occurred, it was no wonder she was impatient, notwithstanding her weakness, to return home, for, as she justly said, "Work and, want were bad enough, but not so bad as worry."

The place which by a pleasant fiction Kate called by the kindly Saxon name of "Home," was situated in a nest of streets, behind the Vauxhall Road, near the swamp where the Penitentiary stands (certainly penitence could not well look uglier or more unwholesome), and these same crowded little streets seem fit places for childhood and youth to graduate in, before their reception into places like the penitentiary.

There was one well-built, commodious house in the street, flaring with light, and bright with paint and gilding; that was the gin-shop and tavern at the corner, facing both ways so as to see and be seen by all. By the wall that flanked the skittle ground, and extended some way down the street, there was a broad pavement where, all day long, groups of young gamblers swore, and quarrelled, and fought over buttons, to the admiration of the smaller fry who squatted on the curbstone, and dabbled their rags in the gutter. The houses were alike in their two-storied deformity; the colour of toad-stools—low, squat and dingy, with a single small window, like one blear eye, in the upper room. Occasionally there was an attempt, sometimes pretty successful, to coax a few flowers to look kindly on the dusty street. In one window there was a row of sickly geraniums, run up like reeds, and now all yellow-leafed and drooping. Indeed, in the spring and early summer, there were some bits of bloom and verdure even here. Ah, the grand houses fortunately

do not monopolise all the flowers—in this queer jumble of a world that we find bad, and rarely make better. Kate's parlour window, it must be confessed, now looked wretched; for a box of mignonette, whose fresh beauty had been a shrubbery to her all the summer, had quite run to seed and withered during her absence, and now seemed like a collection of rats' tails. A great spider had so completely covered with its web, the little six inches of black glass with gilt letters, that announced her name and trade, that it was quite a miniature Waterloo, covered with the heads and limbs of the slain, while the Iron Duke of a spider had impaled a large blue-bottle of a Napoleon in a remote corner as both a trophy and a terror.

Now, whatever the strength of spirit of the little milliner, she could never have walked the distance from the Hospital, and carried the light scrap of a baby; but, fortunately, a gentleman in a cart—yes, Kate called him a gentleman when speaking of the matter, and we endorse it—seeing how she tottered as she reached the bridge she had to cross on her way home, drew up, lifted her into the vehicle, and drove her to the corner of the street where she lived, full two miles out of his way. It was a kind deed, and therefore gentlemanly. Giddy and sick she reached her door, and the barber's wife opposite, with whom the key was deposited, with an exclamation of surprise came over to welcome her, and would have asked poor Kate into the house, but superstitiously feared receiving the first visit; for, according to the general belief of humble matrons, there will be a child born within the year in the dwelling honoured by the first call of a lady “just out.” Ah! those two words “just out,” how differently they sound in different ears,—in those of a West-end beauty at her first ball,—a thief emerged from prison,—or a poor body like our Kate.

Mrs Wiggson, the barber's wife, had good reason to decline the ominous visit, for she was doubtless tired of replenishing the gutter and pavement at the corner of the street, with living ornaments.

"Well! who'd have thought of your coming back so soon," said she, unlocking the door, and helping Kate into the desolate house. "But come in. Ah, there's no place like home," she added sentimentally, "if it's ever so homely." The truth of it was that the place did not look homely, for it was totally dismantled!

"Why, goodness me! where's all the furniture, Mrs Wiggson?" said Kate, looking round bewildered, and sinking down on the only old broken windsor chair that the room possessed.

"Oh, don't you know, my dear cretur, didn't Mr Stubbs write and tell you?"

"What?"

"That he has been appointed dublicate—no, that's not it—delegate, I mean, to the conference held somewheres a good bit off in the country—the Human Rights Society—yes, that's it; and so, as he had to raise the ready to go, he was obliged to sell the things. My husband, when he comes home, he'll tell you all about it. He says that Stubbs is a rising man; his speech, the night as you went away to your friends, was most beautiful. He said he spoke "as a man, a husband, and a father." Yes, them was the very words. Wiggson repeated 'em to me, and you know Wiggson knows about oratory, for he was valet to the great counsellor, Flaherty M'Lackerum, and used to hear him speak all his speeches to the looking-glass; that was when I was own lady's maid to the rich Mrs Mumpson, who married the counsellor."

"But," interposed Kate, for she had heard all about the

great counsellor and the widow many times before, "how is it that he has never written? Oh! surely he must be ill?"

"Well, I can only say that he did write a note when he came over for Wiggson to do his air, but when he was a-directing it he took a sudden thought, and said he wouldn't send sitch a short one, and crumpled it up. He meant to write to you from the conference where he was duplicate—lor' bless me, delegate, I mean, but duplicate comes so nat'ral, for I've got a many, and upon my life if some husbands was duplicates, I don't think they'd be worth taking out o' pawn."

While Mrs Wiggson was making this grim jest, it occurred to Kate that the reason Adolphus did not complete the note referred to, was a fear that the Hospital address would be seen, so she was silent. Not so Mrs Wiggson, who, however, while she talked, bustled about, found a few sticks and a coal or two in the cupboard, and made a fire. Kate could hardly understand how it was that her neighbour seemed so interested in "The Friends of Human Rights Society," but she was soon enlightened.

"Women under the present system are slaves, and no mistake," and the plan to take all the children, and make them the general property of the society, was the peculiar merit that had gained Mrs Wiggson's suffrage.

Kate hugged the little nurseling to her bosom involuntarily, as her neighbour talked. The woman saw the movement, and said, answering the action—

"Ah! that's your first; you come, like me, to have nine, seven of 'em boys, and two gals, cripples—gals! that might have been of some use—and have one neighbour a finding fault with their noise, and another a saying they breaks all the winders that ever is broke, and your husband a-blaming

it all upon you, and a-going off to the public-house in a huff; and see if you won't find out that it's a burning shame any but the rich should have children to bring up."

"Don't fly in the face of Providence."

"I don't; it's Providence flies slap in my face every day; though, Mrs Stubbs, your husband says no enlightened person would ever use the word Providence. I wonder you don't profit more by having sitch a companion."

"Why, I'm not at all clever, I know. Adolphus is above me, and when I ought to have been attending to him, I've been working, you know," said Kate, meekly, bending over the child.

By this time, the fire was smoking hopefully, and a noise in the street, of two boys fighting, disturbed the colloquy; and as Mrs Wiggson heard the bleat of one of her own lambs amid the fray, despite her Spartan avowals, she rushed off, leaving Kate rather relieved by her absence; for the little milliner had been too constant a worker to be any better as a gossip than she was as a philosopher. Dismantled as the place was, she set herself to put it into somewhat better order, shedding a few tears, that would ooze out, over the desolation. There were some broken and shabby remnants of furniture that wouldn't sell, and an old mattress had been left on the bedstead; so that as soon as Kate had made a resting-place for her charge, and refreshed herself with a cup of tea, she began, with characteristic hopefulness, to think of the future. Adolphus was to be a great man; that consoled her. She had always thought so. What were a few chairs and tables in comparison. No doubt he had been too busy. If he was really put in the way of rising at last, why never mind the furniture; she would work, and get more; her customers would always

employ her; she could have more work than she knew how to do, and would soon buy furniture.

As if to cheer her, that very night the landlady of the gin palace at the corner sent to her to make up her children's autumn bonnets; and as Mrs Bouncer, of "The Friend at Hand," spared no expense, it would be a capital job. The very next day Lizzy Wiggson, the humpbacked eldest child of the barber, was installed as the nurse of the baby, and Kate's fingers and fancy were busy with satin and velvet. True, her heart, little simpleton, yearned towards Adolphus with an aching fondness; but that pain was turned to joy when, in the evening, Wiggson entered, drawing out of his pocket, with an air equally pompous and mysterious, a crumpled printed paper, entitled—"The Tyrant's Scourge," which contained an account of the conference of "The Friends of Human Rights," and an abstract of the eloquent address of Adolphus Vernon, Esq.—(he dropped the more vulgar name); and the information that he and three others were appointed as a deputation, by the Central Human Rights' Association, to visit the trade societies and encourage them in their crusade against oppression. Certain public-houses were put down in a list, where the meetings were to be held, and "priestcraft, property, marriage, and superstition," were duly denounced as the foes of human progress. It is no wonder that Kate should think her Adolphus was nearly on the topmost rowel of the ladder of fame, and would soon kick down all who opposed him; when, in addition to this marvellous intelligence, came the testimony of Wiggson, that the paper he had brought had so alarmed the Government that it was fiercely prosecuted (for in those days the custom was to blow every spark into a flame by the breath of opposition), and he had purchased it in a shop where it was put down on the counter, not by

human hands, but a wooden spout, a method that so enhanced the demand, that what with the mystery and the danger, spouts were working continually.

Wiggson, the barber, was proud of his neighbour on many accounts. Adolphus had a good head of hair, and its curls had been as useful an advertisement for the barber as a block in the window; and he liked to hear the fledgeling speeches that Adolphus first let fly in his shop. It reminded poor Wiggson of other days. He considered himself a judge of oratory, and having once given his opinion that Adolphus had the "gift," he felt all the interest of a better on a race-course, in his success, though certainly in this case his ultimate loss or failure would make no difference to him. Wiggson, though a genuine cockney, had an acute ear, and he had grafted some of counsellor Flaherty M'Lackerum's sayings, and a little of his accent, on the parent stock of his London lingo. Poor fellow, it had been a rather expensive accomplishment to him! For, as he sang Irish songs with a brogue that passed among the cockney frequenters of certain free-and-easys, and, moreover, could speak a flowery speech that wandered all about and about a subject, like a wild convolvulus over a hedge; and was therefore in request at certain judge-and-jury clubs; and as he imitated the sublime contempt for economy that characterized his former master, his worldly affairs were often in a condition to justify the most eloquent and pathetic description. His wife, his "Norah Creina," as he called her ("Peggy" was her real name), rather imitated her poetical namesake in one particular—

Oh my Norah's gown for me,
That floats as free as mountain breezes—

and her other talents were of the same wild, sweet-briary

order. She had, as the poor fellow said, strewed his path with (human) flowers; but owing to the said flowers being wholly unpruned, they had as it were quite choked up the path; there was no getting along for them. He was, however, a general favourite and referee in the neighbourhood; and Kate's heart quite warmed to him, as he spoke of Adolphus.

"Oh, nivir fear, dear lady. Your husband is deshtined to pour a sthream of light that'll kindle as it flows—as my favourite poet says—

"Shooblime was the warrerning that liberty spoke."

"Dear me, Mr Wiggson, you are kind, you *do* cheer me."

Here the baby thought proper faintly to join in the conversation, and Kate took it from the little nurse. "Ah, ma'am, yer nurrising the son of a pathriot and a man of genius."

"Oh, Mr Wiggson," said Kate hesitating, "it's not"—

"Oh," continued the barber, preventing any explanation, "the son of my friend, yes!—the man that I'm proud to call my friend. Well, now, that I do call a likeness—none of yer old women's fancies, but the black brows of 'im as plain as if thraiced with compasses and Indian ink. But I must go. Give me the paper; I'll be proud and happy to let ye have it again, ma'am, but the customers will be wanting a glimpse, and it's delighted they'll be to see the triumphant success of my talented young friend."

So saying, and humming "Go where glory waits you," he hastened off, and then, for the first time—for she had been too hurried and anxious to give it a thought before—as Kate looked in the face of the baby she bethought her of the inevitable conclusions of the neighbours that the

child was her own. And, truly, she felt both pleased and flattered. She had never known how strong her wish for offspring was, until she was disappointed, and there was a something gratifying to her woman's heart in the maternal relation. Now I know that if Kate had been one of those wonders of moral loveliness that do right by instinct—that learn truth from the flowers, from the blue sky, from their own heart, from everything but the good old-fashioned Book, she would have either most virtuously at once explained all the case; or else she would have entered into a metaphysical disquisition, and discovered that as truth soars into a higher region than fact, it was psychologically true that the child was hers, for her soul had adopted it. But being as she was, a poor, blind, erring human being, with no clear heavenly light to guide her, and a heart that made her constantly stumble in her path of life, she followed such light as she had, and that was very dim and bewildering, and led her wrong. “They don't know any better, and I shan't tell them; and only to think Wiggson considers it like Adolphus; and certainly I do think it is—the more I look at it the more I think so. Dear me, and if it was but my very own,—what a comfort to Adolphus—and why should he know that it is not? Perhaps he might make me give it up to the mother, if he knew.” Here she clasped the child the closer and turned pale; “and how fortunate that I took the poor thing to my bosom, for I'm able to be as good as a mother to him; that's a good thing in keeping the secret. But if Mrs Smith should come for him—oh, it's not likely.” Then, like all persons whose standard of right is not ascertained by the light of divine truth, she began to appeal to expediency. “The poor thing has come where it was wanted; and as to Adolphus, I don't know; I've always told him

everything in my heart and mind; I shouldn't like a secret from him—yet he mightn't take to it, if he knew. Oh, dear, if my own sweet treasure had lived it would have saved my bothering my poor head; but for her sake, pretty soul! I shall be a mother to this. What a good thing I kept my own counsel, and never told any one here that I went into the hospital; but then the women in the hospital might meet me some time or other; still I never told any of 'em exactly where I lived; I may never set my eyes on one of them again. I wonder how Mrs Smith gets on? How young she was, and how quiet; I hate a woman without feeling." These and similar thoughts darted rapidly through the mind of Kate. Day passed after day, and she adhered to her plan of keeping the secret; the difficulty of divulging the truth being of course daily greater. Oh Truth! what are we poor insects, that we should weave our web of falsehood, and forget that the slightest touch of thy potent finger, and our schemes are rent into dusty, worthless films, to be swept away by the besom of destruction.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HUSBAND'S RETURN.

IN a fortnight's time, the little milliner's sitting-room looked much improved. It was certainly very scantily fitted up, but it was scrupulously clean, and the few household things, purchased by her earnings, were neatly arranged. A deal table in the centre, covered with a green baize, four chairs and a fender, with a strip of drugget for a hearth-rug, bore testimony to her ceaseless industry. She had been work-

ing nearly night and day for a city warehouse that supplied country milliners with models of the fashions. The coming winter Paris caps and bonnets brought over by the principal, had been imitated by the light hand and ready taste of Kate. She was known for honesty and punctuality, and part of her earnings had been advanced before they were due; and with these she paid her rent, and re-furnished her sitting-room in the humble way described. And now, daily, Adolphus was expected.

At length the great man came. He had not suffered pecuniary loss, for his travelling expenses had been paid by the committees of the various societies; and as many of the places were *en route*, there was a tolerable surplus. But on arriving in London his first visit had been to that great reformer—the tailor, and his allies the hatter and boot-maker, so that he came with a respectable cargo of baggage to his dwelling. Little Kate was hastily swallowing her tea, or rather the meal that to save time was both dinner and tea, when the wheels of a vehicle stopping at the door called up her gaze, and she saw the renowned Adolphus seated in the cab (all cabs were open then); and no victor on his triumphal car, in either old or modern times, was ever greeted with a heartier cry of *delight* than Kate uttered as she ran to open the door. And, sooth to say, Adolphus responded to her joy. It was so beaming, so hearty, so irresistible. For an instant even his eloquence was at fault, and instead of saying elegantly as he had intended, “My best beloved, we meet once more,” he stammered out “Kate, I’m sorry,” as if for the first time his neglect had flashed upon him. But there was not a pulse in that throbbing heart that fluttered like a wild bird upon his bosom that condemned him, so he checked his apologies, half wondering at his momentary folly, and gazing round the

place that looked smaller than ever to eyes now getting accustomed to large rooms, he said, recovering his dignity, "Control your feelings, my own heart's love, this wretched contracted place is not the sphere for us. I should have written, Kate, but my feelings would not permit. Oh, I have suffered agonies of suspense. I dared not direct to that confounded place you went to, for it would have lowered me for any one to see the direction, and I often did not stay long enough in a town to find out the post office for myself. Besides the toil, Kate, the mental toil! Oh! I often felt the sword wearing the scabbard."

"Dear Dolph! and yet you look so well, so very well."

Call me by my name, Kate; I hate abbreviations, they're so vulgar; and you must be careful how you speak now I am likely to rise to my true sphere, or you will injure me. I give the name of Vernon, because Stubbs is low."

"Dear Fus!"

"There again, Kate!"

"Oh! I'm so fluttered; I'll speak properly by and bye; I'd bite my tongue out before it should injure you."

"But the baby, where's my baby. Wiggson met me, and told me how plainly it bore the paternal image; no bad inheritance, eh! between ourselves, Kate?"

Kate blushed a deep crimson, and turning to the little bed on a chair in the corner, was thinking what she should say, when in came Mrs Wiggson to welcome the return of the orator; and seeing that Kate was lifting up the infant, it supplied her immediately with a theme.

"Oh! Mr Stubbs, such a beauty! There, now, what do you think of that?" she said, with a flourish of her hand, as Kate, with tremulous haste, uncovered the little head.

The orator, thus apostrophised, looked like many other

less-gifted persons, rather puzzled what to say, for he was surprised at the smallness of the child, and with all a man's irreverence of babyhood he exclaimed, shrinking back from the responsibility of touching it, "I daresay it's very beautiful, but how you can see a likeness in anything so small, I am at a loss to conjecture."

Had Kate been really the mother, it is possible she would have launched out into praises of its beauty, and vehement denunciation of the obtuseness of all who couldn't see the resemblance; but, as it was, she contented herself with merely stooping down and kissing the babe, an action that roused Adolphus, and reminded him that as Mrs Wiggson was present he must perpetrate a little sentimentalism, which of course was great in proportion to the absence of real feeling. An empty heart, like an empty room, is the most likely to have a loud echo. Accordingly, he threw himself into an attitude, and spreading his hands over the babe as it slept in Kate's arms, he quoted the words of Byron—

"Hail to this teeming stage of strife!
Hail! lovely miniature of life!
Pilgrim of many cares untold:—
Lamb of the world's extended fold;
How fondly could I bend the knee,
And turn idolater to thee."

"Lauk! how touching!" said Mrs Wiggson. "It puts me in mind of counsellor M'Lackerum's way, when he'd had a drop, and came a-courting Mrs Mumpson. He never would have had her but for his touching way of speaking poetry; though for the matter of that, it would have been better if he never had had her, for he spent her money and broke her heart, in less than two years! Yes, ma'am, I know it was no more, for Wiggson and I left their employ and married when the counsellor went abroad on his wed-

ding jaunt. In such a style they went off! and I was a-nursing my Lizzy here, and expecting my Arty, when I met an old feller servant, as told me she was to be buried quite private, for there were three executions in their town house, and the counsellor had fled to forring parts. Ah, they wasn't happy!"

"All owing to the pernicious arrangements and prejudices of society. I wonder any marriage is happy under existing circumstances."

"Do you?" said Kate, puzzled and half-alarmed; and looking at her Adolphus, she thought his face was rather flushed and puffy; she feared he took his drops freely. But her remarks, whether spoken or mental, were quickly put a stop to, by the necessity of her bustling about to get a meal quickly for her husband, who to her chagrin, could not spend even this evening with her. He was going to a preliminary council, and every moment was precious. So that what with his refreshment, and change of apparel, equipping himself in some of his new clothes to the high satisfaction of Kate, and the infinite admiration of that important personage, at every dressing-table, self, dear self, he was soon gone. The little milliner during the evening, and far into the night, had time to think how easily she had got through the difficulty she had dreaded about the child. Ah, poor Kate! you did not know that truth, though often at first difficult, is easy in its progress; while falsehood, whether spoken, acted, or implied, is so very easy at first, and most perplexing in the sequel. And it is a most solemn fact that whenever the Devil puts an evil thought into the mind, he always devises means for enabling that thought to be embodied in action. To do Kate justice, if any real, confidential intercourse had subsisted between her and her husband, she would not have been able for a

moment, to keep from him the facts. But their compact was unequal ; it was patronage on the one side, and blind idolatry on the other. Can a slave ever be a friend ?

It was a chilly night, and though as soon as Adolphus had left, she had taken off a coal from the top of the fire to save it, and heaped up the little cinder or two that were still left in the grate with damp ashes and a bit of green wood that merely smouldered, yet she looked uneasily at her tiny stock of coals at the bottom of her cupboard, and wondered whether any economy would make them enough for a cheerful fire at about eleven o'clock, and leave a little over to kindle in the morning. It was a hard problem to solve ; and when, on the baby crying, Lizzie Wiggson brought it to her, she for the first time began to think, inconsistently enough, that it would be very pleasant if Mrs Smith would pay her, if it was only a trifle. For herself she cared nothing, but to have the means of making Adolphus more comfortable was a strong motive to induce a desire for payment even while she dreaded a disclosure of the real facts. No bewilderment is so great as that which deception weaves around its votaries. The finest intellect that ever the Creator bestowed on human being, will not enable its possessor to walk unperplexed in the devious path of error ; while the humblest and plainest mind that keeps directly by the paths of truth and honesty may walk erect and fear no pitfalls—whatever evil comes to them is open and plain. But our little Kate, with all her kind-heartedness, was woefully dark on some matters. She realised the description of Scripture, “ He that leaneth to his own understanding is a fool.”

As she nursed the infant with tremulous haste, and was turning over in her mind how far Swillinberg House, Chiswick, was, and whether she could make a visit there

alone, and get an interview with Mrs Smith, and explain her wish to adopt the child entirely, merely asking for a trifle of money to help her in her present straits,—it occurred to her that for the first quarter the mother of the child would probably have no money, and that thought was followed by others that terrified her. She had gone too far to recede. She must abide by what she had already done. And to make herself the more secure she resolved that as soon as possible she would remove. Mrs Smith's apparent coldness to the child came to her remembrance, and she felt certain that any small obstacle to the mother's finding her, such as a removal, would not be overcome by any very diligent search: here her heart was her tutor, and that was far clearer than her head. As the baby lay on her bosom, and looked up at her with wide-open dreamy eyes, its little fingers clutching to a lock of her hair that had fallen against its wax-like face, she felt as if she could never part with it; she made a kind of mental promise to work for it day and night: it never should be any expense to dear Adolphus. He would grow fond of it, and all would be well. But she was obliged to break off her cooings to the infant, and her perplexed dwelling on the future, by attention to her work. While Lizzie nursed the baby to sleep, the fingers of the little milliner, with the quick click of her needle on her thimble, made a drowsy lullaby like the purr of a cat. At length a neighbouring church clock struck eleven. Lizzie, who had been trying in a sleepy way to help Kate with her work, was dismissed to her home over the way. "Adolphus will soon be home now," said the loving little wife, putting on her saved-up coals, and making for the first time that night something worthy of the name of a fire.

As soon as she was alone there was a terrible noise in the street, "The Friend at Hand" was turning out some

obstreperous inmates. There was a bar-man employed by the widow, Mrs Bouncer, who was noted for the strength of his wrists, and who had a method of throwing a troublesome customer, that was the theme of remark, and, strange to say, of boast in that friendly establishment. "Bill Bruiser," as he was called, had once been tried at the Westminster sessions for manslaughter. A poor tipsy wretch that he had ejected from a house in Westminster had fallen head over heels on the curb-stone, so heavily that his neck was broken. Bill was acquitted, for there were plenty who swore the man reeled on the door-steps and fell, and the doctors varied as to the cause of death; so that, both scientific and unscientific witnesses disagreeing in their testimony, the bar-man got off with flying colours, and rose in his trade from that time, having immediately the offer of the management of Mrs Bouncer's business; for, as she said, "she was a lone woman, and needed some one to manage for her that could clear the house—keep order, and hit a first-rate blow, if needed."

As Kate sat listening to the thud of blows—the strange sound of falling masses on the pavement—the oaths of men, and the groans, not unmingled with the shrieks, of women, she sighed heavily. The noise was certainly no novelty to her; but she felt the misery there must be in the houses of the poor creatures who spent their money only to obtain wounds and bruises, poverty, shame, and death.

Up to this time, though her Adolphus had no doubt gratified his taste for drink—as he gratified every taste of his—to the utmost extent of the means his wife provided, he had not exceeded the bounds of what he called moderation; and if Kate had been asked, she would have strenuously asserted that he was a sober man. Her definition,

and that of thousands, of the term sobriety being that he kept just on the outside verge of absolute intoxication. "He is not drunk" is, with such witnesses, synonymous with the words "He is sober." Just as among the same class, if you ask the question about a man, "Is he a good husband?" "Oh yes, he never beats her," the conjugal tenderness implied being about as great as the sobriety.

By the time the street was quiet, and the policemen grumbling were going on their several beats from which they had been called, much to the satisfaction of many a thief, who, knowing the hour when they were likely to be called to help to quell the riots of clearing the taverns, make that the time of their greatest activity,—just at that time Kate began to eye the fire dubiously, and fidget up and down the room, pausing every now and then to listen for her husband's footstep. She could not work. She went to the street-door and looked out—returned to break up the fire—sat down nervously and tried to ply her needle; then, with a new alarm, she observed the candle burning down, and extinguished it, remembering, with a sudden spasm of dread, there was no more in the house. The baby woke and cried, and she paced up and down with it in the darkness. How her heart throbbed at every distant footstep that struck her ear, now painfully acute with anxiety. What a sick shiver ran through her frame as the nearer sound told her it was not Adolphus. Thus hour after hour passed. The fire, despite all her care, had dropped its last few glimmering ashes, and sunk dead beyond all power of revival. The chill of the morning hour, as it feels the momentary shuddering pang that announces the birth of a new day, struck to her weary frame. The baby cried, and she cried too. Oh, reader, this is not a description of the obvious horrors of intemperance; this is merely the common

night vigil of many a wife and mother, as, heart sick, tired, and desolate, she awaits the return of the husband and father.

Hark! that is his step; no—yes—no, how unequal it is; it's like his step certainly, but what can ail him? With the child in her arms she opens the door before he knocks, and looks out: it is Adolphus clinging to the lamp-post just below. Kate runs to him, saying, "Are you ill, dear?"

"Ill!" was the reply, with an indistinct growl, "what's shoo mean by ill?"

For an instant she was ready to put the child down on the pavement, in her eagerness to help him into the house, and her shame (for she was ashamed, drunkenness was new to her in her own home,) her shame that he should be seen, she rushed back, laid down her infant on the bed, and running to her husband, helped him in, he grumbling and swearing at the darkness. With trembling hands she lighted her bit of candle, went up to him with a smile, and, as if suggesting an apology to him, she said, "You have been overtaken; yes, I see you have, dear; you were tired, and didn't mean—I'm sure you didn't mean to—to——."

"What's shoo mean?" roared Adolphus.

"Hush, hush, dear," putting her hand over his mouth as she spoke, "the people'll hear."

In a moment, while her eyes were looking at him with love and sorrow, his hand was raised, and, striking at her, he threw her from him violently. She fell to the ground, striking her head as she fell; but restraining her cries, hurt as she was, she rose silently. How was it her heart did not burst as it swelled in her bosom and nearly stifled her? What was any outward hurt to the bitter, bitter inward pang of that blow from the hand she loved? For a moment, she pressed her hands tightly on her bosom, as if to hold in

the agony that rent her, her husband meanwhile shouting out disjointed threats and taunts, and daring her to come within arm's length of him.

For an hour or more, she sat crouched in a corner of the room, holding the child from fear of any fresh access of rage being attracted towards it. During that time he talked incessantly, the excitement of the evening's discussion being evidenced in his babblement. By and bye, his voice was clearer, and he called for water. She rose, tottering, and brought him a pint mug of water. He drank it off in a long draught—then looked around bewildered—saw her and the child, and in a softer tone spoke to the infant, and insisted on taking it.

"Come, little Junius."

"His name's Lorry —."

"Lorry be hanged, woman! he's Junius Brutus; that's what I'll have him called."

She made no reply; tears came to her relief. They fell unheeded down her cheeks as she helped him to bed. Then, putting the child on an old chair, she began making the room tidy—went out into the yard, and bathed her face. And then, watching at her window for any neighbour that might be early stirring, contrived at length to procure some coals, lighted her fire, and seating herself at work, began the toils of another day, while her husband for hours was heavily sleeping off the effects of his last night's drinking. When Lizzie came, and she had collected her thoughts, she resolved that on all accounts it would be best to remove. She knew Wiggson drank, and, with that disposition to throw the chief blame of last night's scene on any one but the real culprit, she determined that Adolphus was led into it. She would go into an entirely new neighbourhood. Her customers would come to her; her work

was certain. And as to the child's name, she would let Adolphus have his own way,—best so; why retain the name the mother gave it?

Let us leave Kate for a time to her stitchery and her stratagems. Alas for her and her Adolphus, if the former were not far more clever than the latter. From the time of the events recorded her face began to acquire an anxious look; a nervous agitation was twitching at her heart. The secret weighed upon her spirits like a heavy burden, all the more galling that she carried it alone. No one ever again heard her singing at her work, as in former days. She removed from Mount Pleasant to Seedling-place, Paddington, and was glad at the change, for it seemed to put farther from her the possibility of discovery. Her business increased, and she sat in the midst of apprentices and work-women, a kind-hearted but a care-worn woman. Adolphus was never at home, except to sleep, which he did chiefly during those morning hours when his wife was plying her ceaseless needle.

CHAPTER V.

RETURNS TO GENTEEL SOCIETY.

"I SUPPOSE, Foster, you have too much good sense, and know your duty too well, to be worrying about your child?"

This was said by a languid-looking young lady, who, wrapped in a white cashmere dressing-gown, beautifully braided, and with the loveliest little lace cap on her head, was lying on a sofa in the boudoir at Swillinberg House—to which we first introduced our readers. The young

woman she addressed was walking up and down the room with the infant heir of the Tregloss family honours in her arms. Before she could reply, her answer was anticipated by Flutterly, who, having poured some scent on a cambric handkerchief, was handing it to her lady with the words—

“Certainly mem; as I told nurse Dossett before she went, over and over again, I was sure as a person who had such a lucky thing—which was not to be looked for—and seldom happens to them as have to go to institutions—even if they air for married women, which to be sure no others ought to be let in nowhere, except to jails and tread-wheels.”

“Yes, yes, Flutterly, I know: you speak too loud. I don’t want to hear about creatures, and things, and all that; I only asked because Mr Tregloss has been reading in some book, or something, that nurses have been known to fret after their own children, and he says it’s absurd, and he won’t allow it in Foster, for as we go to Brighton while the weather keeps fine, Foster can’t see her child.”

“Oh, she don’t expect it, mem; she’s only been here a month. You’re not so unreasonable, Foster?”

“I know,” said Foster, pausing in her walk, “Mrs Stubbs will be kind to——”

“Yes, yes, that’s enough—don’t talk—and don’t fret—that would be foolish and selfish; I hate selfishness. Give me my box of beads, Flutterly; I think I could sort the shades ready,” said Mrs Tregloss.

“Pray don’t try your hyes.”

“Ha, ha! Flutterly, my ‘hyes,’ as you call them, are tired with looking at nothing; dear me,” she added, yawning, “how long the days are—but we go away to-morrow.”

Foster continued her walk in silence, and then came in another functionary—a young niece of Flutterly’s—who

was just introduced to the household as nurse-maid, and on whom the chief care of the infant, and a constant espionage on the nurse, devolved. She was a brisk girl, and as intent as her relative, on pushing her way by obsequiousness, and combining to keep the silent Foster from making any advance in the favour of the mistress.

If any letter had come, or person called on the nurse, it was the duty of Sophy to give instant intelligence, but her vigilance had not yet been tested. In their walks out she was to watch that no one spoke to Foster, and in this also, so far, she had no exercise of her faculty.

But though bound to this lynx-eyed watch for others, she was not without her own share of curiosity, and she would fain have got to know, for her peculiar solace, more of the thoughts and feelings of the companion with whom she passed her time. She had asked about the deceased husband, but was silenced by Foster saying, "I cannot bear to talk of him." At another time she ventured, though she had been forbidden, to mention the child at nurse, and was merely told "that no doubt he was very well cared for," a certainty that could only have arisen from previous knowledge of the person who had taken him. So she then enquired. "Is he with a sister, or relation?" and the nurse, who, it seemed, very well knew how to repress curiosity, answered this question by the simple word—"Why?"

In this day of long established penny-postage, and numerous schools, it is still a fact proven, that at least a third of the women of the working-classes cannot write, and letters are therefore, in some circles, very rare occurrences still. Five-and-twenty years ago there were plenty of domestic servants who communicated but once a year, or so, with their relatives, and who, it might be, heard from them even

less frequently. It did not surprise Foster that she had received no word from Mrs Stubbs. She remembered that in the hospital the little woman had complained of her husband not writing, and she concluded that carelessness in that matter was the custom of the family. The old saying—by no means so wise as many others—"that no news was good news," was in her mind allaying any uneasiness that might be there, for it was not in any nature, however cold and dull, to have no secret questioning about the child. It is a humiliating fact that the mean and trivial mix up with all the trials of life—nay, even the saddest matters have often their ludicrous aspects. The fee that was to be paid with the child was more than, just at first, she could afford. She was all but destitute when she entered on her present employment, and, even to a far more affectionate nature, poverty might have been a temptation to abstain from making enquiries, and to be easily content with silence. Now there was this Brighton journey, she would write from thence. Wiser and better folks than Foster are often the dupes of the future.

On the evening that preceded the departure of the family to the sea-side, a large picture came home that Mr Tregloss had bought at a sale of paintings during the day. It was by a modern artist—a simple, yet a painful subject—a blind man led by a little girl. The contrast of age, infirmity, and sorrow, with the beauty, and, despite the rags, the joyousness of childhood—the effect of light and shade—the child catching playfully at a sunbeam—the old man in deep shadow, relieved from absolute darkness by his white hair and beard, made a whole that was very effective. Mrs Tregloss, wrapped in a large shawl, was summoned by her husband to see the picture. She cared nothing about pictures, except as they embellished her rooms by their gilded

frames, and were evidences of wealth. To her a mat of bead-work, or a Berlin-wool pattern was more interesting than the finest work of art; but Mr Tregloss so far ruled her that she assented to his praises, and professed to be guided by his taste.

"There, my dear," said he, as he linked her arm in his, and led her to a chair where she could have a view at leisure, the gaselier being so arranged as to throw a good light upon the picture, "there, that is very fine—very—don't you think so?"

"Oh yes. What a pretty child, but the old man looks like a beggar; it's rather a low subject."

"Oh, that's nothing in art, my dear. The beggar boys of Murillo, the great Spanish painter, cunning, ugly dogs as they are, are very valuable, worth immense sums—immense. This was painted by a fellow that, if he had only kept sober, might have done anything—commanded any sum; but he was a desperate toper, my dear, that did the mischief, which was a pity, with his talents. Those drinking fellows are all alike—never punctual—so the nobleman who gave him the commission for this picture died before it was completed, and the artist had mortgaged it to a dealer, and so, after a few changes, it came to the hammer; it was tipsy Topham's last work. It's fine," he added, musingly.

"Tipsy Topham!" said Mrs Tregloss; "what a name! Is he dead?"

"Yes, or as good as dead, I fancy. There have been various reports. He disappeared from his creditors. It was reported that he was seen in Rome, and then, at the same time, in America; but he was a wreck, done-for, whether living or dying."

At that instant, the door opened, and Foster, carrying a shawl, came to Mrs Tregloss.

"Oh, is it my time to go into the nursery?" said the lady. "That's right, I want an extra shawl; and is the mulled wine ready in the nursery?"

Foster did not answer; her eyes were riveted on the picture with an open stare, and every particle of colour left her face.

Mr Tregloss was looking through his eye-glass, silently, at the details, when the pause attracted him; he turned round sharply, and noticing the look, said angrily, "Did you hear your lady?"

"Yes—no—what is it? I beg your pardon," said Foster, blundering out the words in short, bewildered gasps.

"Go, woman, you're absolutely stupid——."

"Oh, my dear," whispered Mrs Tregloss, laying her hand on his arm deprecatingly, "don't speak sharply to nurse—don't; Flutterly says she's to be kept quiet, and not to think any more than a cow."

But the words were apparently unheeded, for Foster, like one in a dream, walked out of the room, while Mr Tregloss, gazing at her more fixedly than he had ever before done, said, taking up his wife's last word—

"Like a cow! well, she seems as dull as if she did nothing but lounge in a green field, and chew the cud every day and all day; but there, my dear, put on your shawl, and go; I'm glad you've a fixed hour for visiting your nursery."

"Yes, Mr Tregloss, I always go up when baby is undrest and put to sleep. I take my mulled wine every night in the nursery."

"You'll be a model mother, my dear;" and so husband and wife parted on the landing-place, Mr Tregloss to go to his library, where, by the aid of his favourite tippie—a jorum of milk punch—he meant to get through an article

on the malt duties, in one of the quarterlies. While he, for some three hours, is sipping and yawning, book in hand, and his lady, after duly looking at baby, and taking her strengthening dose of mulled wine, is going early to bed, in preparation for the morrow's journey, we will return to the drawing-room, whose lights are extinguished now, and the housemaid has shut up for the night.

The door opens softly, and, with a candle in her hand that she tries to shade, Foster, shutting the door after her, creeps along the carpet with noiseless steps, and stands close to the picture. She brings the candle so as to look closely at the face of the child, and then raises it, and looks at the head of the blind man. It was evident that she was deeply moved, though there was no outward expression of emotion. What need of tears and sighs when her white face, compressed lips, and dilated eyes, glazed with unshed tears, revealed a volume of sorrow.

"I never thought to see it again," she muttered, "it brings back my childhood. Childhood! was I ever a child? What is my childhood to me?" And yet, as she spoke, her eyes rested strangely on the girl's face in the picture—a something in the glowing smile jarred upon her present feelings. She looked up to a pier-glass near, that filled the space between the windows, and holding the candle high in her hand, scanned her own face sadly. "Changed," she said, "changed in seven years; I shall never have that smile again. I suppose it went first in the fever; and then troubles and death—how old, how very old I feel."

Had any one been present when she spoke, they might have been constrained to laugh at her words, for the pliant grace of her form was so girlish that it gave her an undeveloped look—and Flutterly, by contriving that her half-mourning print gowns should be clumsily made, and her

caps large, had done much to obscure the beauty of both face and form—but the look of extreme youth was not to be overcome. Again standing by the picture, and then looking into the corner, and recognising the interlaced cypher that she knew so well, a noise of a closing door alarmed her. She cast one last glance at the picture, stole across the room on tip-toe, peeped out of the door to be certain of meeting no one, and, extinguishing her light, ran fleetly along a passage and up a flight of back stairs into the nursery.

“Wherever have you been, Foster?” said Sophy; “here’s packing up and oceans to do, and no one to help that I see. Why, how pale you do look! do let me mix you a tumbler of something—do? Is anything the matter, dear?” The last words were uttered in a coaxing tone, for the girl’s suspicions were aroused that some letter or person had come, and that in the bustle of preparation she had not been in the way to see and bear testimony; but she was forced to be content with the word “Nothing,” breathed out through sighing lips. And as fretting was considered one of the deadliest sins that a nurse could commit, Sophy held up her hand imploringly, said—

“It’s no use a-denyin’ it you are a-frettin’.”

“Nonsense,” said Foster, and putting aside the glass that was soon presented to her, she said, “I cannot take it. There’s nothing the matter. Why do you watch me so?”

The next day saw the whole household, except a few of the out-door and under servants, safely housed at Brighton, in a spacious house on the East Cliffe. Mrs Tregloss immediately recovered her strength and spirits. Her pony chaise was constantly during the day in the drive, and when, weary of being driven up and down, she alighted, her delight in shopping was immense. She went from one

to another, like a butterfly in a cabbage bed, and if no one else enjoyed the pleasures of Regent Street at the sea-side, Mrs Tregloss did. Whether her eyes ever wandered to the sea, or whether its ceaseless waves, with their fringe of foam, as they came rolling in, tossing and leaping in the sunlight, and then, with a heavy dash on the beach, bursting into glittering spray,—whether for a moment these attracted her attention, it is difficult to say. A vast number of ladies, young and old, seemed, like Mrs Tregloss, to think that millinery, jewelry, and Berlin wool were infinitely more attractive.

The nursery duties at Brighton consisted chiefly in Foster and Sophy walking out with their young charge for many hours every day; indeed, they almost lived in the open air, late as the season was. Flutterly for a time relaxed her vigilance. She knew that Brighton was too far for any annoyance from the nurse's child or its keepers; and so she employed her talents in ministering to her mistress's whims, and even suggesting some that she had not thought of. Mr Tregloss left his household for a time to attend the election of a wealthy friend, a distiller, in whose business Mr Tregloss's fortune was chiefly embarked, his name and influence in the firm being represented in the little significant word "Co." put at the end—"Mixty, Pungent, & Co."

Nobody ever professed to believe that old Mixty would make a good member of parliament, or that the borough of Swaffham or the nation in general would be any the better for his having a voice in the deliberative assembly of the land; but, as Mr Tregloss said, if he was not very bright, he was no worse than many others, and his vote was as good as if he had all the genius in the world; and it helped a firm to have one of its members a legislator. Gin, that helped so much in breaking the laws, should certainly have,

in some way, something to do with making them; and as to the election, it was sure. When was a candidate known to fail that had secured the publicans? Look through the kingdom, and let electors make what boast they pleased, and spout away as they please about freedom, and purity of election, and independent electors,—the beer barrel and the gin bottle carried all before them. “Ha! ha! my fine fellows,” Mr Tregloss was wont to say in his jocose moods, “Britons never will be slaves—no never, to anything less potent than porter, or less pungent than gin—never.”

While he was gone the womankind of his household daily promenaded the esplanade at Brighton and the chain pier. Mrs Tregloss had the loveliest sea-side costume, and duly performed her duty to her baby by buying him all sorts of pretty robes and cloaks, and really thought while she was gratifying herself by spending money, and doing any and everything that involved no sacrifice of her smallest pleasure, that she was the most exemplary of women and mothers. Perhaps if she had really manifested any tenderness for the little nursling nourished by a stranger's bosom, she might have awakened in the heart of the young nurse a feeling of tenderness and regret for the child she had left. For Foster's extreme youth might to some extent be chargeable with her indifference. Nature, it is true, teaches some emotions, but if nature is anticipated in her teaching by any premature invasion of her plans—if girlhood is taxed beyond its strength to fulfil the duties of womanhood,—it is by no means either strange in theory, or rare in practice, that there should be an utter failure. Maturity, both of body and mind, are necessary to the wise, tender, and able fulfilment of the solemn duties of mother and wife. Foster was by no means impressed with Mrs Tregloss's maternal excellencies. She was a young, giddy, capricious, self-

indulgent woman, spending money at will on her child, and paying to have attentions lavished on him; and no observant beholder would consider there was much to be commended in that. But she was destined to see a very different spectacle to that. One day on the beach, she had observed a poorly-dressed, but very neat young woman, carrying a sick child up and down under the shelter of the cliff. Foster had often wished to speak to the woman, for her face was so full of anxiety that any one who had known sorrow of any kind immediately detected the traces of grief, and as

"Misery still is wont to trace
It's semblance in another's case,"

she was irresistibly drawn towards her. But Sophy, who was her constant companion, was an obstacle in the way. It happened one day that the attractions of a new draper's shop had lured Sophy from Foster's side, and it was agreed that while the infant was carried in its nurse's arms towards the chain pier, Sophy should make her purchases in North-street. As Foster was crossing the Old Steyne a shower of rain caused her to descend some steps in front of the cliff, and take shelter in a covered seat that she had often made a place of refuge from the weather. Seated on the one end of the seat she sought, was the young woman she had before noticed. Her baby was lying on her lap, evidently very ill, and the mother—oh, none but a mother's hand could be so gentle—was smoothing its little face with softest touches, and cooing out little baby phrases of endearment, seeking to win a look or smile, and to beguile the feebleness of pain by her endearments. (

Foster, quiet as she was, could not avoid asking about the sick child's malady: and then she learned that the

young woman had come with her husband, who was a working upholsterer, to Brighton; that they were as yet strangers in the town; and that the hope of the sea air benefiting the baby, had induced them to leave London.

"I would do anything, anything," said the young woman, emphatically, "if I thought my pretty lamb would be restored."

A troubled look came over Foster's face. She moved uneasily, as if she could not bear to hear any more. The child in her arms looked up and cried, and then the young woman at her side said, "It is not your own, I see you are its nurse; is it fed or ——?"

A deep blush covered Foster's face, and her manner was confused enough to justify the most unpleasant suspicions, as she answered—

"Oh, I nurse it; Mrs Tregloss is not able."

"Tregloss! oh dear me; then that is the child I was once so mad as to leave my own, my dear sweet pet, for. Ah, I was mad and foolish." Her hand wandered caressingly over her own child, while her eyes were busy looking in the face of the smart little baby Tregloss.

"Indeed, I have heard that a person came to the family and left them discredited——, that is, they said her husband fetched her."

"Yes, that's true enough; George Compton—that's my husband—he came for me. I should certainly have gone mad, if I'd attempted to have stayed."

"Then you left your child," said Foster, wishing to fix that fact before her mind, as if she had an inward satisfaction in so doing.

"I did, and may God forgive me that rashness! My husband had been long out of work, and he attended sale-rooms, and—and—auctions; and bargains, you know,

always bring about drink. I'm not going to say George was wrong; he was led away. He did not like to let me see him when he was not himself. He stayed away from me, and we were behind with our rent, and our goods were seized, and then I was in want of bread, and a decent neighbour offered to take my baby. I went to Dr Sootherly and got my name put down on his list, and the day after he sent for me. I never shall forget it—never. I went, and as soon as I had gone George comes home, and follows me, and took me away. But the fright and the grief upset me so that I fell ill, and though I'm better, baby is not the same that she was before I had that shock. Oh, if anything happens to her, I shall never forgive myself."

"And your husband, does he drink now?"

"Drink! no indeed. He's signed the pledge, and so have I. People say I had no need, for I was all but a teetotaler; but you see my argument was—if my husband can do without a great deal, surely I may do without a little. But, dear me, I forgot, where's your child; however do you bear to be away from it?"

"He is with a friend—a kind woman."

"Dear me—and you're very, very young—poor soul."

A question was hovering on her lips that she evidently did not like to put, while a grave compassion was beaming in her modest eyes.

"Do not misjudge me, Mrs Compton," said Foster, rising from the seat and drawing up to her full height, "I am a married woman."

"And does he drink—that's the misery—the drink!—it comes in and breaks up the home; does he drink? George is very zealous to do good; can he go to him, or write?"

"Neither—neither—he is dead!"

"Oh dear, I beg your pardon," but the words hardly reached Foster's ears, she walked away with her swiftest step, leaving Mrs Compton standing and looking after her, reproaching herself for asking painful questions, and pitying, with all the intensity of her kind heart, the poor thing so bereaved.

"And to have to leave her child,—no comfort left her in the world, and to go to those proud, hard people. Shall I ever forget his looks at us, and how they all set us down for hardened drunkards? And yet George says he belongs to a great distillery firm. I'm sure those who make men drunk haven't much right to despise a drunkard. It's a great puzzle to me how religious men can make great fortunes out of what ruins thousands—body and soul; and how magistrates can license houses to sell drink, and then fine the poor deluded creatures that drink it."

Ah, it would puzzle many wiser heads than thine, Susan Compton, to make out these difficult social problems, and understand how wealth and respectability are built up out of the spendings of guilt and folly. But who, in looking at a beautiful plant, enquires too closely about the manure it has required? And it is understood to be very ill-bred indeed—argues great want of due sense, etiquette, and politeness—to be scrutinizing the sources of wealth, or tracing to their source the common manifestations of what is called justice. Only here and there some eccentric, fond of pondering on the fitness of things—or some creature like this poor woman, whose mental eyes have had the cataracts of prejudice taken out by a painful operation,—ever venture to look into such matters.

CHAPTER VI.

BRIGHTON DOINGS.

FOSTER walked along under the shelter of the Cliff, the words "Does he drink?—that's the misery—the drink"—ringing in her ears, and seeming to urge her on over the rough shingle with as hasty a tread as possible. Something in the previous conversation had evidently stung her. The apathy which had bound her spirit in icy fetters, and which contact with the cold, smooth, frozen surface of conventionalism that surrounded her was little likely to disturb, seemed to yield to the simple words and genial looks of the true-hearted young mother. Tears swam in her eyes, but with an effort she checked them, drew up her head stiffly, as if rebuking the unwonted emotion, and determined not to yield to it. The baby began to cry, and she jogged it impatiently in her arms, finding, meanwhile, her walk on the shingle difficult. The rain came in intervals, between long, gusty sweeps of wind; and if one could imagine such majestic powers as sunshine, clouds, and winds indulging in a game of romps, such a day as that might justify the fancy; for the sun would blaze out so brightly as to turn the white caps on the distant waves into crests of flame, and fill the rolling billows with quivering light; and then great masses of clouds would career across the waves, unfurl their gloomy banners, and wrap both sky and sea in their dark folds;—then down would come the rushing rain in torrents, the sun again, with his fingers of light, rending the dark drapery and laughing through the rents, turning the rain drops into glittering diamonds. Whether this commotion of the elements was in

merriment or anger, it certainly made it not easy to walk on a rough road, both arms employed holding a baby, and Foster had better have sat still and continued her chat with Mrs Compton, and learned a lesson of tenderness, if indeed that can be taught. But we have seen that she went away before the shower ceased, and was soon assailed very roughly by the wind, which blew back her large ugly bonnet so far that it loosened the strings, and before she could get a hand at liberty to secure them, away went the bonnet, dragging down her long coil of hair in its departure, and leaving her with no other covering to her head than that which nature had in great abundance bestowed. Had Foster in her confusion been able to fix on any definite plan, she might either have recovered her bonnet before it, by three successive leaps, reached the wave that, flapping over it, bore it safely out to sea, or she might have twined her hair in some neat fold, and not presented an utterly dishevelled appearance; as it was, what with reaching out her one disengaged hand, and pulling hold of a tress or two of hair—running forward and stooping to catch the luckless bonnet that, of course, eluded her grasp—and thus tangling her hair about her shoulders and partly over her face—she looked, in less than a minute, like a mermaid in a storm, too tossed to use either her looking-glass or her comb. Out of breath, she was obliged to sit down on a heap of wet shingle, and before she could throw back the shining veil that obscured her face, a hearty laugh sounded near her, and a voice said—

“In the name of all the syrens, what’s this?”

“Dear me,” gasped Foster, “how awkward—what shall I do?” Resting the child on her lap, she put back her hair with both her hands from her face, and looking up, saw a tall young man, with a gay, sea-breezy sort of face and manner, standing near, and laughing involuntarily.

To twine up her rebellious tresses in a knot was the work of a few moments, while the deepest blushes suffused her face. The young man, meanwhile, ran to the margin of the wave, and with his stick tried, as it rolled in, to reclaim the bonnet, but failed. He turned round, and shaking his head, said—

"It's no use; but one can hardly sympathise with you in the loss of that black dingy head gear, when nature has given you such a coil of glossy silk to wear. I, at all events, ought to be much obliged to the winds."

Foster's face resumed its cold, set look as she unfastened her shawl, and drawing it up over her head, attempted to rise, but encumbered as she was, it was not easy to regain her feet, and she involuntarily took the hand held out to assist her.

"Fair Syren," began the young man with mock homage—a blending of admiration and familiarity in his manner.

"I'm no syren, but the nurse to this child," said Foster gravely.

"Oh, most lame and impotent conclusion. But, my good girl, can I do anything to remedy the mischance, as you would call it, the loss of your bonnet? I do not call it a mischance that has enriched my sight with such a gleam of rippling gold. Stay, why need you go? Am I to think it all a dream, and that I have had a vision of a mermaid in a coral cave?"

"Let me pass, sir; I don't understand you," said Foster, in a faltering voice.

Reluctantly the young man made way for her, and she reached the steps and ascended them just as Sophy came running to the barrier at the top of the cliff, and looked over with eager gaze after her. Foster stood by the young

girl's side unnoticed for a moment, and then the latter with a start, exclaimed—

“Goodness gracious alive? Why, where's your bonnet? Lost? eh! Why, what a figger you do look, Foster! Lauk, what shall we do?”

At that instant the young man who had followed Foster reached the summit of the steps, but, seeing she had a companion, did not again seek to speak to her. The rain coming on swiftly, Foster called a car, and entered it, saying, “Mrs Tregloss will be angry, if baby is out any longer this boisterous day.” Sophy entered after her, and as the old waterman closed the door she leaned her head out of the window, and bawling to the man, gave the address—“Pinchbeck House, East Cliff”—in a tone quite loud enough to reach far beyond the spot where the young man was. He stood a moment as they drove away, and then, turning on his heel, lighted a cigar, and as he smoked it, muttered between the puffs, “Pinchbeck House—that's taken by Tregloss! What lovely hair!—fine creature altogether!—very fine—first rate—servant there. Let's see, a nurse. Ha! fair game, I fancy.” And so, meditating mischief, and walking briskly along—defying the wind and rain in his waterproof coat—turning an admiring gaze now and then to the fitful sunshine and the glancing waves, he hummed, in the intervals of smoking, a popular air, and looked a handsome, prosperous, merry gentleman—one who would not be likely to sue in vain among his own class for the love of a lady, or the approbation of her parents. And all this blandishment of flattery, and winning grace of mirthfulness, he was inclined to use for the brave purpose of bewildering, alluring, and tempting the poor young woman whom accident had brought into his sight that morning. His code of social morals was, that

the person being in the condition of a dependant, no one efficiently to protect or avenge her, she was lawful prey. He had no compunction whatever ; no inward whisper told him it was cowardly to use the advantage of station, education, and nature as weapons to destroy—base to win only to betray. He would incur no loss of position—no contempt of society, even if his little weakness was discovered. On his side there was no risk and no punishment ; all *that*, a virtuous state of society had determined should be incurred by the weaker vessel ; so he amused himself by laying his plans, and, with a view to ascertain if the young woman did actually live at Mr Tregloss's, he called that morning at Pinchbeck House, and left his card—Mr Horace Hempson—and heard that Mr Tregloss was expected home next day. On returning to his lodgings, and looking over the notes on his table, he found, among other invitations, one to dinner at Mr Tregloss's the following week. Under ordinary circumstances, he would have declined, for he disliked the pompous manner of Tregloss, but as it was, he wrote and accepted. For several mornings afterwards, he saw Foster and her companion, with their charge, walk on the esplanade, and he contrived to pass, and repass, so as to be seen ; but he did not venture to address the object of his vigilance. He was both surprised and annoyed that she did not take the slightest notice of him. He had unbounded confidence in his own powers of attraction, and a thorough scepticism as to any virtue being impregnable. So that the blank gaze of Foster, that seemed never to meet his, piqued him. This complete indifference of hers concentrated his attention on her. He had leisure to remark the extreme beauty that she possessed, and to note the disfiguring concealment of her coarse, yet always neat attire.

Meanwhile Foster had frequently met Mrs Compton, who was rejoicing in the now rapid recovery of her child, and was so happy in consequence that her smiling face was a beaming picture of delighted love. On Sunday, Foster saw her walking by the side of her husband, both themselves and their child neatly dressed. They entered a place of worship together, and a look of mingled wonder and sorrow crossed Foster's face as with a sigh she pursued her walk. Sophy prattled at her side unconscious of the thoughts passing in the mind of her silent companion.

That evening, when the child slept, Foster took the opportunity, during the absence of Sophy, to write to Mrs Stubbs. She balanced her pen musingly in her fingers as if hardly knowing what to write; but the remembrance of the motherly love and joy that she had seen in Mrs Compton's face, constrained her to gain some tidings of her own child. After two or three attempts, the voice of Sophy approaching, talking to Flutterly, caused her hastily to conceal her note. She hated talking to Flutterly, and so for that time the writing was given up. Shortly after Mrs Tregloss came into the nursery, and had the evening dose of mulled wine; and as it was now very cold weather, and Mrs Tregloss had actually shivered once in the day, and sneezed twice, Flutterly thought it advisable to mix a little spirit with the wine; she was the more induced to do this as Mrs Tregloss had complained it was poor flat stuff.

As the lady sat by the nursery fire, sipping her glass, the baby happening to be rather restless, was taken out of Foster's arms and jogged and fondled by Flutterly, who exhausted her vocabulary of grand names on him. Sophy ventured to observe that he did not sleep very sound, and then Mrs Tregloss thought it right to give Foster a lecture.

"My son—my darling little sweet Percy—(Mr Tregloss

liked aristocratic names, and had therefore called his son Percy Douglas)—certainly looks beautiful, but as he does not sleep, nurse Foster, it must be because you are so obstinate about your diet. I'm told you do not take your ale as you should. I dislike obstinacy. I'm not finding fault, you know, I do wish you would submit and take wines and all that, and not be troublesome. Look at me! I always take my wine; not that I care for it—oh, dear no; but Dr Sootherly said I must, and Mr Tregloss insists, and so I take it."

"But," said Foster bluntly, "drinking leads to drunkenness."

"Oh, for shame of you, Foster, a-naming such a thing, and using such an ungenteel word in this room, and before my dear angel of a mistress."

"Hush, Flutterly, let me speak to her. The shocking, degrading vice you named just now is confined to low people—given to all kinds of ways and—and—things not to be named. People of station know how to drink properly. Proper drinking is genteel drinking, and genteel drinking is proper drinking. Do you understand, Foster? I'm trying to make it plain to you, quite plain, but you look—yes, you really do look as if you did not understand me."

Thus appealed to, Flutterly echoing the words "It's as clear as day, and as plain as a pike staff—do you understand?" Foster stammered out, "Not exactly; I've heard there are people who do without strong drink altogether."

"Do without altogether! then more shame for 'em," said Flutterly, her niece chiming in with "Well, that's unconscionable."

"Why, dear me, Foster, wherever have you heard of such people? They must want to upset the government, and the nation, and trade altogether. Why, from what I can

learn—and you know I hear gentlemen talk about it, and they must know—it's the malt, and the barley, and the hops that keep up the government; and people ought to pay their taxes, or they don't do their duty, you know. And the wines and spirits, they pay taxes, and make the nation rich and prosperous. I'm afraid, Foster, you must have heard of these radicals, or chartists, or whatever 'tis they call them—infidels, is it not?"

"No, madam, Teetotalers."

"Oh, it's all the same; they don't want to pay their—."

At this moment, a loud knock at the street door announced Mr Tregloss. He made some inquiry after Mrs Tregloss, and mounted at once to the nursery, just as Flutterly, in an unusually splenetic tone, was saying, with uplifted hands, "Teetotalers indeed!"

"Eh, what's that—what did you say, Flutterly? did I hear you utter the word teetotaler?"

"Foster does not take her ale as I wish," said Mrs Tregloss hurriedly.

"Is the child ill?" exclaimed Mr Tregloss in an alarmed voice. They all with one voice said "No."

"How flushed you are, my dear, quite a hectic," said he, turning to his wife and touching her cheek.

"I've been explaining about—about—drinking, and all that to Foster, and it's heated me."

"Why do you exert yourself? You'll not make her understand; I know you won't. But as to teetotalers, I'll not have them named in my house. A pretty pass the world would come to, my dear—a pretty pass indeed—if those enthusiasts were to spread their opinions—their pernicious opinions. But, my dear," he added, with a flourish of his hand, "Mixty's returned—splendid majority. We secured that—we had the publicans."

"Oh, I don't want to know *how* it was, dear ; but I'm so glad Mr Mixty is a member of parliament. Mrs Mixty and Anna Maria will be in town all next season, and there'll be such delightful parties, and he's a dear man ; but how ever will he manage to keep awake dear ? He always goes to sleep, you know, in the carriage, and at church, and almost at the dinner-table ; how ever will he manage ? Didn't somebody call him "Dozy ?"

"Oh, my dear, it won't matter. Ha—ha—Dozy or Dummy, he's in, and it's a triumph for us !"

Whether the *us* represented a party in the state, or the firm of distillers, was not explained, but Mrs Tregloss linked her arm in her husband's, and left the nursery, and was no sooner out of hearing than Flutterly thought it incumbent on her to speak her mind to Foster, saying—

"Now let this be a warning to you, once for all—yes, once for all—don't you be arguing with your betters, and pretending to know, indeed ! and as to drink, if you really can't take what's sent up for you, there's Sophy and me—we never yet refused, as I know on—never—to stand your friend, and help you. Many and many's the half-pint and the glass I've drunk for you unbeknownst ; but if you go talking about teetotalers, or whatever 'tis you call 'em, it'll be worse for you—mark my words. Sophy don't argefy—not she ; she'd be above pretending she's better than her mistress."

Foster made no reply. In the maze of words she could not find a clear meaning to guide her. She knew well enough that her deficiencies as to strong drink were made up for, by both Sophy and Flutterly, and so much interest had been awakened in her heart for the child she nursed, that she never left it to the charge of Sophy any part of the night, that young lady's slumbers being so heavy with

the ale she took that attention to the child was out of the question.

This latter circumstance favoured Foster's determination of writing her letter when the house was still, and accordingly, when the baby was slumbering lightly in his cot, and Sophy was snoring as if she was in danger of apoplexy, Foster left her bed, wrapped herself in a dressing-gown, and, kindling a taper at the night-light, she wrote a few lines of inquiry about the child, promised at Christmas to send some money to Mrs Stubbs, and enclosed the Brighton address, though she wrote doubtfully. Putting the note in her pocket she found means to post it next day, unnoticed.

The dinner party was on the following day, and whether wine or parental pride inspired the thought, or the pertinacious inquiries of his guests, one in particular, or all combined, but Mr Tregloss and his party had no sooner returned to the drawing-room than he ordered the baby to be brought down and displayed. Flutterly's first thought was to take him down herself, but she feared she should compromise her dignity and be taken for a nurse, instead of for the chief female functionary of the household. So Foster was ushered into the drawing-room, and a very sweet picture she made—the infant lying in her arms, and her head slightly bent over him, her eyelids drooping bashfully until their long lashes almost rested on her flushing cheek. One old lady, who evidently had an eye for the beautiful, put up her eye-glass and watched the young woman as she made the tour of the room, and, on the retirement of the nurse and infant, said bluntly, "Where in the world, Mrs Tregloss, did you get that beautiful young woman from?"

Mrs Tregloss stared as if the adjective in the sentence

had completely bewildered her, but, on its being repeated, she said—

“Do you mean the nurse?”

“I suppose so; but positively, though she carried the babe, I can hardly believe it is your nurse. I seem to have seen the face before; it's like a picture I've seen somewhere.”

“Oh,” said Mr Tregloss ostentatiously, and entirely ignoring the annoyance he had had, “I wouldn't have any but a first-rate specimen of humanity to sustain my child. What I argue is this:—You want physical aid and nurture, then see that you get it—and money can get anything—see to it you get fine physical capability; as to anything else, it's no consequence. The person may be quite stupid—this one is—nearly an idiot I should say, but a splendid creature, as you see.”

“And her own child,” pursued the old lady, “she has one, I suppose.”

Then Mrs Tregloss related Foster's antecedents—“a widow—child taken care of, she believed, by some relative, or friend, or something.”

“No much matter—what—eh? if it's kept out of the way,” said the plain-spoken old dame, to the no small amusement of Mr Horace Hempson, who had watched the whole scene, and on whom the praises of Foster's looks and the information of her condition were not lost. Most persons like a corroboration of their judgment or taste, and Mr Hempson, though weary of his host and the company, felt himself repaid for his purgatory by the sight of Foster, and the tidings that he had heard about her. Not that her being a widow was exactly the most pleasant communication that could have reached his ears. Still, if virtuous, she was friendless, evidently; that was good hearing, accord-

ing to his creed. Circumstances would favour his designs. How, when she had to leave the Treglosses, was she to maintain a child?—she who looked as yet little more than a child herself. The young man grew gay over these thoughts, and the only real obstacle that presented itself was the Tregloss family. How could he manage to get away a person in their household, holding for the time being such a confidential situation, without it, if it transpired, being considered a breach of hospitality? However, there was no immediate hurry. He had an aged grandfather in very precarious health, to whose death-bed he expected daily to be summoned. To plan any stratagem that would involve absence just now, was not to be thought of. Meanwhile, he had, as it were, surveyed the ground—taken the bearings, and knew not only the outward value of the prize he sought to obtain—no matter by what means—but the circumstances in which she was placed. He had drank feverishly at table, and the stimulant, if it did not assist clear thinking, certainly influenced his feelings to an extent that shut out all fear of failure—all shame at success.

Mr Mixty came to the evening party that followed the dinner. He received the congratulations of his friends who gathered round him, and then, as soon as possible, he sank into his chair, and fell into a sort of waking doze, all his answers being in a drowsy tone. He was a short, plethoric man, with a face that certainly was haunted by the spirits that he loved—they kept a kind of carnival in his nose and cheeks, displaying their purple and yellow banners in splendid style.

Every one agreed that it was a delightful evening; and most of the guests, as they departed, talked to one another of the wealth of their hosts, not always, it must be owned

(seeing they chose to partake of their hospitality), good naturedly.

"Upon my word," said one, "Mrs Tregloss queens it bravely. Who would think she was the daughter of a gin-shop keeper?" "Well," was the reply, "and she's married to a distiller, so that's all right; they're much the same thing." "Oh, I beg your pardon, you're wrong there; a distiller and a brewer are different. Why, some of our first folks—our grandees—are distillers and brewers; but the retail people are of course plebeians." "Oh, stuff, they're all branches of the same tree." "Yes, an upas tree." "Ah, never mind, the poison fetches gold."

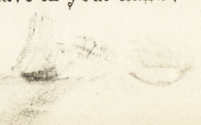
While in another carriage there was an old lady saying to her niece, "This is a queer world, when that young woman—did you notice her?—the nurse who brought in the child—should be the servant of such people as the Treglosses. Did you notice her?" "Not particularly." "Then you should; what do you go into society for but to notice, I should like to know, and if you had kept your eyes open you would have seen the loveliest creature—reminded me of one of Raffael's Madonnas."

Some days after this Foster grew anxious about the post. No reply came to her letter. Sophy saw her looking out when the postman came, and divined what she expected. As usual, she told her Aunt Flutterly, who began to cast about in her mind whether Foster had eluded their vigilance, and was holding any communication without telling her. There was an uneasy sense of discontent in Flutterly's mind about Foster. She could not, as she complained to her niece, "make her out." The men-servants, who had heard Foster so commented on and praised in the drawing-room, had carried the tidings to the lower regions, and set all the women criticising her, and many, Flutterly among the

number, disliking her. She would have been glad of anything that she could report to her disadvantage, and therefore, on the hint of Sophy, kept a sharp look-out, and resolved to intercept any letter that might come, reassuring herself with the belief that it was a duty she owed to Mrs Tregloss. There was no difficulty in carrying out her plan, for all the general post letters went to the housekeeper's room, and were sorted there. About three weeks from the time of Foster writing, there came a letter with a printed superscription. Flutterly opened it, and there within was Foster's letter returned, with about half-a-dozen Mount Pleasant's on the outside, that seemed to have been tried, before the words "not found" were finally written, and the letter sent back to Brighton to its writer. There was nothing in the constrained, cold letter, written under half-awakened feelings and in secrecy, that could serve Flutterly's purpose of doing her an injury, but she resolved on showing it to Mrs Tregloss, and making it a cause of complaint that Foster wrote "on the sly"—as she chose to call it—"and no one knows who she may write to." Flutterly chose a bad time for her communication, for Mrs Tregloss was busy sorting beads, and counting a piece of the elaborate pattern she was working, and her "Dear me, what now?" was ominous of impatience as well as indifference.

"Look here, mem—I don't complain—indeed I'm not given to complain at no time—but it's certain some folks is deeper than some folks thinks of, and keeps themselves to themselves in a most strange, mystairious way. I'm not given to nothing mystairious myself, which is more than some people can say."

"You tiresome thing, Flutterly, what do you mean? There! I've lost my count—dear me, and I must go over it all again; what is it you have in your hand?"



"A letter, mem."

"Then why didn't you say so ; give it me."

"I'm very sorry, mum, to hinterrupt you, but this is Foster's letter."

"Then give it to her and go ; you've made me lose my count, and I must go over all these stitches again, and all about a stupid letter of Foster's."

"But mem, you know master said she wasn't to have nothing to make her fret, nor yet to see nobody, and do nothing unbeknownst."

"Oh dear, how you plague me ; I'm teased te death among you. There now—don't speak—give me the letter."

"Well," she said when she'd read it, "what does it mean?"

"It means mem, that its returned, and didn't go where the child was."

"Well, and what of that?"

"Why she'd be in a way, mem, praps, She thinks all's right and the child well done by, and it 'ud set her fretting, maybe ; leastways, if she was obstinate, and I've seen her have a touch of that, she'd be fretting."

"Oh, if you think that, Flutterly, don't give her the letter—say nothing about it. We go to town in February, and then she can inquire and find out all about it. There must be no fretting ; Mr Tregloss strictly forbids it on baby's account—the darling. There—now—what are you waiting for ? I've told you what to do. Dear me, to think I've lost my count, and have to go over this pattern all again."

And so, with no thought that any law, human or divine, was broken by keeping the letter from its owner, the lady returned to her bead-work, and Flutterly destroyed the note.

Thus another impediment in the way of Foster ultimately finding the child was interposed. The days passed on. The due number of steps were taken by the nurse—the due number of beads sewn on by the lady—the due amount of restoratives drank, and scoldings bestowed in the household. Perhaps the only person that really made progress, and in every sense fulfilled the end of its existence, was the baby. That did thrive, and every day gained something in mind and body. It was useful, too, in breaking up the otherwise intolerable monotony of the house. What, with the languid mistress, and the pompous master, every one would have been wearied to death, amid all the plenty and splendour of it, were it not that the child's pretty, bubbling laugh, and even its occasional cry, stirred with a little healthy glow the otherwise stagnant household. It could hardly be said that the infant had inspired love. His parents were proud of him, as the inheritor of their riches and name. The servants were proud too—he was a personage of vast importance; and Foster's interest had quickened as he grew. Her interviews with Mrs Compton, now that her child had recovered, were not frequent, and the wholesome influence which the sight of a true-hearted mother diffused was therefore no longer felt. In proportion as Foster took more interest in her charge, her anxiety to hear tidings of her own diminished. When she thought of him it was in reference to little Percy,—was he as large or as fine. She heard such praises lavished on all sides on her nursling, that she could hardly help believing, not only that he was a very fine child, but that he was one of the finest in the world.

Meanwhile, her footsteps were watched without her being aware of it. Mr Horace Hempson had been called away at Christmas to his grandfather's, and had not returned,

but he employed a woman accustomed to the work, who contrived to scrape an acquaintance with Sophy, and soon learned all that authority had to disclose about Foster, and how long it was likely she would remain with the family; and as Flutterly had heard Mrs Tregloss say the baby was to be weaned as soon as he was strong enough, as they did not want him to get too fond of his nurse—she was able so far to settle all preliminaries with her employer.

In February, the family, to Mrs Tregloss's great delight, returned to London, and, on the first night of their return, Foster found means to get down into the drawing-room, and to have another look at the picture. She formed the resolution, too, of asking to be allowed to go out and see her child. A request so startling, that when, without any previous mention of her intention to Flutterly, she named it to Mrs Tregloss, that lady at once refused. As a compromise, however, it was agreed that Flutterly should go and desire the nurse to bring Foster's child for her to see it.

With a most affecting air of suffering the lady's-maid set out on her mission, saying to her niece, "Brought up as I have been—most refined—to have to go poking, first to hospitals for that cretur who's never been a bit grateful to me, and now to some back slums—I, that don't know my way in London nowhere's but to Regent Street and Grosvenor Square—I say it beats the globe, and I am not going to stand it."

CHAPTER VII.

THINGS ARE NOT WHAT THEY SEEM.

A VERY much more expert person than Flutterly, and who, moreover, would be in earnest in finding what she sought, could not fail to be hopelessly perplexed, what with the vague direction and the crowded district into which, after a tolerably long circuit and much enquiry, she went. And yet she came into contact with a member of the only family in the neighbourhood who could give her the information that she sought. It was a sloppy day, even in the best paved London streets, and in the back slums of the Vauxhall road, the puddles filled the broken pavement, and overflowed the slimy gutters, standing in broad pools on the ill-kept roadway. One of the Master Wiggsons was diversifying his street amusements by turning over head and heels, and occasionally walking on his hands, under the sheltering wall of the skittle-ground of the "Friend at Hand." Just as Flutterly turned the corner, the young gentleman miscalculated his distance, and coming head foremost into the centre of a puddle, sent a cascade of splashes of mud over the handsome gown and shawl of the justly indignant lady; whereupon, seeing the strange posture of the boy, who maintained his reverse position, she made a strike at his upstanding legs with her umbrella, and shouted "Police!" Her outcry, as to any results that she had desired, was most unsatisfactory. A horde of little urchins poured out, yelling on all sides; numbers of windows were thrown up; and mothers interested in the street doings, and instinctively disliking the well-dressed but common-looking stranger, called out to her that she "ought to

be ashamed of herself abusing a poor defenceless child in that brutal way." So that in a minute Flutterly found herself the centre of a mob, and was only too glad to make a hasty retreat, just as Mrs Wiggson, breathing gin and rage, with her youngest child in her arms, rushed out of the bar of the "Friend at Hand," and asked what she meant, "an upstart, stuck-up thing, by daring to strike a child belonging to them, as was as good as her—or a mighty deal better—any day—if they didn't happen to be quite so fine." But for this apparition starting out of the door-way, Flutterly would have most likely taken refuge, in her exigency, at the "Friend at Hand;" as it was, she turned the corner very quickly, and made the best of her way into a more open street, followed by sundry derisive shouts and cries of the young fry. As soon as she was out of hearing of this detestable crew, and could slacken her pace a little, she sought for her handkerchief, which, after the fashion of that time, she carried in her reticule—a vastly handsome affair of crimson velvet and gilt beads—when lo! it had been cut from her arm—two pieces of the silk cord alone reposing on the sleeve of her merino gown. So there she was, moneyless; with plenty of real grievances to deplore. In vain she sought for a policeman; there was none to be found; and in a fever of vexation she turned her steps towards the abode of a friend of hers, who lived in a mews at the back of Eaton Square. There she told her disasters, borrowed money enough to take her home, and then made enquiry for a Mount Pleasant West, and was told it was in quite a different district. However, her friend had a boy who ran errands, and he was despatched for Lambeth Marsh, while his mother and her visitor beguiled the time of his absence by recounting their troubles, and obtaining relief from some of the best cordial gin that ever came from the distillery of Mixty,

Pungent & Co. In less time than might have been supposed, the boy returned. He had found the residence of a Mrs Stubbs (the wife of a journeyman tailor), who was ill of the small-pox, and had lost a child by the same disease two days before. A horrid place the boy said it was—and Flutterly, being now very loquacious, blessed her stars she had not gone—paid the boy for his trouble, and left word he was to enquire about the woman, and send a message to Swillinberg House; and with recruited spirits she set out homeward, revolving in her mind, as she sat in the Chiswick omnibus, how she was to make a profit out of the losses and vexations of the day. It is a curious fact that while Flutterly was in a state of towering rage at the infamous wickedness of the wretches who had robbed her, and recalled all the punishments, not even excluding hanging itself, as justly their portion, she determined in her statement to double the amount of the sum she had lost—assured that it would be paid her,—and rather complimenting her honesty that she was content with exacting no more, after all she had gone through on that dreadful day. Repeating to herself most exactly the sum of “two soverrings, and two half-crownds, and a few sixpences—I can’t exactly say how many—I think five—but I might be mistaken in one.” She was at length put down at the Swillinberg gates, and began her sobbing before she entered the hall. Very glib was her statement of all the horrors she had encountered. She had walked miles and miles, till she was fit to drop; she’d been attacked—look at the mud on her clothes and—robbed!

Mrs Tregloss somehow enjoyed her statement; while Foster felt all the humiliation of this sending into such a district having been on her account, and became conscious that they all regarded her as a kind of accomplice of the rob-

bers. She felt afraid to recall Flutterly to the object of her visit, though the words—"But the child, tell me of it,"—hovered on her lips, she dared not utter them. After the "two sovereigns, two half-crowns, and I can't be perticler about the sixpences, whether they were four or five," had been repeated about half-a-dozen times, and Mrs Tregloss had said nearly as many "Oh, as to the money, that'll be repaid of course, and all expenses," adding "but I never thought—never, that you knew such kind of people, Foster!" and the latter had stammered out "Indeed I do not know them—I haven't an idea of the place;" then it transpired that it was not the place; and Flutterly began making all sorts of strange grimaces to her mistress, indicating that Foster should be sent away. The latter saw this, and divining the cause, said, in a concentrated voice that sounded like the utmost coldness, "You have not then seen Mrs Stubbs?" "No, I have not, and a mercy I have not, and the less that's said about her the better."

"Why?"

"Well, you go away, and I'll tell mussus."

"She's dead!" said Foster, the memory of the many acts of kindness the little woman had done for her coming to her mind reproachfully.

"Don't be making such a fuss, Flutterly; I hate fussy people. Tell her at once," said Mrs Tregloss, "Foster knows her duty—that fretting and stuff, and all that is not allowed; so tell her."

"Well then, the child is dead, and a appy release, no doubt, for there's no hend of children in them low streets, and she's a-dying of the small-pox."

"The small-pox!" shrieked Mrs Tregloss; "oh, Flutterly, you cruel thing, you, to name such a thing to me; go away, do; whatever would Mr Tregloss say; how dared

you go there. Oh! my eau-de-Cologne—my millefleur—I'm fainting. Foster, you stupid thing, why do you stand staring there; get me—get me—something;" and the lady closed her eyes and sunk back on the sofa, Sophy and Flutterly running to her, and excluding every breath of air as they leaned over and breathed upon her. Ringing the bell furiously, the women-servants, in a body all made for the boudoir; and there were hysterical cries and sobs from Mrs Tregloss that only yielded to brandy—the word "small-pox" in some unaccountable way was bandied about—and the master of the house chafed, and coaxed, and blustered, and stormed at intervals, until the confusion wore itself out, and Foster, pale and still as a marble statue, was observed sitting very quietly by the side of the baby's cot. Her quietness was such a tacit reproach to the recent tumult that every one felt angered with her. Her assumed want of feeling was a ready complaint.

"Don't you see your mistress, and the state she is in?" said the master.

"Yes, and all through you, Foster, as one may say," cried Sophy.

"Well, I'm thankful I've fielding; I ain't a stock nor yet a stone—thanks to goodness gracious—I've a refined art —."

"Woman, keep to the point, and tell me what has alarmed Mrs Tregloss, and put her in this dreadful state;" said Mr Tregloss; and Flutterly related, not without many parentheses—that was impossible—her version of the incidents of the day, taking care, however, to guard against being misunderstood as to the small-pox, by dwelling on the fact that she had not gone; she had sent there, which Mr Tregloss said "altered the character of the communication. But your mistress has so much feeling, her tender-

ness is wonderful. It's too much for her frame, poor dear! sadly too much; see, she is quite exhausted. I shall send for Dr Sootherly. There, Flutterly, throw your shawl and bonnet off, and get your mistress to bed as soon as possible."

In so well-regulated a household as Mr Tregloss's, there was, of course, no special reason for fearing the malady that Flutterly had incautiously named. All the precautions that modern science so wisely directs had been taken, even to the extent of vaccinating all the younger servants at the time the baby was vaccinated. But it was a sort of superfine creed of Mrs Tregloss's to allow no mention of fevers, or any contagious ailment, or of death, if it could be avoided. She considered it an evidence of great elegance to be awfully shocked and disgusted at the sterner maladies and sorrows of life, particularly when they attacked the poor. A world all swans' down, rose bloom, and bead work, was what Mrs Tregloss wished to surround herself with, and even to endure that, she needed the constant support of stimulants. Just as Brindley was said to regard rivers as only intended to feed canals, Mrs Tregloss thought water was merely meant to qualify alcohol, and to make strong drink. In no other shape or form did she employ it. Her toilet had all kinds of almond emulsions, and scented washes, and spirituous perfumes, just as her beverage was a mixture of various stimulants, and the consequence was that she daily grew more nervous, tremulous, thin, and hectic. Unable to take the amount of wholesome exercise that would have tired her, she became more and more restless, and in proportion as health receded her life became more than ever artificial. To do Dr Sootherly justice, he used very simple medicines. If the truth must be told of a great medical functionary, the nightly pill and draught

were merely, the one Castile soap, the other thin barley water, sharpened with a few drops of elixir of vitriol, Mrs Tregloss firmly believing that her life would be the sacrifice if she did not take this said pill and draught. The doctor had far greater trouble with his patient's diet. He guessed the sipping that went on daily. In the poor he would have called it dram-drinking, and he wished to alter the habit which he had not the honesty to denounce. He recommended claret and light wines, but Mrs Tregloss found, as most people do, that they disagreed—the horrible acrid stuff, like partially sweetened vinegar—and so, by Flutterly's aid, she qualified these "elegant, harmless" (?) drinks with the strongest spirits; and as they did not make her strong—it would have been wonderful if they had—she teased the doctor into ordering her "Dublin stout." Tiring of that she came to "bitter ale," each change keeping up the appetite and ministering to the consuming thirst that was rapidly becoming the peculiarity of her constitution, and the torment of her life.

This is no fancy sketch. It is in this way that many women of the wealthy classes—the young, the delicate, the thoughtless, sacrifice their health, and their lives. Most of them are dupes, led on by crafty nurses and waiting women, who seek to establish an influence over them; or are beguiled by indolent, ignorant, or selfish medical men, some of whom are, it is to be feared, active promoters of the evils they should cure—many of whom are certainly passive instruments in perpetuating that most terrible of all social evils, intemperance. As to the victims, like Mrs Tregloss, multitudes of them know not what they do. Others are not unconscious. They make yet more terrible and dreadful sacrifices even than health, when all that makes life pure and noble is lost. Under the bewildering stimulus of

strong drink, and the enervating influence of indolence, they fall a prey to the tempter, and sink down to depths where we dare not follow them. There is a bottomless pit of evil in this world, and imagination shrinks appalled before the dismal facts that legal tribunals discover; and just when the word "progress" is on the lips of reformers and philanthropists, the veil is withdrawn, and beneath is the abomination of desolation, the mystery of iniquity. Oh, strange, struggling, conflicting age! Truly the stamp of greatness is on this nineteenth century—great virtues, genius, nobleness, benevolence; great crimes, falsehood, inconsistency, pride.

"For we throw out acclamations of
Self-thanking, self-admiring,
With, at every mile run faster—
'Oh, the wondrous—wondrous age!
Little thinking if we work our SOULS
As nobly as our iron,
Or if angels will commend us
At the goal of pilgrimage."

But to return from this digression. Mr Tregloss entered the library from which he had been called by the clamour, and resumed his chair. He was reading an old book, on the management of infants, in which the writer insisted on the transmission of moral and mental qualities to the babe with its physical nurture, and instanced, among other arguments, the old proverb, "Drew it in with his mother's milk," to sustain his theory. Mr Tregloss remembered the fixed and stony look of Foster, and the many instances of chilling, torpid reserve, which he called stupidity, and came to the conclusion that his son would be injured by such a nurture. "To be sure," he said, "my son inherits talent from me—undoubtedly he does. I've made my way too well in the

world for any one to presume to doubt that. Yes, he inherits talent from me, and tenderness from his mother; poor little thing, to think of her feeling so for the death of the child of that iceberg—being so frightened at the very name of a malady that might affect our son (by the way, I must not forget to have the letter fumigated when it is sent here from that boy Flutterly employed, before it is read). But neither my talent nor her tenderness will remain with him if he is sustained by that stupid creature. It will destroy and overpower his real nature. Why, bless me, it's said—a foal of blood may be suckled into a garron. Besides, that class of nursing people often become troublesome—presume on the office they fill, and set up some kind of claim; it is as well to get rid of them entirely. I should not like my son to have a plague of a woman setting up a kind of maternal claim on him." These recondite speculations were put a stop to by an unexpected visitor. Mr Horace Hempson, clad in deep mourning, entered the room. He apologised for making a visit at that hour, but stated his intention of speedily leaving England, and that his time was limited.

Mr Tregloss had heard, for such news fly fast, that his guest had been disappointed as to inheriting the bulk of his grandfather's property. He had only a very moderate fortune, and the habits in which he had been trained unfitted him for any settled pursuit. He was one of a large class of expectants, who hang on to some rich relation, acquiring habits of spending the money they are doomed not to inherit, and continuing their extravagant mode of life until it has become a second nature. Mr Tregloss knew that Mr Hempson was encumbered with debt, and that the sum which had been bequeathed him was utterly inadequate to his long-established mode of life. However,

he was glad to see him. The monotony of the evening would be broken by his society. Ascertaining that his guest had dined, he rang for refreshments, and bright wines and spirits in their crystal shrines, soon glistened and sparkled on the board. The fire was heaped up, and the gentlemen prepared to enjoy themselves. The pile of books by Mr Tregloss's side attracted Mr Hempson's attention, and he was favoured with an explanation of the theories on which the master of the house had been meditating when he arrived. He was equally amused and instructed at the vanity and egotism of his host. The quiet way in which he took it for granted that he and his were naturally so superior to the beautiful young woman who was the object of what Hempson chose to call "his love," seemed the perfection of conceit. As the wine circulated, both gentlemen became to a certain extent confidential. By a series of leading questions, Mr Tregloss obtained a confirmation of what he had heard whispered in his circle. A marriage had been spoken of as possible between Horace Hempson and a young lady of fortune, whose chief merit, it is to be feared, in the eyes of her suitor or his friends, was, that her lands lay contiguous to those he had expected, only a short month ago, to inherit. As soon as it was found that a different bequest of the estates had been made, the young lady, at the command of her parents had given her ardent admirer what has been expressively termed the cold shoulder, and for fear that dish should not be sufficiently indicative of the real state of affairs, her friends had explained that Mr Hempson's visits had better be for a time discontinued. There was, as our readers see, no love whatever in the case, but that did not prevent their being on one side a great deal of mortification. Hempson had been a spoiled child. He had hitherto seen only the smooth

side that the world presents to its well-to-do favourites, and the first touch of the rough lining that underlies the smoothness made him wince terribly. Though conscious he had not given his heart, and suspecting the lady had no heart to give;—though perfectly willing, and indeed desirous, to wait, and have his full fling of pleasure before he sacrificed himself—for a sacrifice he involuntarily thought it—and entertaining wild schemes of libertinism, as we have seen, against a poor, unprotected woman, whose youth and poverty should have made her sacred to a really honourable mind,—he had still the idea that he had been infamously treated by his bride expectant. His pride was wounded, and if he had been the most ardent of lovers—pure and disinterested of men, he could not have been more indignant. Like all impatient people, he was for going to extremes. He had lived in gaiety all his life, and now he talked of complete seclusion. Mr Tregloss was not far wrong when he divined that one reason for his guest coming uninvited at an evening hour was, that his creditors, having got scent of his altered fortunes, were on the alert to push their claims. The bitter way in which Mr Hempson had spoken of the worldliness with which he had been treated, decided the master of Swillinberg House to adopt a very cordial manner, and to press his guest to stay a few days. In fact, handsome as was his house, and capital his library, Mr Tregloss often found himself hippled. The neighbourhood was not as social as that which he had left, neither was he exactly so great a personage in it. His wife was very pretty and well dressed, and in his estimation amiable, but she did not exactly shine as a companion. It was fatiguing always having to start subjects, and with due reference to her being able to comprehend them; and though her “Yes” or “No” were accompanied with a sweet little

simper, yet it was insipid, or, at all events, not exhilarating. Indeed, how he could get over his evenings, if it had not been for his wine-cellar, would be difficult to say. So a companion of any kind to vary the scene was pleasant, and none the less so that he could assume the Mentor. And as he cordially disliked the family to which Mr Hempson was to have been allied, he could indulge in invectives against them that were pleasant to himself and his hearer; a sympathy in disliking being often quite as strong a bond as a sympathy in liking.

So the evening wore away; Mr Tregloss ringing to inquire after his lady's health, and then yielding himself to the full enjoyment of his glass, in which he was emulated by his companion. Indeed, as no better way of obtaining comfort under mortifications than that which the bottle supplied was known to Hempson, he drank with feverish eagerness, and for a long time, such is in some temperaments the influence of mental excitement, without feeling any particularly unfavourable results. The guest-chamber that could be most easily prepared was one of the same suit of rooms as that in which Mrs Tregloss's bedroom, boudoir, and nursery were situated, and it adjoined the latter. There was indeed a door of communication between the two, though it was usually locked.

Sophy, Foster, and their infant charge—the latter in the most elegant of cots—retired to rest early, by Flutterly's desire. Mrs Tregloss had been got to bed immediately after the scene we have related, but the sending for Dr Sootherly had been postponed until the following morning. Flutterly had seen all safe, and certainly very weary with the events of the day, was glad to mount to her room on an upper story. So that the gentlemen as they hob-nobbed had no interruption from the household. Martin, the

butler, was dozing below, waiting wearily for his master's bell, as a signal to attend him and his guest to their chambers. Probably there was no one in the house really intelligently awake but Foster. Sophy, as was her custom, had drank her own supper beer, and that allotted to the nurse, and was, after her usual fashion, snoring heavily. If the walls had not been thick, and a double door between the nursery and the boudoir, she would often have disturbed the repose of her employers; as it was, she only disturbed Foster, and she was nobody. On this night, however, the nurse had something more to think of than Sophy's annoyance. Her child was dead. Often in her musings about him the thought had crossed her mind that he might die, and in the cold words of those about her, such a conclusion was to be desired, at least not to be deplored; but now that it had come, instead of a burden being removed, she felt a weight on her heart that seemed to suffocate her. A sense of wrong—a terrible consciousness that an innocent being had gone, as a witness to testify against her at the great tribunal, oppressed her. She was not religious—only the merest outline of religious truth had ever been taught her, and that by a parrot-like repetition. But no eyes that have looked in a Bible are entirely dark from that time. God does not leave himself utterly without a witness in any heart; and, though acute grief she did not feel, a dull, weary listlessness, unrelieved by tears or any outward manifestation, chased away sleep from her pillow. It was well it did so.

She heard the footsteps of Mr Tregloss and his visitor—who the latter was, of course she did not know. For an hour after the master of the house had retired, Foster heard the visitor pacing his room with what sounded like unsteady footsteps. Once a chair was thrown or fell against the

door that communicated with the nursery. She crept out, and feeling the lock, discovered that the key was on the other side. She was afraid to try whether it was fastened lest she should open it and alarm the guest. Retreating to her bed, and feeling an undefined dread, she listened intently. There was every now and then the creaking of a chair, then a voice talking; once, indeed, even a snatch of a song came to her ears; and she made up her mind as to the condition of the visitor, but without attaching much importance to it. The incident was not so uncommon as to merit any mental comment. Then there was a long pause, as if he had retired to rest; and Foster, at length wearied out, sank into a fitful slumber. Suddenly, something, she knew not what, woke her. The night-light, she fancied, gave an unusual glare. She sat up, heard a creaking, and smelt fire. Leaping out of bed, and dragging on a gown that she kept ready for her nightly use, she ran to the door that divided the rooms, and saw a bright gleam, a distinct line of light, all round the crevice. It was the impulse of a moment to dash it open; and there were the curtains, the bed hangings, the whole room as it appeared, in one blaze; and sitting asleep in a chair, no particle of his clothes removed, was Mr Hempson.

A glance had shown her this; her quiet temperament did not prompt her to scream, and make the outcry that more voluble persons would. She rushed at him, dashing a chair against him, while the flames seemed to leap through the door-way towards the chintz and muslin hangings of the nursery windows. Sophy's eyes had opened, and simultaneously she screamed out, before she exactly knew for what,—“Foster, Foster, where are you?”

“Here,” said Foster, running back through the flame, and flying to the bell, which she rang, and then catching

up the child, she opened the door on to the stairs, and going to Mrs Tregloss's room, cried "Fire," as she ran. By this time Sophy's shrieks were terrific, and all the light drapery of the nursery was in a blaze; Foster, not knowing what she did, rushed with the child down to the hall. The men from below, and the women from above, were running in all directions. Mrs Tregloss, with far more reason, and now with no one to attend to her, was lying screaming on the floor—her husband with difficulty rousing himself and carrying her, like one in a dream, to the drawing-room. Meanwhile the cause of all this commotion had rallied, and was vigorously tearing down curtains, tossing heavy blankets upon them, and striving to trample out the flames. But the smoke mastered him; half-suffocated, he got out of his room somehow by a door opposite to that which led to the flaming nursery, and wandering along a corridor, and along a staircase, found himself, after several turnings, in the hall, where, lying spent on a mat—the baby clasped tightly in her arms—was Foster.

By this time, the alarm bell had been rung—taps were set running—menservants were fetching water—women gathering round their mistress, many screaming and crying with her, and all the terrible panic that adds so much horror to that most dreadful of calamities—a fire.

It was remembered afterwards, and commented on, that Mr Hempson's first care was to lift Foster in his arms, and carry her and the child to the porter's lodge—the cold night air aiding in the work of sobering him. He then, bitterly cursing what he called his "misfortune," bewailing himself as the "unluckiest dog alive," returned to the scene of the calamity. There were many workers—the parish engine arrived, and the flames were not very long before they were subdued. The damage was confined to the rooms adjacent

to that in which it had occurred, and which, as the cold, grey light of morning broke, presented a most dismal spectacle.

But the consequences of the fire did not end with the damage and devastation of the flames.

CHAPTER VIII.

SUMMARY PROCEEDINGS.

THERE is no action of our lives that contains its end in itself; certainly no evil action. Nothing in this world is so prolific, and shows itself in so many protean forms, as sin. The gardener complains of certain plants that they are self-sown, and therefore most troublesome. And so it is with sins and follies; the winged seeds fly in all directions, and involve not merely the guilty, but often the innocent, in misery and ruin.

The day after the fire was, of course, not only a busy, but a confused time. The lawn at Swillinberg House was covered with costly articles of furniture and valuables that had been hastily removed, and were now under the charge of the police. The household were scattered in all directions, their numbers to some extent adding to the difficulties; for with all his self-importance, Mr Tregloss in an exigency was not by any means a cool leader. He was too fussy to be a safe guide; and there were some disasters connected with this fire greater than the injury to his house and the dilapidation of his furniture. Mrs Tregloss was seriously ill. Her over-stimulated system was peculiarly susceptible to fright; and from the time that she had leaped out of bed, and, seeing the mere reflection of the flames,

had fallen to the ground in fits, there had been no tranquillizing her.

With a view to restore composure, she had been carried, in a partially lucid interval, to the lodge, where Foster and the child were, but her distraction for the time defied all powers of persuasion, and there was nothing for it but to prepare a room in a distant part of the house, and place her there under the charge of Dr Sootherly and Flutterly.

Mr Hempson, as soon as the first excitement was over, found himself badly burned in his arms and hands, and quite helpless—a mischance which in a somewhat less degree had also befallen Foster. Her right hand and arm were severely scorched, and as the day progressed became very painful, though she made no complaint, and if she had there was no one to listen to her. Mrs Dossett, who happened just then to be at liberty, heard early in the morning of the fire, and came to offer her services to the family, which were accepted; though Flutterly, in a panic of jealousy, contrived that her attentions should be given to the child, in lieu of those of Sophy, who was employed by her aunt in the sick-room of the mistress.

“How did the fire originate!” was of course a very natural and general question, and among the servants it was answered in the vague phrase usually employed. “It broke out”—some said in the nursery, others in Mr Tregloss’s dressing-room; some insisted it was in the guest’s chamber, or in the boudoir; all those places being utterly dismantled, the windows burnt out, and the walls alone remaining; it was not wonderful there should be a conflict of opinion.

Mr Tregloss had heard the nursery so often spoken of, and was besides so conscious that Foster gave the alarm, that he came to the conclusion that some carelessness of

that "stupid woman" had done it all. He was unwilling to blame his guest, or to question his sobriety, for that would be reflecting on himself. Indeed, as he tried to recall the incidents of the past night, he was inclined to think that the alarm he had suffered had confused his remembrance of previous matters, for certainly he could not recollect either going up stairs to bed, or taking leave of Mr Hempson. "Of course how could he, with such a calamity breaking in upon his first sleep? As to admitting even to himself, that he was, as he styled it, *non-compos*, that he would never do. No man was soberer than he. Who could dare to say *he* ever went beyond the bounds of gentlemanly freedom in the matter of drink? The very thought was preposterous. But Hempson—how about him? Why yes, he might be a little gone—just a little; it was confoundedly unlucky that he had asked him to stay. To say that he was drunk, even if true, would be a sort of self-implication. Besides how he had worked and how he was injured?" Mr Tregloss, though smarting under his losses and family troubles resolved to be cautious and not make them worse by charges that might recoil on himself. "That stupid woman" was both a convenient phrase, and, if need be, an unresisting scape-goat.

While these cogitations were passing in the mind of the master of the house, and while Mr Hempson was having his burns dressed, and being put to bed at the little neighbouring inn—afraid to look his late host in the face, and bitterly conscious that he had been in no condition to take care of himself or trusted with a light—Flutterly, in the pauses of Mrs Tregloss's frenzy, had made enquiries of her niece, and come to conclusions that had not entered into any one's mind.

Who can stand before envy? The feelings that had been

growing up against Foster—the dread that if she continued much longer with the family she would make a place in the consideration of the mother and child, ultimately unfavourable to Flutterly's own interests and those of her niece—added so powerfully to the prejudices already entertained, that, without any misgiving as to the truth of her conjectures, Flutterly constructed a perfectly clear theory about the disasters of that night, and all the troubles that had ensued. And here we may say of far better dispositions than that possessed by this poor, envious lady's-maid—with her flunky spirit, warped into all sorts of contortions by the debilitating influence of constant obsequiousness—that once allow a prejudice to enter the mind, and any evil will be believed of the object of that prejudice. It is a most difficult attainment to be able to believe good of those whom we dislike, and still more difficult to avoid readily believing evil of them. So that, over and over again, Flutterly had the narrative repeated by her niece, in reply to leading questions of her own. "When you woke, Foster was not in bed with you?" "No; that she was not."

"And you saw the door open between the nursery and the yellow bed-room?" "Yes, Aunt, and I'm certain I saw —."

"Stop a bit—not so fast. I want you to be very pertik'lar—pertikerlarity, as I'm always a-tellin' you, is everythink in making all strait and clear. The room door was open? Well, did you see Foster a-coming out through that same door?"

"Yes, I did; I'd take my Bible hoath of it."

"And she hadn't baby with her, eh?"

"No, I telled you she catched the young master up and run."

"Very well—ve-ry well indeed. I'm no witch nor no

wizard, and I never made no pretence o' bein' wiser than my betters—which, though I say it, and p'raps I hadn't ought—but I'm not quite so blind as some folks thinks, and it's high time as something was done in this house to show them as ought to be showed the value of old, and tried, and trusty servants, as despise low people, and low ways, and back slum riff-raff."

But Flutterly had not for a short time an opportunity of explaining her views in any important quarter, and she was too wary to risk any precipitate charge. She was an accomplished servant, and knew that very much depended on the mood of her master as to the intelligence she had to convey. She had also to reflect a good deal about Mr Hempsen. She knew he was not an intimate friend of the family; still, any charge that implicated her master's guest was a serious matter. If Mr Tregloss thought proper to treat her insinuation with contempt? She had no mind to awaken such a feeling. Yet the odious moral code that prevails in society had its full influence on Flutterly. A gentleman, to her thinking, was guilty of only a venial offence if he tampered with female virtue; but she made amends for this latitudinarian estimate by the bitterest rigour towards her own sex. No word in the vocabulary of insult would be too stern to apply to the tempted one. Indeed, she often said, with a smirk, "*Gentlemen would have their fancies.*" It never occurred to her that what was sport to them, was degradation, ruin, and often death, body and soul, to those who were the objects of such "*fancies.*" But why should we expect Flutterly to think differently? Educated ladies of good repute—modest matrons and bashful maidens, may be found, who hold exactly the same creed. The seducer is not excluded from the fashionable circle—nay, not even from the virtuous

home. Smiles are freely lavished on him; his "little escapades" are palliated, or the more exquisite hypocrisy is adopted of pretending to ignore such faults. But the seduced? Oh, detestable creature! name her not—cast her out—let her perish in her sins! True, there was a different doctrine taught in Old Judea, eighteen hundred years ago; but what's the use of adverting to that? Surely society may introduce genteel modifications into the code. The old French Marchioness, who said openly—"Depend upon it, the Almighty thinks twice before he condemns people of quality," did but decidedly express a sentiment that is manifestly acted upon—though it may not be uttered—in many influential circles in this enlightened era.

After a few days of great anxiety and no little confusion, the Tregloss family were all established in that part of the house that the fire had not burned. The lady, though still extremely ill, was not in absolute danger. The nursery, as before, was situated near her chamber, and the nurse's hand was nearly well. Not so, Mr Hempson's; great inflammation had supervened, and what was at first thought to be a painful, but not dangerous accident, became of serious consequence. Mr Tregloss's conjectures as to the state of Mr Hempson's affairs were found to be correct. The myrmidons of the law were on the track of the sick man. The certificate of the medical man kept them at present from removing him to a debtor's prison, but his progress was watched with vigilance; and Mr Tregloss was by no means inclined to view the aspect of affairs leniently. Such tidings fly fast, and almost as soon as Mr Tregloss learned the embarrassments of his late guest, the servants were discussing the same topics. Sheriff's officers were known to be hovering about the inn, and the amount of prudential talk that circulated in Swillinberg House was

very edifying. From the master to the lowest helper, there was such a wonderful amount of wisdom, that they might have all been reading Poor Richard's Almanac. Certainly it would have been more consistent if they had obeyed that worthy's injunctions, by discarding their strong drink while they talked of the young man's prodigalities; but that they were not prepared to do. Mr Tregloss, as soon as his wife was in a condition to listen to him, duly lamented the state things were coming to.

"Hempson, my dear, has over-run the constable fearfully, I hear," he said. "I visited him to-day, and he proposed that I should render him some assistance, but you know that is out of the question. Indeed I've a conscientious objection to do anything of the kind. I've suffered enough from that rascal that I have disowned."

"To be sure," said Mrs Tregloss, fretfully; "but don't tell me dear, about it, nor about your nephew that went to the bad; I can't understand about business—you know it vexes me—and to think what a time it is since I've done any bead-work, and that was my only amusement."

"And baby, my dear, our son?"

"Oh yes, of course, baby; though, somehow, whenever I see him, I always tremble, and think of the fire; I can't bear it, Mr Tregloss."

"Ah, it's too much for you to see him, mem," said Flutterly; "and them as have shook your nerves, if I'd my will, shouldn't escape."

"What do you mean, Flutterly, by 'escape,' eh?" said Mr Tregloss quickly, the investigations of the insurance company having rather annoyed him. "Who are you talking about?"

Flutterly elevated her eyebrows, and looked significantly

towards the bed in which Mrs Tregloss was lying, and made no other reply.

The master divined that her silence was a precautionary measure, and therefore leaving the room he returned to his library, and, as soon as he thought Mrs Tregloss was quiet for the night, desired that Flutterly might be sent for. She had expected the interview, and Mr Tregloss's statement about Mr Hempson was all that was wanted to induce her to open her mind. Her narrative had been too carefully conned to fail in any particular, and to do her justice, she thought she was telling truth—a little coloured it might be, but correct in the main.

“Send for Sophy, sir, don't let me go—I don't want—I'm not colleaging—I'd scorn it; send for that innerc'nt gal, as I'm sure I've trembled for, being, as she is, constantly with that owdacious cretur,—send for her, and ask her yourself.”

Mr Tregloss was in a ferment of rage, for the idea that any clandestine meeting had taken place was entirely new to him, and furnished an immediate solution of the difficulty that had annoyed him. We have seen he did not choose to admit that intemperance had anything to do with the matter, as that reflected on himself; but any levity of Foster's—that sort of vulgar romping which he knew went on with ill-conducted servants, when they were noticed by, or wanted to attract the notice of, a dissipated young man—afforded an easy solution of what he chose to consider a perplexing difficulty. Therefore, when Sophy came with her plain story, so often told to her aunt that it was perfectly familiar, he was instantly convinced. How far the wish was father to the thought, he knew not; but, after ascertaining the particulars before enumerated as to the night of the fire, he asked if Foster had ever seen Mr Hempson before, and

learned that he was often lounging about the beach at Brighton, and was by no means unknown to either of them, though to Sophy's knowledge they had never spoke. However, as the facts testified to were so suspicious, Mr Tregloss rushed to the conclusion that Sophy had been no match for the artfulness of the person whom she was set to watch. The idea that his child had been, and continued in the care of such a woman, filled him with indignation. If the custom of taking a stranger into the family, at a moment's notice, to fulfil the tenderest office, and requiring the giving up of the maternal tie, had been the very wisest and most unobjectionable practice, he could not have manifested more surprise and disgust at the turpitude he thought he had discovered. "That such a wretch should have had the charge of my son! Woman, why did you not tell me—how dared you keep it from me?"

Flutterly, startled at the turn things were taking, of course began to cry. Like some orators, she thought a pocket-handkerchief irresistible, and therefore duly produced it, declaring that "what she had gone through no tongue could tell. There was her dear mistress—all but dyin'—there was the precious sweet darling of a baby as was certainly thriving, though she was afraid it was upon wickedness, as a angel like him didn't ought to be fed upon; and there was no body that had any right ad ever come to her afore, and said 'Flutterly, speak your mind.'"

This last expostulation had great force with Mr Tregloss. He remembered he had not, when he examined the other servants, called Flutterly or her niece. They were occupied with Mrs Tregloss, and so he had left them out in his investigations; and now it was ten o'clock at night, and he was more perplexed than became so prompt a gentleman as to what he should do. Not for a moment would he have hesi-

tated to send Foster out of his house at a minute's warning. Nay, under the influence of excited feelings, he would have done so, as an example to his household; but there was his son? So summary a process with his nurse might be productive of suffering, certainly of inconvenience to him; therefore, at all events, he must bottle up his wrath, until he had consulted two practitioners, Mrs Dosset and Dr Sootherly. The former he could talk to that night—for the latter it was desirable to wait the usual morning visit. It was with many low curtsies that Mrs Dossett, whom he had instantly summoned, entered the library. She was by no means on her usual lofty eminence as a domestic functionary; she felt that her dignity and importance, as superintending in the infant's nursery, were very subordinate to her usual state of ordering in the lady's chamber. She certainly made the most of her position; by great airs of condescension she "had come to oblige the family, and they must make much of her, for she was expecting to be called away hourly." However, it was consolatory that the master consulted her; when Mr Tregloss began his queries she did not understand him, and there was a division of feeling in her mind as his meaning dawned upon her. When Foster was first introduced into the house, she had openly jeered at the notion that she was a widow—her extreme youth being the suspicious part of the assumption in Dossett's idea. A wife in her teens would not have been so strange, but a widow she considered dubious. Therefore any charge against Foster's character that tended to establish her foregone conclusion was a pleasant corroboration of her opinions. Every one is gratified at being able to say, "Ah, I told you so; you see I was right." But this satisfaction was modified by Dossett's dislike of Flutterly. The way in which she, an established nurse, had been excluded

from the sick-room of the lady, was an offence never to be forgotten or forgiven. And from sheer revenge she was inclined to take the part of a person whom she fully believed Flutterly meant to wrong. So with due formality she favoured Mr Tregloss with her sentiments.

"I never chose the young woman, sir, and I never at first had much of a notion of her; better she'd a said right out what that class of nusses has mostly to say for themselves, and that is, 'I ain't neither wife nor widder, but I can take to your child.' That's truth."

"But, nurse, I'm not asking you this woman's character; I've made up my mind about that—perfectly made up my mind. I want to know, if I send her away to-morrow morning—I'm extremely sorry that I'm obliged to delay until to-morrow morning—if I send her away, will my son suffer—must we as a family endure the annoyance of another of the same class!"

"Why, sir, there's a risk; the pretty cretur is young." Mrs Dossett seemed suddenly struck by the thought that the last phrase might be misapplied, and so explained it by adding—"Your blessed son and heir, sir, I mean of course."

"Of course," repeated Mr Tregloss with a lofty wave of his hand.

"He's young to be weaned all at once; but I'm here, sir, and if I was certain I could stay I wouldn't fear taking the 'sponsibility, sir; but I may be called away any hour, and then, sir, I wouldn't answer for the consequences; for Mrs Flutterly no doubt is a clever lady's-maid, and the young girl, her niece, if so be she is her niece." Hu—hu! Dosset was taken with a queer little cough as she spoke the last words. "Her niece, as I'm told she is, may be able to wait in a nursery, or what not, but neither of 'em, sir, knows the handling of a baby, or is fit to hev the

charge; and this Foster, I'm bound for to say, whether she's a widder or not, keeps right on at her dooty, and for quietness, I don't know her match."

"Stupid and crafty, nurse. But keep your eye on her, and to-morrow feed the child—nay, begin to-night while she is here. If you think you can succeed in that, you shall be no loser. I would give a handsome gratuity to any one who would release my son from any further dependence on such a person, for go she must. After setting my house on fire by her infamous conduct—what business had she, pray, out of the nursery? After that, I will not endure her in this house; and only the consideration of the office she has held in this family prevents my prosecuting her, and that I request you to tell her, Mrs Dossett."

"Deary me, sir, I'm sure I'd do anything for the dear baby; as for the money, that's nothing, though you are so good as to name it; but as for telling the young woman, sir, that I should not advise by no manner of means; it would be far better to get her away quietly."

Mr Tregloss waved his hand in signal that the conference was ended, and dismissed the nurse; who, being a good-natured woman in the main, and able to do a kind action where her individual interests were not injured, returned to the nursery, convinced that Foster was the victim of Flut-terly's arts, and willing to befriend her.

The face of the subject of all these conferences, as she leaned over the infant's cradle, was so pensive in its quietude, that it touched the heart of the nurse as she re-entered the nursery, and she felt troubled how to begin her mission.

Foster had her arm in a sling, and was still pale from recent alarm and suffering.

"You've an enemy in this house," said Mrs Dossett in a

whisper, "and they're a-goin' to wean the child. I've done what I can for you, my dear soul, but I'm nobody in this place compared to somebody as I could name; but, dear me, you needn't mind, you go to your friends and wait for a few weeks, and something 'll turn up for you, never fear."

Foster heard these remarks as if she was in a dream. Only one idea was clear to her—"Wean the baby." For some time she had thought of such a possibility, and wondered what was to become of her, then; and a hope arising, not from any sense of comfort in Mr Tregloss's house, but from an interest in the child, had led her to wish that she might be retained in charge of him.

Now, as, with tearful eyes, she saw Mrs Dossett commence preparing some food and realized in her words that she was actually sent to break the matter, she was overcome with mingled grief and alarm, not without some touch of indignation. The child was thriving; she had done her duty; why this change of places?

For some hours of the night, Dossett talked to her, but to little purpose; for as it was her plan not to tell Foster of what she was suspected, there was nothing exactly tangible, except that she was to leave; and it was with a pang that punished her coldness towards her own child, that she saw her nursling taken from her, and watched Dossett endeavouring to still its cries with unwonted nutriment. Five months had passed since she entered Mr Tregloss's family. The money they had paid her had been mostly expended in clothing. She had very little to receive, and the question, what she was to do, and where she was to go, pressed heavily upon her. Dossett, duly anxious to please Mr Tregloss, and obtain the "handsome gratuity" he spoke of, was intent on her charge; but she was not without a wish

to serve Foster; and so, after ascertaining—no very easy matter to do—that the young woman had no home or friends, she said to her, confidentially, “If they dismiss you to-day, till you can turn yourself, you may go to my lodgings, but say nothing about it, for I don’t want to offend them. I’ve a good connexion in the first of families, yet still a bad word might injure me; but that Flutterly’s sich a cretur, that I know she’s been your enemy. But don’t cry;—think what a mercy your child is dead.”

She gave her card to Foster—“Mrs Dossett, ladies’ nurse, 3 Montgomery Grove, Little Chelsea:” and armed with that piece of pasteboard against actual destitution in the streets, poor Foster, instead of retiring to bed, prepared her little stock of clothes ready to go, as she feared, the next morning.

And it was well she had made the preparation, for as soon as Mr Tregloss understood from nurse Dossett that his son had slept tolerably; and learned from his gardener that Mr Hempson had been removed the night before from the “King William Inn” to the King’s Bench Prison, he made a little packet of Foster’s balance of wages, and sent Flutterly with a message that he ordered her to leave his house before twelve o’clock.

Nurse Dossett was desired to walk out with the child, so that there might be no scene. Mrs Tregloss, being ill, could not, of course, see the nurse; and the lady’s-maid, in the loftiest way, said, when Foster asked an explanation of the suddenness of the whole proceedings, “I suppose people aint obleeged to keep open house for any body as wants to stay. You was hired and you’ve been paid, and you’re dismissed, and a mighty good job for you that you got out of them horrid back slums as I had to go raking in; but

then if people's used to that kind of thing, why use is second natur."

So without a word to the master or the mistress, or any leave-taking of the child, Foster and her box were put outside the gates, to wait for the omnibus that was to take her part of the way to nurse Dossett's lodgings.

CHAPTER IX.

LOFTY INDIGNATION.

As the omnibus bore the friendless, discarded nurse away from Swillinberg House, and the master was preparing to take his constitutional walk, in a very satisfied state of mind that he had acted with a decision and judgment worthy of himself, he was delayed by the information that two gentlemen wished to see him on business. Their cards bore respectively the names of Mr Mitchell and Mr Harding. The latter was known to Mr Tregloss as an eminent picture-dealer, and the former, on being introduced into the library, stated that he was a solicitor. They came on the subject of the picture Mr Tregloss had bought in the last autumn, and no sooner did they name their business than the shrewd, keen look came into Mr Tregloss's eyes, and he glanced from one to the other with a cool cautiousness that fully justified the reputation he possessed as a man of penetration. He had clearly ascertained that there was no flaw in the title to the picture, so he sat at ease in his arm chair, and stretched out his feet, and carelessly dallied with the newspaper, as, after some little beating about the bush, they frankly stated that they came to ascertain whether he

would, for a reasonable profit, sell the picture to them again.

"Certainly not, gentlemen. It was fairly bought. I like it; it is mine; certainly not."

"The circumstances are peculiar," said Mr Harding, "or I would not have brought my friend Mitchell on such an errand. I told him I feared it was hopeless. When a judge of pictures gets a gem like that—the best, or one of the best, that the artist ever did ——."

"The very best," interposed Mr Tregloss, nodding his head complacently.

"Why, he is not likely to part with it, unless he wants money."

"Which I do not." A comfortable, self-satisfied cough followed, and Mr Tregloss beat the fire into a blaze as Mr Mitchell, unwilling to give up at once, said—

"A client of mine employed me to seek out the picture. I knew Mr Harding would be as likely as any one to know of its whereabouts, and hearing that a gentleman of such feeling as well as taste as Mr Tregloss had purchased it, I thought that what I could explain to him concerning it, might influence him to grant my client's request."

"Feeling—sir—you are very obliging—but what has feeling to do with it?"

"This, if I may be permitted to explain. The picture is, in a sense, a family picture. My client is a widow lady, who has become, late in life, much richer than she ever expected to be. She is, in fact, a sister of the artist Topham; and this picture, of which I have seen a rough sketch, represents the father of the artist, who was blind for years before he died—a very grand looking old man, with a head that would do for Homer—and the child was Topham's only daughter, a little creature of great beauty, whose

childhood must have been as full of misery as it was possible to pack into the wallet of a child's experience. Now, my client, deprived, during her husband's life-time, of the opportunity of seeking out these relations, helping 'Topham by stealth until she was quite wearied out, wishes to possess this relic of her kindred, not only because of the genius of her brother, but ——."

"The genius of her brother!" said Mr Tregloss, spreading out his hands in amazement, "is it possible she could bear to retain any memorial of such a kinsman? As a work of art, gentlemen, of course I, a stranger to the artist, being neither kith nor kin to him, may set a value on it; but if he had been my brother, I give you my word I wouldn't care to give it house-room. It would always have reminded me of family degradation. Why, I've heard that this fellow, in his drunken fits, would wander off, nobody knew where, for weeks at a time; then come home nearly naked, and gaunt as a famished wolf, and while the penitent fit was on him, would work night and day, and sometimes strike out something fine. Ah, Harding, you dealers knew what to make of him then."

"Well, we employed him when sober, we had nothing to do with making him drunk—that was left for your 'Mountain Dew,' your 'Cream of the Valley,' or whatever the compounds of the new member and his partners may be called. Ha! ha! remember that, please, my good sir; no offence, but just remember we'd nothing to do with helping him to drink or to drunkenness."

"Mr Harding," said Mr Tregloss, loftily, "I don't consider that I have anything to do with retail matters. All that is mere contingency. For my part, I most decidedly say I hate and detest drunkenness; and as to such fellows as this Topham, who cannot govern themselves, why, they

are below contempt. And pray what became of him?" he added, turning sharply to Mr Mitchell.

"Oh, from bad to worse. In my professional capacity, I have been employed to trace out his course. Never was anything more involved. His wife died broken-hearted."

"Pooh, pooh, nonsense, that's a disease modern research proves impossible."

"Well, she was worn out with sorrow, then; though I take it, Mr Tregloss, that's much the same thing; and a pretty deal of tough wear women will stand before they give in; we lawyers know that well. From all I've heard, this Topham professed to love his wife. He admired her, it is pretty evident, for he painted her face often enough—Madonna, saint, martyr."

"Ah," said Mr Harding, smiling grimly, a connoisseur smile, "it was according to very ancient precedent then, that when he painted her as a martyr he should make her look like one. The artist who stabbed the man to see the death agony, set the example."

"Yes, but the sudden murder was better than the slower process. But neither you, nor I, suppose it was for artistic reasons that he wore her down to her grave. No, no; while he drank and sang, she pined away. That's an old story—so old, sir, I take it nobody cares to hear it. But the child she left came in for the mother's legacy of suffering. He took her about with him when he was dodging his creditors, left her awhile at St Heliers, in the Channel Islands, then dragged her off to Rome, then back to Boulogne; then awhile she was in pawn in his lodgings at Liverpool. Without education, except what she picked up, without a single decent companion of her own sex, she struggled up, it seems, out of childhood; and then Topham married again—a gin-drinking creature, a model whom he

had often painted from. Then, I fancy, the girl had worse usage still. I was told that the woman wanted to compel her to follow the life she had herself led; and to avoid that, she married, when little more than a mere child, a boon companion of her father's, a young fellow with half-a-dozen aliases, as profligate, I am told, and more cold-hearted than Topham—married him secretly, they say, and went off with him; and there my information ends. Topham's wife got some money out of my client, under pretence that he was dying, and with that they went to America, where Mrs Topham had relations. Six months ago, I inserted several advertisements in the *Times*, for the daughter of this man, and received replies, in a man's hand-writing, and had one interview with some people who professed to know her, or to be able to find her, but it was all a hoax; nothing came of it."

"She's dead, no doubt," said Harding.

"I've no evidence of that," replied the lawyer.

"Well, having giving up her relations—washed her hands of them—unless I could find this niece of hers, Lilian Topham—that name, at all events was a correct description—my client, before leaving England, would give ——."

"I'm empowered," said Harding, taking up what he considered his department of the business, "I'm empowered to offer a good round profit on the sum you gave."

"Sir, twice the money will not buy it. I've listened to you," continued Mr Tregloss, "while you have unfolded this most nefarious history, and I really am amazed that any one, a lady above all others, and, as I infer, a lady of property, should trouble herself to rake such a wretch as this Topham out of his kennel."

"He was not always such a wretch," said the lawyer.

"He had great talents," added the picture-dealer.

"Gentlemen," replied Mr Tregloss, in his loftiest manner, "don't tell me what a man was, but what he is. And as to talents, why, that makes the matter worse—far worse. What are talents given for, gentlemen, but that we should make our way in life—rise in station—attain success. Talents, indeed! I've no patience with the cant—pardon me, I speak strongly, for I feel strongly—the rosewater cant of pity, 'for overpowering temptation,' and all that stuff. What's a man if he can't withstand temptation? My motto in life, gentlemen, and a very good one it is, contains five words—'Take care of number one.'"

By this time, Mr Tregloss had talked himself into high good humour. He had shown how he despised vice, and how independent he was of money. The picture, if he valued it before, became now doubly valuable that somebody wanted it. There was triumph in the possession, and, knowing so much of its history, he could henceforth most eloquently hold forth about it. He was vexed the lawyer had not told the name of his client. The narrative he felt, would have a loophole there. So, well knowing the value of a social glass in unlocking the reserve of most minds, he pressed his guests to stay luncheon, and ringing the bell, ordered that it should be served earlier than usual. In the meantime, he invited them to the drawing-room, to see the picture they had been talking of.

The lawyer looked at it with interest rather than with admiration; but the master of the house and the picture-dealer viewed it from different lights, and talked glibly the technicalities of criticism.

"What a flesh tint that is," said Harding, pointing to the neck and arms of the child.

"What depth in the eyes," said Mr Tregloss, musing,

and then added "it is a great triumph of the artist's skill that, beautiful as the face is, it looks familiar—an assemblage of features that one has seen—nothing exaggerated or incongruous."

"What a creature to have lived the life I have heard described—neglect, ignorance, want, and, latterly blows."

"But the old man, he is dead."

"Yes, years ago. While he lived, the child knew something of comfort. He came between the habits of the father and their consequences to the child. Yes, I fancy the grandfather did not belie his looks. But he died miserably," said Mitchell. "His son's career was worse than his own blindness."

"He should have shaken him off. It was due to society that he should have done so. In not doing it he became an accomplice. I, gentlemen, don't speak one thing and do another. I've known what it is to be disappointed; and I've let others know what it is to be discarded."

At this moment, the luncheon was announced, and over the luxuriously appointed table, pouring out his choice wines—and, as the day was raw, mixing a stiff tumbler each for his guests, which, as he presented, he described as being "an invaluable great coat, quite a dread-nought"—Mr Tregloss grew wonderfully glowing in his speech and face. He expatiated on the example he thought it incumbent on the master of a family to set—the necessity that a man should rule his appetites, and instanced, as a proof of the fatuity and recklessness so prevalent in society, the embarrassments of young Hempson. All his talk tended to one point—look at me, see how I manage! Again over the wine the picture was referred to, but it was evident all the offers were in vain, as also was Mr Tregloss's effort to obtain the name of the lady who sought to reclaim the relic.

The luncheon would have been prolonged far beyond the time assigned for the mid-day meal, had not Dr Sootherly arrived; and finding his patient much worse than he anticipated, and terribly worried with the wailing of the child, he made enquiries into all particulars, and learned with some displeasure, the very sudden dismissal of Foster. His opinion, as far as he had given it to Mr Tregloss, had certainly not been expressed with any intention of injuring the young woman, whose quietness and beauty had not been unnoticed by him. The master of the house being so occupied with guests, enabled the doctor to make a tour of observation and enquiry. He heard all the hints and guesses of Flutterly, and the clumsy assents of Sophy, and going to nurse Dossett, learned from her something more nearly approaching the truth. The extreme restlessness of the child, and the return of alarming symptoms in Mrs Tregloss, decided him to see the head of the household before he left. The flowing eloquence over the flowing glasses was, therefore, somewhat rudely suspended by the doctor's message "that he particularly wished to speak to Mr Tregloss." The two visitors went out to test the warmth of their spirituous great-coats in the bleak February wind, under the cold grey sky, and were certainly not sorry that good broad-cloth lent its aid as well. For, in spite of Mr Tregloss's encomiums, they both shivered as they faced the wind, and both felt discomfited by their failure in the great object of their morning's visit.

Meanwhile, great was the consternation of Mr Tregloss, as Dr Sootherly, with the gravest face, and the most seriously professional shake of the head, remonstrated against the changes that had taken place. "It's a trying time of the year, my dear sir—there's teething coming on—Dossett is clever with infants, very, but it's perilous—perilous. My

replies to your questions about the transmission of qualities were given abstractedly, as general propositions, but I had no idea of their being so immediately acted on. Great wits jump," added the doctor, in his blandest tones; "there's no keeping pace with such promptness as yours."

Mr Tregloss was partly propitiated by the doctor's manner, but yet wholly worried at his tidings. Immediately fancying all sorts of evils about his son, and in this chief anxiety nearly forgetting his wife's increased illness, he stammered out—"Something about the fire—heard of improper conduct—not to be tolerated—great stupidity."

"As to stupidity, that's no fault where we want to avoid nervous irritability; and for the rest, had you never remarked that your son's nurse was not likely to be a favourite with the women-folk?"

"Well, but that impudent fellow, Hempson! She was all the more likely to attract him."

"I do not see it in that light. Indeed, I called on Hempson—my nephew attended him—and he distinctly told me that, let the fire originate as it might, he considered he owed his life to the young woman rushing in as he slept, and throwing a chair or something at him. That's his testimony, and he'll swear it, I feel sure. My nephew, Ashley Sootherly, was talking to me about Hempson only last night. His affairs, I fancy, will be settled soon, and he will come out of his difficulties a poorer, certainly, but, I hope, wiser man than heretofore."

"Ahem! there's room, certainly, Dr Sootherly, for the latter improvement; but my son, what is to be done?"

The bland and courtly doctor did not say, "You ought in common prudence, to say nothing of politeness, to have consulted me," but he took his revenge by very bravely saying, "Recall the woman."

"Nay doctor, do you recommend some one else."

"I have no one at all equal to this young woman. The child takes notice—is wonderfully forward—would not readily take to any one else."

The proud Mr Tregloss sorely chafed at this dictum of the doctor's, and paced up and down his room in a ferment that was not appeased by Flutterly entering, crying, and begging the doctor to return to her mistress, who was in the strangest way, and talked of wanting to get out of the window; and it was as much as Sophy and cook could do to hold her. While Dr Sootherly returns to the lady's room, we will follow the steps of Foster.

As, in a dreamy state of perplexity, she was borne along by the omnibus, she remembered that she was to be set down at Knightsbridge, though she had no distinct idea of the direction to turn to the right, and then take the third turning to the left, etc., with which nurse Dossett had prepared her for the task of searching out Montgomery Grove. The cold was far more raw and piercing than in the depth of winter. Drearily she stood, with her box at her feet, put down at the corner of a street, and looking round her helplessly, as if for some one to aid or direct her. How terrible, to some natures, is the blank feeling of wanting guidance—of having no direct plan to go by, no arm to lean on. The dream of independence, of being a law to one's-self, may be very grand and dignified as a dream, but it is a terrible reality to feel as if the world that lies before you was like a narrow, dark shaft into a deep black pit, with a ladder that only one at a time can occupy. With some such shrinking did Foster gaze along the inhospitable street—up at the sullen houses, into the unfamiliar faces, that surrounded her. Every one seemed occupied—to have a purpose and a place in life—but her. A ragged boy, touching his cap, put his

hand on her little box, and said sharply, "I'll carry it." He was lifting it on his shoulder, before she had decided what answer to give him, when a young woman, with a child on one arm and a market-basket on the other, exclaimed, "Why, Mrs Foster, is it you?"

With a start of pleasure greater than one supposed she could have felt, Foster turned towards the kindly voice, and said—"Mrs Compton! oh I'm so glad to have met you—can you tell me where Montgomery Grove is?"

"To be sure I can; I live in Little Montgomery Grove. Here boy," she added, "keep by me, and don't run on so fast."

A few words of explanation enabled Mrs Compton to understand her companion's present circumstances, and her kind heart was touched that she was going to a lodging where there would be none to meet her—no fire, no comfort of any kind—and she said, after a few moment's thought, "Come home and have a bit of a warm at my house. I must get my husband's dinner ready, and then when you've had a snack with us, I'll go with you to Mrs Dossett's, and see you safe."

Giving directions to the boy, while Foster was tremulously thanking her, a quarter of an hour's quick walking brought them to the door of a neat little house, whose bright windows, white blinds, and clean door-step seemed to smile a welcome, and giving her basket to Foster to hold, she opened the door with a latch-key, and directed the boy to put the box down in the passage.

Foster had twice offered to carry the child, (she did not seem to think of the basket,) now a fat, rosy, laughing baby, but the mother refused the assistance, clutching her closer each time the offer was made. In her secret heart, Mrs Compton had not overcome her repugnance to Foster

giving up her own child so calmly. And as soon as the street door was closed, and she had ushered her guest into her little comfortable sitting-room—half kitchen, half parlour, and broken up the fire into a cheerful blaze, her first inquiry was after Foster's child.

"It is dead." Then came the account of her having written, of no answer being received, of the weary search the lady's-maid had made, and the tidings that had been brought.

"Well, but are you sure Flutterly made no mistake? She had no motive, certainly, but, dear me, how terrible it all seems; and yet when a poor baby is wronged that way—its own food that God meant for it taken away, perhaps it's best it should go too. I've seen nurse-children in London that my heart has ached for, and that seemed, poor things, as if they couldn't die. Only half alive, but yet they hang on to life."

Foster moved uneasily, as if a wound was being probed while she spoke, and seemed to gaze round the room as if wishing to escape.

"Tell me how it is that you have left Brighton?" interrupted Foster.

"Oh, that was only a job, you know, and it was mostly on baby's account that we went. Now, bless her, she's well—quite well."

"And you live here, Mrs Compton, and your husband has employment near?"

"Yes, he's doing very well; everything has gone right since he's been a teetotaler. Dear George is the kindest husband, and we've met with such friends! Oh there's the truest-hearted, friendly man lives in this Chelsea—a builder. 'Twas he got my George to sign—followed him up when I despaired, and found means to say the right word to him

at the right time. And it was he that got him his Brighton job ; and now he's recommended George to his present employers. Ah, let me tell you," she added, growing emphatic as she spoke, "there's few men that have done more good than our friend—I don't mean by speaking only, though he does that ; but, bless you, his life's a lesson that no words can come up to. When a working-man gives up his only luxury, and conquers his chief besetments, it's tough work. It takes a hard strong pull, and he's a brave man that can do it and not flinch."

As she spoke, the notable young housewife laid her baby down in its cot—its rosy lips smiling in its sleep—and bestirred herself to get the mid-day meal. As she moved about so neat and ready, her skilful hand so deftly performing her household tasks, Foster's eyes followed her with pleased yet pensive wonder. She felt so helpless. And when Mrs Compton, at intervals, asked her what she meant to do, or what she could do for a living, it was a terrible humiliation for Foster to have to say, "I know nothing, and can do nothing."

"Why, however have you been brought up? You look like a lady—are you a scholar?"

This phrase was the common way of asking if she could read and write. Yes, that she could do certainly, but Foster belonged to that terribly injured and exposed class of women who have been fitted by their training for neither hand work, nor head work—to whom the needle with all its varied utilities is a stranger, and cookery and housework are unexplored mysteries ; and whose knowledge of books is not enough to teach others. And with myriads in this condition, we wonder at the success of the seducer ! One thing was hopeful in Foster's case—she knew that she was ignorant. Justly might she have pleaded that she could

not help being so. But she thought that morning less of the excuses for the fact, than of the fact itself.

Reader, the most important periods of your mental and spiritual history are not your times of triumph, your seasons of exultation, your periods of self-complacency and joy, but the times when your defects are revealed to you; when the lightning flash of conviction strikes through the depths of your nature, and shows you the dark deformity of your faults, or the yawning void of your deficiencies.

The husband came in to find his wholesome dinner, neatly served, and to join with his wife in welcoming the melancholy stranger. As soon as he left, Mrs Compton fulfilled her promise, and accompanied her guest to the larger row of houses; called with that luxuriance of imagination for which Londoners are remarkable—"a grove," a neighbour's boy carrying the box. Very different from the cheerful welcome of the Comptons was the suspicious look of Mrs Dossett's landlady, as she took the card containing in its corner the words—"Let the bearer have the key," and sullenly complied with the request. Mrs Compton objected to go up stairs, but said, cheerily, "You know where I live—not a stone's throw round the corner—and you come whenever you like. I'd go with you and find out something of the rights about your child—for of course you'll go to-morrow—but I'm afraid I daren't, because of my own pet lamb; but you come in, mind, and see me—the oftener the better."

Foster mounted to the cheerless room which Mrs Dossett called "her genteel apartment," carried up her box, and sitting down upon it as if it was the only thing she knew in the strange place, looked at the empty grate, at the grey sky coldly spreading before the sombre windows, listened to a creaking sound upon the stairs that she thought must be

the crying of her nursling; listened more intently, and heard, as nervous women will, who have babes depending on them, the wail of an infant vibrating in her ears, and then covering her face with her hands, broke down at last and wept bitterly.

She had thrown her bonnet off, and was rocking herself to and fro, when footsteps sounded on the stairs. She was too miserable to heed them. There were other lodgers in the house. But suddenly the door was thrown open—and, could she believe her eyes? It was actually Dr Sootherly, no less a personage stood by his side than Mr Tregloss!

They both paused, evidently struck by the desolate look of the poor girl as she sat crouched together on her box.

"You see," said the doctor, turning with an air of triumph to his companion, "my dear sir," he whispered the remaining words, "this is not a person to act as——."

"Hum, ha, no-o," said Mr Tregloss.

"Young woman, your grief does you very great credit. There has been a little mistake. It would have been cleared up, no doubt, if I'd seen you before you left. But put on your bonnet—there's a carriage at the door to take you back."

"There, there, my good girl, that's right—don't cry. You're going back to baby."

Foster rose mechanically, and in a minute entered a cab, heard the directions given to the driver, saw Mr Tregloss drive off with Dr Sootherly, and in less than an hour was received by Mrs Dossett in triumph at Swillinberg House; Flutterly saying bitterly to her niece, "There's some people, like scum, will float, do what you will."

CHAPTER X.

TROUBLED WAYS.

AND what all this time was doing in the home of the little milliner in Seedling Place? How had her experiment of moving, and her plan of reforming her Adolphus by baby blandishments succeeded? Poor Kate! If her caps and bonnets had been as poor specimens of her skill, there would have been an end of a good deal of oratory on the part of her husband. Instead of explaining so glibly the solemn mystery that men called a revealed religion to be nothing but superstition—"giving a forced meaning to a book of allegories," he would have been employed in solving the mystery of how to keep soul and body together. But his wife, after the fashion of thousands of other wives, worked; and he drank and talked.

Her two parlours were in a much better street than that she had left. A bonnet and a couple of caps in the window indicated her trade, and work came in tolerably fast, and it was a wonderful stroke of generalship which had decided Kate on taking the rooms. The landlady of the house had two girls she wished to put as apprentices to learn Kate's business, and was well content to let her place at a low rent instead of paying a premium with her girls. So far all was prosperous.

And the child also was as thriving a specimen of baby humanity as if he was swathed in satin, and laid his head on a down pillow. Lizzy Wiggson, cripple as she was, had a good, sound, healthy heart, and nursed the little innocent impostor, with all the skill that arms accustomed to lugging about a baby from the time they had four or five years' pith

in them, could bestow. Indeed, the child was constantly in the open air, for Kate had no time from her urgent toil at her needle to do more than sustain him. Lizzie brought him for that purpose at fixed intervals, and then betook herself to parading the streets in all weathers, according to the approved custom of little London nurse-girls. But as the child was more warmly clad than befalls many, he took no harm, and grew a sturdy, chubby little fellow, with apparently a good grip on life.

Adolphus was not a man to care very much about a young child. He noticed the little fellow, certainly, in the brief intervals when he visited his home, but if there was any crying, or trouble of any sort, he was not slow to express his impatience. The benefit to society of a large public nursery would then come to his mind, and the folly of the appropriative feeling of parents, would be a favourite subject of conversation. To do him justice, Kate was not nearly so apt and ready in expatiating on the beauties of the child as most mothers would be. All that pleasant household chit-chat about the likeness of the child to the father, and all the agreeable flatteries that likeness sanctioned, was a language unknown to Kate. She loved the child intensely, as a something that filled the place of the little creature that had just looked at her and departed, and also she loved it from the anxiety and sorrow it had occasioned her. Kate was conscious that she had never been the same in her spirits since she had so easily slipped into the course of deception. Her husband never caressed the child but she trembled and blushed, and took it away as soon as she could; and yet, whenever her thoughts wandered, as they often did, to Swillinberg House, and the young mother of the infant, she was conscious of a perfect spasm of dread at the idea of her ever coming to claim him. Often, while

she was bending over her work, she would revolve all the circumstances likely to betray the truth, and a sense of relief would follow as she remembered that the address had not been written down, but given hurriedly as the widow went away from the hospital. There was evidently no wish, nay, a positive prohibition against any one going to the house, and she argued there would be as great a disapprobation at the mother coming out to see the child. Kate was not ignorant of the customs in nurseries, and knew well, from some families she had once worked for, how an infant's nurse is watched and guarded. Then there was no one at the hospital who knew either her or Mrs Smith. The constant coming and going of patients in public institutions, like the waves of the sea, washes out the traces of the former tide; no fear from that quarter. Once or twice she had thought of Mrs Wiggson with alarm, as being likely, in her office of gossip-in-chief to the neighbourhood, if any one went to inquire, to pounce on them and cause mischief, but that was soon dismissed. Her secret seemed safe enough, but, oh! it was very burdensome.

As to the removal being in any sense a safeguard against Adolphus's associates—that was a great mistake. He liked the cronies that he met at the "Friend at Hand"—the flatteries that were served up to him at Wiggson's; and the greater respectability of their present neighbourhood, though it gratified his pride, by no means fed his vanity. He seemed to have left his allies and admirers, and made himself amends by being as little as possible in his new home. Indeed, what with Human Rights' societies, and Rationalists' discussions, and the Forensic Club—where the occupation of the members was to try over again any public trial of interest, selecting, it must be owned, those of

a gross or morbid character—what with these and the amusements that diversified them, such as a free-and-easy with the sons and daughters of Harmony one night a week, and a dancing class on Friday evenings, there was not much time for home. However varied might be the social matters involved and discussed in these different societies, they seemed to have one peculiarity in common. They were all provocative of thirst. Politics, it is well known, are proverbially thirsty. Whenever men meet in a public-house to discuss the question of taxation, they always tax themselves to a tolerably large amount; and however earnest they may be in their denunciations of the iniquities and expenses of Government, they will never agree to any remedy that involves beginning at home with number one. So it came to pass that Adolphus Stubbs'—alias Vernon's—home was merely a place for him to sleep himself sober in. Yes, there was one other use that he made of the place—he threw off his ill-temper there. It was not very easy to quarrel with Kate, she was so patient and so loving; but when a man is dissatisfied with himself; when, by the use of stimulants, he keeps up a feverish state of talkative bombast, or noisy jollity, there comes a time of re-action, and then it is that the wife and the home are wonderfully convenient media to carry off the impatient humours that oppress him. Our readers will, therefore, understand that it had been a miserable winter and spring to Kate. If the little baby could have told its experiences, he would have named many nights when he was rocked to sleep by the sobs that heaved her bosom. In the midst of all this worry, Kate grew very pale and thin. She began to stoop with her constant toil; and the expenses of keeping the home, and supplying Adolphus with the means to appear at his oratorical displays were so heavy, that she found it

very difficult to keep one good gown in which to wait upon her customers. Her glossy dark hair was neglected, and little threads of silver mingled with it, long before time, in its natural effects, would have brought them there. These changes, inevitable to her life of toil, were noted and resented by her husband. He had been as proud of her good looks in her earlier married days as a man so self-centred could be, and he observed the alteration with anger. While she, poor little simpleton! was angry with herself too. She felt willing to lighten the blame of Adolphus's conduct by accusing her own unworthiness of such a treasure. "I'm no companion for him, I know; and, somehow, I do look as he says, enough to frighten anybody, though it's hard, too, that he should say it."

It was just at this time, when anxiety about the increasing extravagance, idleness, and intemperance of her husband had nearly banished from her mind all fear of her deception about the child being discovered, when an unexpected rencontre showed her how little the safety of her scheme could be relied on.

She was sent for to a house in the Bayswater-road, and, while taking the orders of the lady, a gentleman entered hastily, and said, in an apologetic tone, "You must pardon me, my dear sister, interrupting you; the train stays for no one." As he spoke, Mrs Stubbs being opposite the window, the light fell full upon her. The penetrating eyes of the gentleman, who had evidently the gift of noticing every thing and every body, without appearing to do so, were for a moment turned upon her, and without the least hesitation he said, in a tone of kind interest, "Why, Mrs Stubbs, you are looking very ill. I think you looked better when I saw you last. I shall return to town in a week; come to me, and let me see what I can do for you;" then turning

to the lady he finished his adieus, and was off almost before Kate, who had dropped an involuntary curtsy, remembered that it was Mr Munroe, the young surgeon at the hospital, who had attended her during her confinement. It was well that Mrs Ashley Sootherly, the lady in question, had not a very elaborate order to give, or she would have given it to a very incompetent person just then. And as Kate walked home, her wonder was great that among so many patients as he must have had, she was remembered. She did not know the habits of accuracy that most medical men have, nor the care with which any peculiar or interesting case is noted by them. She had been very near death in the first days of her hospital residence; and the patience with which she had borne her sufferings, and her kindness to others, which the women were not slow to speak of when she had gone, had caused her to be remembered as a pleasant exception to the selfishness so unfortunately common. "How pat he had my name," she said, "how fortunate he never asked me about the child. I wonder did he know that I took it? Can he remember that my own poor darling died?" The record of a careful medical man of all his cases, particularly in his early days of practice, was of course unknown to her. The different classes of society are often very little able to estimate each other's habits. Mr Munroe would, perhaps, have been quite as surprised at the little milliner's accurate remembrance of certain peculiarly beautiful head-dresses she had fashioned, as she was at his recollecting the important cases he had attended. But "conscience makes cowards of us all," and the recognition of the young doctor was an added anxiety to the already full cup of Kate's troubles; and, as she had mixed one ingredient in the cup herself, it increased the bitterness. Retribution, it must be confessed, had come very quickly to

her, in the shape of a constant sense of dissatisfaction being added to the yearning of her heart towards her unworthy husband.

Unable to bear this wearing torment, she often pondered in her mind whether it would not be better to take an opportunity of going to Swillinberg House. She felt curious to know how the mother of the child she called hers had fared, but her greatest difficulty was that with her constant employment she could not spare the time. The busy spring season had set in, and she encroached on her night's rest very often, and, on Sundays, Adolphus usually spent the forepart of the day in bed; and then there was a great getting ready in the afternoon, for he attended sundry meetings on a Sunday evening, and had, indeed, been partly the founder of a society, called "Progressionists," whose chief aim was to show that its members had progressed into a region where industry, sobriety, religion, and common-sense were alike unknown. The Friends of Human Rights had, it seemed, quarrelled. There was some dispute about the funds. A few members ventured to request that a balance-sheet of expenditure should be submitted to a general meeting; and others had taken umbrage at such a want of confidence in the management, and so, in more disorder and bitterness than became friends and boon companions, they split up into little cliques, each schism being constant in two things—drinking deeply, and abusing each party but their own.

So to get to Chiswick was a feat not to be performed by our little milliner until the spring deepened into summer, and the first symptoms were shown of the families leaving town. Then Adolphus, who had been more uncertain than ever in his movements, announced that he was intending to make a little circuit, and explain the principles of the

"Progressionists," and canvass for subscriptions to start a journal that should expose all shams, including of course, as the chief, religion and property.

Had Kate been a less loving wife, or had her time and thoughts been less occupied, she might have had her suspicions aroused in a particular, on which she would have been very sensitive, but she was too busy to be jealous. And when the stately Adolphus left her, saying, "I would have liked—that is, if you could leave the child, for I wouldn't on any account have that annoyance—I could have liked to have taken you a trip, Kate, but you really are so altered lately. You must wean that boy. I declare, you look ten years older. However, another year, if you have a good winter, I'll take you somewhere with me;" which meant, "Earn the money for me, and if I must, for decency's sake, I'll let you have a little taste of the treat you provide." But Kate was propitiated by the thought having entered his mind. As to the ecstasy of really going out for a few days with Adolphus—that was so supreme an ideal, that she cherished it in silence to adorn her dreary hours—a fairy-land, to be chiefly visited in her dreams, though it was hard that she was no longer comely in her husband's eyes. She cared not how she looked to others, but it sadly grieved her to be told, that she was old and ugly before her time, by him. He had been gone a week when, on the Sunday, Kate resolved to put her plan in execution, and make a pilgrimage to Chiswick, just to see, as she said, "how the land lay."

It was a brilliant summer morning when she set off. With many kisses and charges as to carefulness, she left the child with little Lizzie—for Kate was not able to carry him, even if she had wished to do so. She sighed as she saw the people going to church and chapel, husbands and wives and

family groups. When they were obviously of the upper classes, the little milliner might be merely indulging her taste in dress by observing them and their garb; but when she passed some respectable working man surrounded with his wife and children, all neatly dressed, the serene look on their faces that told of a Sabbath enjoyed to the full—of the rest that was so sweet after six days' toil—then Kate felt her eyes grow dim with gathering tears. Oh, surely these people were not "shams!" their joy and comfort was evidently real. What would she have given to have been walking by the side of Adolphus to some place of worship! How she would have thanked God! As it was, she felt a sense of being excluded. She had received no religious teaching, but even the ordinary phrases that had filled her ears without touching her heart seemed now to vibrate through her. She remembered the religious services in the Hospital, and how it had impressed her for the time being, and now on this beautiful calm Sunday she wanted to have some one higher and better than any human being to thank for it. The necessity, divinely implanted in the human mind, to worship something, was felt with strong yearnings—a dumb striving for expression—a holding out of hands, blindly groping in the dark, by the poor toil-worn woman as she paced along on that Sabbath morning. When she had crossed Kensington Gardens, and reached the road to Chiswick, she waited for an omnibus, but it was full, and so she went on her way slowly, half inclining as she drew near her destination to turn back.

She had to inquire her way at Hammersmith, and was directed by a man, who said, "You cannot miss it; Swil-
linberg House ain't a place that you can skip over."

Very weary was Kate when at length she stood before the place she sought. And great was her surprise to find

scaffolding erected at one end of the house—that which had been damaged by the fire, and to which extensive alterations were in course of being made. The other wing of the building had all the blinds down, but that was no doubt owing to the bright sunshine. She hesitated about going up the carriage-sweep to the front door, but the lodge was closed, and she could find no bell. At length, in much trepidation, she rang, and the echoes of the bell resounded through the quiet dwelling so distinctly, that Kate began to think her journey was in vain. After twice or thrice repeating her ring, she heard the sound of tardy footsteps, and saw some one looking at her through the side windows of the hall door. Then a pane of glass was opened, and a woman told her to go to a back entrance and wait, and she would be answered. Kate did as she was desired, and soon found herself confronted by a woman, who exclaimed peevishly, in reply to her question, “Why, don’t you know the fam’ly’s abroad? Which of the servants did you say you wanted?”

“Mrs Smith.”

“There’s no such name among ’em; there’s only two that’s called ‘Mrs,’ and that’s the lady’s-maid and the cook. Yes, now I think of it, there’s Mrs Foster, the nurse.”

“No, I want Mrs Smith. She was the nurse, I know.”

“Indeed, you’re very knowing, but I wish you hadn’t come disturbing us this way. My husband and me has the care of the house while the fam’ly’s away; and if your husband was in the police, and on duty all night, you wouldn’t thank any body to be coming ringing you up for nothing.”

Kate apologised again, and her manner propitiating the woman, she said, with more exactness than before, “I know all the servants, for I’m employed now and again for

them when there's a company or what not, and I tell you there's no such person as Mrs Smith."

"Then she must have left."

"Stay, now I remember there was a nurse that left after a few hours. She didn't suit. And a pretty house they've had ever since they've been home from Brighton," she added, now fairly awake, and by no means unwilling to talk. "There was a fire, and the lady was frightened so bad that she went almost out of her mind—indeed, she was quite gone for one while. And now they've patched her up a bit, and the fam'ly's gone abroad to Germany. Let's see, to a place with two names—what do they call it? Oh, I recollects now, Bad'un Bad'un. For my part, I think, when they've got no better name than that, they needn't to say it twice over. But you look tired; you can sit down on the bench by the wall. I don't never ask any one inside; you see it aint allowed."

Kate thankfully accepted the offer, and the woman's tongue ran on. "The lady is to drink the Bad'un waters, but there's them that says, if she'd drank nothin' stronger than water here, she needn't a gone to drink the water there. But gentlefolks will have their whims, and if they goes a good long way, and pays a good price for it, I s'pose water they'd a turned up their nose at here, 'll go down sweet enough there."

But Kate was not heeding this statement, her amazement was so great at hearing that Mrs Smith had only stayed a few hours. "Then she had deserted the child; it was plain she never meant to seek or claim it, and so far there would be no discovery." It did cross Kate's mind, for there was a native delicacy in her nature, that it was very terrible for a lady to be spoken of—as addicted to intemperance, for the innuendo of the woman in charge was very

plain. She put up her hand to her mouth, and bent back her head as if drinking, when she had talked about the foreign watering-place; and Kate's inference was, that however menials may themselves indulge, they have a very keen eye for the same defect in their employers. Indeed it is the peculiarity of those who are addicted to drinking, in whatever stage of progress, that they are very shrewd to detect the same liking in others. There's a sort of bacchanalian free-masonry, by which each pleads another's example as their own justification.

So, dissatisfied with the result of her inquiry, Kate set off homeward, and was just about to hail the omnibus, when her attention was attracted by a crowd of people following a boy who was in charge of the police. To her surprise and grief, it was one of the young Wiggsons. He had been picking pockets, it was said, as the people were coming out of Hammersmith church, and, after a chase, he had been captured, and was now hiding his grief and terror under the mask of bravado. Kate had too warm a mother's heart in her bosom to behold unmoved the child of her old neighbour, the brother of her little crooked drudge, taken off to the Station, and yet she was naturally unwilling that the boy should see or recognise her. She heard the rumour of his delinquencies, and resolved, in her pity to go to the Wiggsons, though it was out of her way. Very dismal, as she trudged on, were her reflections. The thought of the charge she had taken, and a dread that he—the infant that had cost her so many anxious hours—that she had bought with the sacrifice of her peace of mind and integrity, might turn out such another as that wild, wilful, hardened boy, she had just seen dragged off by the collar, cuffed and scoffed at, that thought was very bitter. And yet, if she had no help from Adolphus in training the babe,

how was she, working from morning to night, to keep him out of the streets and lead him aright? There was a deep compassion for this boy, however, bad as he was. Had not neglect, hunger, blows, been his portion? Were not cunning, lies, and intemperance constantly before him? How was he to escape falling into the hands of bad companions?

She had a lift of an omnibus part of the way, and reached the well-known street, just as the sun was at the hottest in the afternoon. The barber's shop was half open and Mrs Wiggson was sitting just inside the door crying. When Kate let herself into the shop, she found that two children were sitting nearly naked on the floor, asking when dinner would be ready. "I'm so hungry, mammy, so hungry," sobbed the eldest, while the mother, with a multitude of words that sounded like oaths, and which we need not repeat, was wishing herself and them dead, in all the turbulence of angry grief. Kate was unwilling to be the bearer of bad news into a scene already so desolate. She was thankful she had not spent her little trifle of money on going down to Chiswick, as it enabled her to give the price of her omnibus ride to Mrs Wiggson, who snatched it eagerly, and began with deafening volubility to tell her troubles. "Wiggson's going to ruin. His hand shakes so that people won't let him shave them. I knew how it would be; I've told him times and times; and then what does he do, the hard-hearted brute? He says he drinks no more than I do; if only the children were all in their graves I wouldn't care. And I must say that your husband hasn't been the friend he ought to Wiggson. He holds himself mighty high, and forgets them as helped to make him." Kate felt that if this strain were held for long she should lose her temper, so she said meekly, "I came to

try to serve you, Mrs Wiggson. There's your Ned—do you know what has happened to him?"

"No good," shrieked the miserable woman, turning pale for a moment, but yet still unsubdued.

Kate related the scene she had witnessed, and to her utter amazement, heard the mother say, "Well it's been a' coming a long time, and if he's done what'll get him four or five years, there's one provided for anyhow."

Kate, spent as she was with her long abstinence from food, and her fatiguing walk, rose up indignant, and the old fire flashed out as she said,

"Mrs Wiggson, are you a mother? I always thought you to blame for letting those boys ramble the street while you were gossiping, but I didn't think anything could make your heart so hard."

"Hoity, toity, my lady, who do you talk to, about hard heart? Hasn't my heart been trampled upon till it's like to be as hard as a smith's anvil? Look at home; if you choose to slave and work while your husband's colleaguings with Mrs Bouncer at the corner, more fool you. If Wiggson drinks, I'll drink. It's all very fine with your child, a baby in arms, but wait a bit; a boy with such a father as your Adolphus, though he is a fine speaker I don't deny, and much run after, and thought of, by them as don't know the rigs of him; but a boy with that kind of a father won't be no better than mine—mark my words if he will—so don't be after talking to me."

And useless, indeed, it was to attempt reasoning. The evil was far too great for Kate to cope with. She saw that there had been money for drink, even when the children had no food. And she saw also that the family were doomed; but she did not see, for that went beyond her speculation, that the cost of supporting this family, as they

would inevitably drift, some to the workhouse and some to the prison, would fall upon the industrious portion of society. To keep such households is the main part of the expense incurred by parish and police rates, to say nothing of the injury done by their example—like thistle seed *that* would sow itself and produce a plentiful crop. But there was one word of Mrs Wiggson's that struck home. Adolphus "colleaguening with Mrs Bouncer," Kate's former customer, the landlady of the "Friend at Hand." As she walked sadly home, and, sick and weary, flung herself down on her bed, a thousand little circumstances rose up in her memory to annoy her. "Could there be any truth in the wretched virago's word?" Yes.

CHAPTER XI.

KATE SEES GLIMPSES OF FUTURE GOOD AND ILL.

At the time of which we are writing, there existed no divorce court accessible to common folks; and no means, within Kate's reach, of a judicial separation. And it must be owned if there had, she was not very likely to avail herself of them. It is not the worst-used wives who are the most clamorous for redress; and in the matter of domestic wrongs, while there is undoubted justice in the efforts of the law to protect the weak against the strong; yet there is no way of protecting the weak against themselves, or preventing the anguish that arises from misplaced affection. Our little Kate, with all her ignorance, had in her enthusiastic and loyal nature a solemn idea of the sanctity of marriage—its life-long obligation, which might be very old-fashioned and unphilosophical according to modern notions,

but yet agreed with the authoritative dicta—"For better, for worse, 'till death us do part." We do not suppose that Kate had pondered much the meaning of that phrase when she uttered it; but having uttered it, in all the fulness of her heart, she was willing to abide by it; nay, so completely willing, that it never once occurred to her that the compact could be broken. Are there not still a multitude of wives who hold that creed? For them there is no remedy. And it is ever the generous nature that thus loses all thought of self. So completely did Kate forget her own wrongs and privations, that she would have thought no sacrifice too great that might win her husband from his faults. She had the sense to see that no amount of affection on her part could prevent his suffering the consequences of his intemperance. A man may scatter ruin around him, and for a long time escape himself, but retribution comes—comes in a variety of different ways, as sickness, accident, poverty, loss of character. From each or all of these no love can shield the inebriate, and Kate bitterly dreaded the future for her husband, and was not without sore anxieties about the child, though as yet the latter had not been the hinderance to her pursuits that might have been expected. Mrs Wiggson's words, "A boy with such a father as your Adolphus, won't turn out no better than mine," sounded in her ears as a dismal prophecy. Though she tried with natural sophistry to persuade herself that however bad the example might be for the child, it was no worse off than it would be with its own cold, strange, mother. Yet the sting remained. Her act of deception was like a thorn in the flesh, she felt it at most unexpected times. The very goodness and honesty of her nature made her sufferings from this cause more acute. Curiously enough she had in her present abode an opportunity of hearing some truths to which she had

hitherto been a stranger. Her back-parlour window opened close to the wall of a large school-room. The windows that lighted that part of the room where the desk or rostrum was erected were so close, that when the days became warm, and it was necessary that both the school-room and her workroom should be ventilated, Kate could hear all that was spoken from the desk. This room, of an evening, was frequently let for a variety of good objects. There were some religious meetings, and, once a week, a temperance meeting. At first, as she heard the arguments of the latter, she was somewhat amused, for, like multitudes of people at that time, she was ready to say, "You go too fast and too far in proposing total abstinence." Still, as she sat at her work, and listened to the testimony of the speakers, conviction darted into her mind. Whenever the domestic and social evils of intemperance were described, or some reformed drunkard, with the genuine eloquence of truth, told his experience, she felt each word vibrate through her heart. One night in particular, a speaker pleaded for the innocent victims—the wives and children, whose lives were made unendurable by the intemperance of the husband and father. Then Kate could not continue her work, her trembling hands dropped into her lap, and her full heart overflowed in torrents of tears.

One thing she heard one speaker say that surprised her greatly. In computing the opponents of the cause, he enumerated not merely all engaged in the traffic, but medical men, and worse than all, "women!" "Surely," thought Kate, "that must be wrong. Women have so much to suffer from intemperance, that they certainly would be on the side of sobriety." Kate's queries were soon answered by the startling fact, that in many cases where a man given to drink signed the pledge of total-

abstinence, his wife could not be prevailed on to sign it; she would often plead the selfish excuse, "I'm not a drunkard"; the little I take does me no harm. I know when to leave off." And thus not only leave her husband to struggle alone against the promptings of appetite, but would introduce to his home the temptation that had proved a snare to him. To our warm-hearted, affectionate little Kate, this seemed such unwomanly conduct, that her earnest face was crimsoned with the flush of amazement and indignation as she heard such statements. It happened that the Monday after her unsatisfactory Sunday ramble, there was a large and animated meeting, and after listening to one or two speeches, Kate could resist the impulse no longer, she put on her shawl and bonnet, and ran round the corner to the entrance-door of the school-room. "I am come to sign the pledge," she said to a man at the door, who was sitting by a table covered with papers and tracts, and among them a pledge-book. A young woman who was keeping near the door, because of her child being rather inclined to add a noisy testimony to the speaker's words, saw Kate's eagerness, and heard her hurried words, said kindly, "Ah, you'll never repent signing the pledge. There's many things we do in haste that it takes a long time to undo, and some that we never can make come right again; but every day of your life you'll find that the pledge is a wise and good thing. Can a woman ever be too sober?" The settled assurance with which this was uttered—the comfortable, well-to-do look of the healthy mother and her sprightly little child, were irresistible. With tremulous haste Kate put down her name. She was confused to notice that her tears had blurred the writing, and she was beginning a stammering apology when the young man said, "Never mind the blots. Signing the pledge has often

proved the beginning of a fair, pure page of life, free from the blot of *that* sin which spreads further than any other—stains the whole life more. Pray that it may be so in your case.”

Kate was both too agitated and too busy to remain at the meeting. As she went out the young woman followed her a step or two, and said, “It was my husband, George Compton, who took your pledge. We have been *so* happy since we signed, and, oh! before that we were *so* miserable.”

They were but simple words. Every temperance meeting in the kingdom furnishes some such testimony. The whole matter had nothing of the effective or remarkable in it, but yet what an influence was exercised on our poor Kate. She went back to her work-table strengthened with a good purpose, and as she sat and listened to the speakers, as their voices echoed through the little room, a prayer rose in her heart, that she might have strength to pursue a new course. Her great hope was that she might reclaim her husband. She felt that the mere abstinence which she resolved to practice was as nothing to what she would do, if possible, to win him from his evil ways. And she had enough of reasoning power to know that, even if she failed, it would be some comfort to remember that she had made *every* effort—had left no plan untried, and that she could wash her hands in innocence as to the one great temptation of strong drink. Had Kate been at leisure from her own emotions to note any incident of the meeting, she might have observed a gentlemanly young man, who was standing just within the door on the margin of the assembly, listening, and observing all that took place with intense interest. He evidently kept himself aloof, and a questioning, critical look came into his face as some argu-

ments were adduced; but yet the chief expression of his manner was conviction. He observed the little episode of Kate's sudden rushing in and signing the pledge, and the manner of young Mrs Compton to her. He was too much absorbed to note that the latter looked intently at him; and when, near the conclusion of the meeting, he went out, silent and thoughtful, he was not aware that he had been recognised, or that Mrs Compton was saying to her husband, "George, that is the gentleman I used to notice at Brighton, who was always following about that poor girl, Foster."

But to return to Kate. It happened that she was just then very busy with a mourning order for Mrs Vineingly, a widow lady, who was staying for a short time at a private boarding-house in the Queen's Road. Contrary to the custom of most of her employers, this lady had called several times on Kate, and had seen the infant in the nurse-girl's arms more than once. It was no uncommon thing for the beauty of the child to attract attention, and this lady in particular seemed much struck by it. "The child does not resemble you at all," said Mrs Vineingly, scanning the baby features. "Is it like its father?"

Kate, as usual, coloured up, and hesitated something about "not being a judge of likenesses." Her manner struck Mrs Vineingly as being odd, but that lady was intent on the far more important matter of her caps and bonnets to give it more than a passing thought. Indeed Kate was indebted to Mrs Vineingly's many caprices for her frequent visits. She was one of those ladies who never seem able to make up their minds. As soon as she had decided on one fashion of her head-gear she was instantly possessed with a desire to try another plan, a method that would have had one good result, that of being beneficial to

trade, if Mrs Vineingly had been rich, or long enough in one mind to have allowed the completion of any article; but as it was, she had just sufficient leisure and genteel poverty to be troublesome; and therefore came at all sorts of times suggesting alterations, or countermanding orders, just at the very stage when loss of time and trouble were incurred by the poor milliner, doomed to submit to these whimsies. Kate had been disciplined into great patience, but she was often sorely tried by this customer, who with much tact tried to atone for her changeableness by stooping to many little arts of conciliation, such as great notice and praise of the child, elaborate politeness and condescension, with vague promises of the patronage she would have it in her power to bestow. When Burns wrote the lines—

“Man’s inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn.”

he certainly might have used the generic term—man, in the comprehensive sense of including the whole human race. For women are by no means exempt from the charge of causing bitter suffering to their sister woman. Kate would have yielded to no one in love and respect for her own sex. She knew they could be kindly and pitiful; she knew also, alas! from her own experience, that they were rightly described as “the suffering sex;” but she was much more intimately acquainted with them as capable of tyranny and oppression, in small but not unimportant matters, than in any other aspect of their characters.

Oh, gentle reader, be not angry or incredulous when we open these truths. The wrongs of governesses—the grinding oppressions that have made most female occupations that depend on woman’s patronage so unremunerative—

the discontent of domestic servants, are all so many obvious truths that woman is verily guilty concerning her sister.

Among the many valuable papers that of late years have been contributed to the social science meetings, by women anxious to atone for the indifference and the wrong-doing that have so long prevailed, there needs still an appeal—not so much from woman against man, as from woman against woman. A little more generous appreciation—a larger and deeper sympathy—a greater union is needed still. Until woman feels that an injury and injustice to one of her sex is an injury to all, many evils will still prevail. And as long as she is careless of the hours of toil enforced on woman, as long as she thinks her own virtue proved by denouncing her betrayed sister, while she smiles on the betrayer, as long as she tempts to the wine-cup with pleasant smiles and spurious hospitality, thinking she does enough for temperance if she merely denounces drunkenness,—so long will there be unremunerative and excessive toil—constant accessions to the ranks of the betrayed, and the inebriate.

Kate did not, of course, enter into these speculations. She was conscious, in a dumb, puzzled way, that there was much wrong, which a very little justice and truth would tend to set right; and she sighed helplessly over her work as she tried a new trimming for the third time on Mrs Vineingly's cap; and had to sit up all one night altering a mantle and bonnet; and her breakfast had scarcely been swallowed when that lady appeared, followed by a boy who carried a basket of head-dresses, to which Kate was asked to put her skilful hand in tiny alterations, while Mrs Vineingly waited, for she was going off to Germany in some haste.

Lizzie Wiggson, in obedience to a formal signal from Kate, was decamping along the passage into the open-air with the baby, who, though clean, was not exactly in presentable trim so early in the morning; but Mrs Vineingly, through the front parlour window, saw the little fellow on the girl's arms, and instantly tapped on a pane for him to be brought in, saying, "You need'nt let me disturb you in the least, Mrs Stubbs; I'll just amuse myself with my little friend here." As she spoke, she took the child from Lizzie, and began caressing him. Her interest in the boy was certainly a genuine emotion. Amid many affectations it was evident that her heart was susceptible to deep tenderness for infancy. And vexed as our little flustered Kate was at the visit, she was half propitiated, as she now and then, in a pause of her work, found time to look up and notice how Mrs Vineingly was gazing into the child's eyes, and that tears filled her own, and were with difficulty restrained from running over.

"I could look into your beautiful dark eyes for ever, you sweet boy," she murmured, sighing as she spoke; and Kate ventured, as she put a cap out of her hand, to say, "I suppose, ma'am, you have had many children?"

The lady looked up quickly—an almost fierce expression came into her eyes. "Many?" she said; "oh, no, I have had but one, and that," she continued, as if making an involuntary admission, "was one too many."

The question of one of Kate's apprentices who came into the room could not divert the little woman's mind from the strangeness of the reply, and her look, in spite of herself, assumed the questioning expression that she checked upon her tongue.

"Ah, you may look, my good woman," said Mrs Vineingly, bitterly. "Make much of your baby while he is yet

a baby, or a young child. It's the only time that a mother can reckon on any comfort."

"Oh, dear! don't say so," ejaculated Kate.

"I do say it. You dote on your child, and slave for him, and while he is like this he repays you with smiles and caresses, but a time comes when all that is altered, and he will take your toil as his right, and repay your love with indifference at best."

"And at worst?" said Kate, aghast at the sternness with which Mrs Vineingly spoke.

"At worst! with cruelty and hatred!"

"No, no,—that's too hard—that cannot be."

"I tell you I know it. I had once a boy as lovely as this—aye, and very like him too; and—but there's no use telling the old tale. Here girl, take your boy. He looks strong and healthy, but many children die who look so; if yours should, it is perhaps the best that could happen to him; at all events, if I had my time to go over again, I would guard my heart from disappointment; I would expect nothing but ingratitude."

Lizzie took the child from the lady's arms. Her mood changed suddenly, and she began in the most careless tone to scan her millinery, taking no further notice of the infant, and seeming so far annoyed at having given expression to the sudden thoughts or feelings that had goaded her, that she was intent on removing the impression she had made on Kate's mind, by the most eager and frivolous talk about dress.

While this unwelcome customer still lingered in Kate's little parlour, a cab drove up to the door, and Adolphus alighted. The look that darted from the eyes of the little milliner would have been quite sufficient to have explained, to a less penetrating observer than Mrs Vineingly that terror

in no small degree mingled with the feelings with which the husband was received—for that it was the husband she never for a moment doubted. Kate had rushed into her inner room, and through its door into the passage, in time to prevent Adolphus going into the front parlour. In her eagerness she seized his arm, and said in a tremble of love and fear, "Not there—not there, this way, dear Dolph."

Now the great man was certainly not in the state in which he had been on the previous night. He would have resented any one hinting that he was not perfectly sober, but enough of the demon of drink lurked within him to rouse all his angry passions. He was so ill-tempered that he had worked off some of his superfluous humour by quarrelling first with an omnibus conductor, and lastly with the cabman who drove him home sullenly, and went off muttering, "It's a pity you don't stop your mouth by munching your own fingers' ends; that'd per'aps keep somebody else's fingers off you, my fine feller."

Adolphus turned fiercely on Kate as she plucked at his arm, and, flinging her off, said—"What, am I not master in my own house—not go in there—why, pray?" and of course in he went, Mrs Vineingly rising as he approached. The sight of a lady for a moment quelled Adolphus, but quickly rallying, he flung himself down with an authoritative air, and said to Kate—"What's this confusion, pray? I thought you would have things ready for me—you must have expected me."

"You didn't write, dear; but come in, I'll put your breakfast in a few minutes. Excuse me, ma'am; my husband has been out of town."

"Oh, no apology," said Mrs Vineingly, going to the door. "Be sure and send the things home to-night, or let me see, I'll send for them."

Kate by this time had followed her to the street door, so confused and worried that she answered, "Yes" and "No," at random. When the lady was on the outside step she turned, and with a significant look, said—"And that's your husband, is it?"

Kate looked down as she muttered incoherently—"Yes; and if he only didn't—didn't take a little more than was good for him, he'd be a very good husband."

"God help you, poor simpleton," said Mrs Vineingly, turning from the door, and to Kate's great relief, walking hastily away.

Of course, Adolphus was both cross and tired, and it was the wisest plan for Kate to get him off to bed. Her only quiet and endurable hours while he was in the house were while he slept. She was fated to have a little scene before the great man's eyes closed. He favoured her with his opinion on her looks while he took his breakfast.

"Why, Kate, you really are like a scare-crow. Sat up, do you say, last night? Why don't you manage better? There's other women of business keep their girls up; if you'd any gumption you'd never slave yourself; but you never had any skill in working other people—no administrative faculty, none in the least."

"I work hard," said Kate, bewildered by his fine words.

"Of course you do, and that's just what, if you'd the faculty I speak of, you wouldn't do."

"But, dear Dolph, haven't I heard you beautiful on the duty of not over-working anybody?"

"Oh, simpleton, pooh! all that's professional. Of course, when I'm on the platform my cue is—'The toil-worn operatives,' and the denunciation of those that fatten on them; but that's no reason, Kate, that you shouldn't get as much as possible out of your girls; but then I don't

expect you to understand anything of that kind, any more than I expect a donkey to run for the Derby."

Kate was stung at the speech, but she made no answer. She felt that he wanted to quarrel with her; and in truth, if he could have put her in the wrong by rousing her to angry replies—if he could have found fault with her for idleness, or of the house for untidiness—how gladly would he have silenced the inward voice that tormented him, by throwing all the blame of what he knew to be his evil courses, on his patient wife. As it was, her toil and her quietude foiled him of any obvious grounds of complaint; but just then Lizzie brought the child, who was crying at the top of his voice, and, of course, here was room for grumbling. "I do believe that there never was a more ill-tempered little monkey in this world. Come here, sir, come to me." The child, who saw too little of him to know him, shrieked out in an agony of terror, as Adolphus, with a rough grasp, swung him out of Lizzie's arms. Kate ran to save the little creature from the impatient shake of the angry hands that held him. In the struggle, the writhing child escaped the grasp of each, and fell to the ground. The usual quietude of the poor milliner, yielded to her terror as she screamed aloud, and catching up her nursling, soothed it with every word of endearment she could think of; while her husband, glad of an opportunity for rage, exclaimed—

"Since that brat was born you've never been the same woman, Kate. A yelling little monkey; you teach him to hate me. I'm nobody in this house; I wish the boy was dead; and when he gets a little older I'll kill him, if he shows me much of that temper. I'm not going to submit to your spoiling the brat; no, no, I'll let you see, if you can't rule him, who can."

These threats, breathed out savagely between his shut teeth, tended to convince Kate that Adolphus had no real liking for the child; that he was jealous of its receiving any attention from her; and that as time went on it would have a very hard life in the dwelling that, by a pleasant fiction, she called home. How it barbed the arrow that pierced her heart to remember that she had voluntarily encumbered herself with the child. How terribly was violated truth avenged, for she had learned to feel for the little creature a tenderness only second to a mother's love, and yet for her sake, for the child's, even for the unworthy husband's sake, how much better it would be if she could find its mother and restore it.

But while Kate was enduring all the hardness of that lot which falls to the common experience of a drunkard's wife, we must for a season leave her to her fate, and take our readers, to a very favourite place of resort on the continent. Like other fashionable folks, we will go to Baden Baden.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW PEOPLE TRY TO RUN AWAY FROM THEMSELVES.

AMONG the many kinds and classes of tourists who every summer and autumn crowd the German watering places, there are perhaps but few who go purely and simply for health's sake. Many travel with the laudable object of enlarging their minds by observation of other countries and manners, or of improving in their knowledge of other languages. Some, perhaps not a few, go for ostentation—to say they have been; and it is remarkable of these, that while they

grumbled at everything abroad, on their return home they are constantly depreciating everything English. "Mountains! Oh, we have seen Switzerland." "Castles! Oh, nothing to Heidelberg." "Rivers! After the Rhine, all are tame." These wiseacres forget that nature, like truth, has always a beauty of her own—perfect in itself. And they forget also, if indeed it ever entered into their minds, that the amount of beauty in an object seen, depends quite as much on the eye that sees, as on itself. But by far the largest class of continental tourists are those who, impelled by restlessness and inward dissatisfaction, are flying, with all the speed of steam, in the hope of escaping from themselves. To pass away time—to lighten the burden of life—to make a change in the outward scene, from the hope that possibly they may thus change the inward feelings of weariness and discontent,—this is the impelling motive with hundreds. Need we pause to prove that this in reality was the reason of Mr Tregloss's removing his family for the autumn and winter to Baden Baden? Somehow, despite his wealth and his prosperity, things had gone terribly cross with him of late. He had many annoyances. The fire in his house had been much talked of, and, contrary to the usual fact that people rarely hear what is said against themselves, Mr Tregloss's fussy way of constantly putting his servants, and all whom he considered his inferiors, on a sort of cross-examination, caused him to elicit enough to know that there was a pretty general opinion that his household was not quite so free from intemperance as became the residence of so virtuous a man. Then his young wife troubled him greatly. Despite what he called her docility, and her youth, and her fortune, he found she was a dear bargain. Men who, like Mr Tregloss, wait until they are middle-aged before they commit matrimony, and

congratulate themselves on winning then some pink and white insipidity, who is all simper and deference; discover sometimes that life becomes very stagnant to them, and that the "genus stupid" that they have preferred to intelligent women, have often some little selfishness, and more than a little obstinacy. The helplessness of such wives makes them miserably exacting. Mrs Tregloss's whole life was artificial—her occupations, her hours, her diet—and yet there was no convincing her that any of her personal habits had to do with her ill health. She had, in the first place, set out in life with a theory, that it was lady-like and becoming to be weak and helpless. Her maid, and it must be confessed her physician, had both fostered the delusion, and under their united regimen (though the full extent of Flutterly's influence in the matter was certainly unknown to Dr Sootherly) had made her excitable as well as feeble. Mr Tregloss, before he left Swillinberg House, had good grounds to fear that his wife's reason was at times unsettled. Her oddities assumed a form that could hardly pass under the name of eccentricities, and as she would spend some days in tears, and some in flights of over-excited, ghastly mirth, change of scene was certainly the easiest and pleasantest remedy. Nor was Mr Tregloss exactly satisfied about his son. From the time that the weaning process had been partially tried, the child had not thriven. Mrs Dossett had a famous aromatic cordial, made of cinnamon water, brandy, and a soupçon of opium, that she used to secure quietness; and Mrs Flutterly thought it a capital achievement that she had peeped surreptitiously into a little book of receipts of which Mrs Dossett was very choice, and had discovered the ingredients of the cordial, making her own court to Mrs Tregloss by showing her this evidence of her care for the infant, and requiring as a re-

ward, that she should have the privilege of giving it to the infant herself. "It is but little I can do for the pretty cretur," she said, "much as I doat upon him, a precious darling; but do, dear mem, let me have that one right. It's more than I can bear to see the child of my precious lady entirely given over to them as haven't the refined feeldings which is what I've been brought up to."

Mrs Tregloss liked to be coaxed, so Flutterly got her way, and the poor infant began his course of dosing under Flutterly's regimen on the evening before they commenced their journey. It was capital to know a process that insured his sleeping amid all the bustle, and the immense attention that Mrs Tregloss required.

The unceremonious way in which Foster had been dismissed, had made a due impression on her. She felt that her position was singularly insecure, and however a natural instinct for her nursling may have sprung in her bosom, that it would be very unlikely to obtain any answering regard or consideration. The brief visit she had paid the Comptons, and the discovery, almost like a revelation, of her deficiencies, had, to a certain extent, altered Foster. She felt her loneliness—thought of the time, whether distant or near, when she would have to seek another employment, and asked herself, in a perplexed, troubled way, how she was to live. As to the suspicions that had been entertained of her, she never knew their full extent. Her mind was very free from coquetry. The hardships of her lot had left her little time or inclination for the levities that so often are the result, indeed the resource, of a totally-neglected education. Her very beauty had brought with it hardships. From her childhood she had been used to sit for weary hours to have her features transferred to canvas. Fatigue and punishment had been the consequence, until she was far

more conscious of a wish that she had been of coarser mould and homelier look, than of any sense of pleasure or vanity. All her troubles had come of that same troublesome beauty. Never yet had the sweet triumph of being fair in the eyes of one she loved been hers; and beauty's value is chiefly in the estimate that love confers on it. Now the wish sprung up strong within her for improvement; and even the many changes of place that they saw on their route, before reaching their destination at Baden, and the busy idleness of leisurely travel, failed to divert her mind from the purpose of striving to overcome her ignorance. She cast up the little measure of her acquirements. She could read and write tolerably; these humble elements she would improve by practice. She could draw tolerably well; and she sang with a lovely but uncultured sweetness. As to needlework, and all the neat and valuable feminine arts of housewifery, she knew nothing of them; but she became observant of others, and tried, very clumsily at first, it must be owned, to imitate Flutterly's skill-of-hand, or even Sophy's. But there is marvellous efficacy in the word "Try," and in a month from the time that we saw Foster seated in Mr Compton's room, blushing as she owned that she could not do one useful thing for an honest living, she was in a fair way of overcoming that humiliation. Sophy was so constantly employed as a sub. by her aunt, and in a foreign land there was so much less need of exercising surveillance over an English nurse, that Foster had more time than ever to herself. She had learned from the prattle of Sophy, who could not be quiet on such a theme, that it was considered in the household that Mr Hempson had been, as the young girl phrased it, "smitten with Foster." More than that she was not told. And it must be owned that as she sat

by the side of the infant's cot in the quiet evenings, or walked about with him, her mind reverted to the kind, open face, the bold, yet comely, looks of Mr Hempson. Foster was half angry with herself that the memory of him, as he watched her about at Brighton, and still more the recollection of that night, and some fervent words he had spoken to her in the hasty tumult of the fire, were indelibly impressed on her recollection. Neither could she fail to be aware that, but for her discovery of his situation, he must have perished. No human being ever confers such an obligation on another without being interested in the person they have served. It is an incontrovertible fact that while benefits may be, and often are, forgotten by those on whom they are conferred—while obligation by no means invariably calls out gratitude or cements affection—the doer of a kindness always has a sense of sympathy with the recipient of it. So that, far more than was good for her tranquillity or peace of mind, Foster's thoughts dwelt on Horace Hempson.

Arrived in Baden, after a few days' stay at the principal hotel, Mr Tregloss took a very fine suite of apartments in the Avenue, leading to the gardens of the KURSAAL. He had retained several of his English servants, and added to them such a sufficient retinue of foreign domestics as made up a very costly household, and marked him out as a man of the highest distinction that money could confer; and as German courtesy is sure to put to such a family the term *wohlgeboren* (well-born), he enjoyed the satisfaction of looking down on less well-appointed tourists.

As for Mrs Tregloss, she rallied at once after she had made her first visit, in an invalid chair, to the Kursaal. The sight of the fine ball-room and saloons, in which gambling was constantly going on, instantly revived her.

Here she could display her gayest dresses. The charming ease of continental manners provided for plenty of gaiety in the gardens and the rooms. Then, under the shade of the avenues of trees, were numerous little booths, like a fair, where all sorts of pretty toys and fancy things were to be sold, and it was so delightful to be able to buy more nick-nacks than any one else—to out-dress and in every way out-vie other people. Mrs Tregloss was alive instantly. The waters, Mr Tregloss said, were wonderfully efficacious. Though it must be owned that Mrs Tregloss, when she visited the spring and received her glass mug filled with the water bubbling hot, and tasting like tainted chicken broth without seasoning, did, as she walked about, shaking the draught to cool it a little, contrive to spill far more than she drank, and on her return home always required a large tumbler of wine to take the taste of the naseous draught out of her mouth. It was not much, certainly, of the water that she drank, and if it had not been that some princes and nobles were there, duly quaffing the steaming beverage that nature serves up hot, she would never a second time have tasted it. As to the beauties of that sweet valley in which Baden Baden lies—or the wood-clad hills that rise in all directions round it, with verdant pathways winding over them to the loveliest seclusion of sylvan scenery—or the shady avenues that led to the sombre recesses of the Black Forest—of all that she was careless. A sandy plain, that had such a ball-room and fancy fair, such gay groups and merry music, would have been quite as pleasant to her.

Now and then a monstrosity would excite her attention. For several days she would drive along the Lichtenthal Avenue—not to visit the waterfall that, about four miles from Baden, amply repays by its beauty the weariness of

many a foot-sore tourist's journey by its wild, fresh, sparkling beauty, as it leaps with a sort of laughing grace down the hills, and hurries off to hide among the woods. No, Mrs Tregloss, and hundreds like her, preferred to go to a chapel, where the hideous skeletons of two nuns repose in glass cases on either side the altar; round the ghastly bones of the skull and bodies are twined pearls and gems, whose gleaming light mocks the loathsomeness of the display. Mrs Tregloss never wearied of counting the rings on those bony hands and feet—computing the value of the jewels that bedizened those fleshless ribs, or shone from the eyeless sockets of the skull. The sight amused her better than the finest work of art.

As to Mr Tregloss, he was eloquent to an acquaintance or two, whom he encountered there, on the horrible immorality of the gaming tables. To think that the government should license these—should derive revenue from them—that the grand duke should draw his income from such a source—oh, it was horrible! Mr Tregloss disapproved of gambling, and, over his wine or schnaps, would be very eloquent on the ruinous tendencies of games of chance; “and to think that they are licensed, when they produce so much misery and ruin! How many a fine estate has been lost—how many a reputation destroyed at these tables!” It did not for a moment occur to Mr Tregloss to extend the range of his enquiries into systems of licensing at home, that spread far greater ruin among classes who could least of all afford to lose their time or money, or to tamper with their reason. Nor, as his friends emptied their glasses to the accompaniment of his moral discourse, and left him, did he reflect that the very wine with which they were then primed, was the auxiliary that decoyed them, heated and restless, to the gaming-table.

The summer had deepened into autumn, and still the family lingered there. Mrs Tregloss had been ill again. The first novelty over, she felt her old weariness and langour oppressing her, and she immediately decided that, though the air suited her, the waters disagreed; and she resolved this time, with Mr Tregloss's entire concurrence, to make a tour of the wines. "They are so light, my dear, they cannot hurt you," was his comment. So from costly Johannesburg to humble Hockheimer, they made a trial of them all, not, it must be owned, without qualifying them with Eau de Vie. "English constitutions, my love, cannot do with such acidity," said Mr Tregloss, and Flutterly gave it as her opinion that "most of them rubbishy things they called winds, was no better than red ink sweetened with a lump of sugar; and as for the white it only set her teeth on edge, and gave her a cold chill all through her. She didn't deny, with plenty of spirit and sugar put to 'em, they was drinkable. And she was bound to say, though they tasted so queer in the mouth, they did somehow flustrigate the head, nearly as much as the good, strong, double distilled and rectified drinks as they had at home in England; leastways, Sophy and herself had taken only about a bottle a-piece, and it had made them giddy, which such cheap stuff didn't ought to have done."

Meanwhile, visitors were on the way to Baden, interesting to divers personages in our narrative. One afternoon, Foster had taken a winding path out of the town, and ascended a gentle hill, on the summit of which was a level piece of green sward entirely surrounded by trees. She was fond of the seclusion of this place, and she could put down her nursling in safety on a cushion, and employ herself with her needlework as she sang and amused him.

The child was weakly. His large eyes had a mournful, wearied expression, and almost the only time when he did not pine and fret was when Foster had him out alone with her. Then he would be tranquillized by the air, and seemed to like to listen to the soothing sound of her voice. She had not sat long when a rustling sound among the trees made her look towards the pathway that lead up to the retreat, and to her great amazement, as the boughs of the trees were pushed aside, Horace Hempson stood before her. He looked pleased, but by no means surprised, and his first words to her sufficiently accounted for the astonishment being all on her side.

"I knew you were here; I have sought you."

Foster half rose, then seated herself, then took up the child from among the wild-flowers that she had been gathering for him, and showed in a variety of ways that the appearance of the unexpected visitor was certainly not indifferent to her, though she began to prepare for an immediate departure.

"Stay," said Mr Hempson gently, taking her hand as he drew her back to the grassy bank on which she had been seated, and placing himself beside her. "Stay. I came purposely to speak to you. I must ask you to hear me. I have during the time since I last saw you—and that interview can never be forgotten by me—written to you often, and as often destroyed what I had written, partly because it very inadequately described what I had to say, and partly that I feared it might not reach you. I had assured myself that you were still with these Treglosses. I had written to Mr Tregloss about you."

"To Mr Tregloss?" gasped Foster, recovering her suspended power of speech.

"Yes, on a mere matter of business that I need not

dwell on. I could not hope to make him understand me, or, indeed, to explain myself to you. As soon, therefore, as I arranged my affairs, settled something of my future plan of life, I resolved to use my first moment of leisure, and follow you here." He paused a moment irresolutely, and Foster, with the simple directness that belonged to her character, involuntarily uttered the one word—

"Why?"

"Why?—because you are unworthily placed here. Why?"—his voice quivered a moment—"because I love you."

His companion rose instantly. Was it alarm, indignation, or pleasure that so deeply flushed her face at that frank avowal, and that made the blood as instantly retreat, and left her pale as marble?

"Nay, hear me out; I must be heard. I repeat, I love you. I confess—yes, to prove the sincerity of my avowal, I confess that I misunderstood the—the feeling you inspired when I met you at Brighton. Some thought which I had then, I scorn now. I am changed. I do not come to you—how could I dare to do so?—as a thoughtless young man with words of idle admiration on my lips. I come seriously to say, 'The life you saved when I put it into jeopardy by folly; that life will lose all that makes it valuable to me if you refuse to listen to me.' In all honour, I again say I love you. Tell me that you are free to be my wife. Nay, do not turn away. Why do you look as if I talked of impossibilities? I am not asking you to share wealth—I wish I could—that has departed. I am, comparatively, a poor man. I have my way to make; and, once happy in my love, I will make it." His eyes glowed with the fire of determination as he spoke. "Yes, happy in my love, I am equal to any fate. And

you, whose sweet face has haunted me day and night like a vision, you will not refuse me; you will trust me; I have seen the error—nay, the guilt and folly of the course I once pursued; and I ask you, with a respect that equals my love, to bear my name, to help me to be a better and happier man by sharing my fortunes.”

With all the energy of emotion he poured out his words—hurrying her involuntarily along with him—his manner conveying far more fully even than his earnest words the sentiments of deferential, respectful love that he avowed. No woman, so wooed, could help feeling that he was sincere. As the poor girl, in a tumult of conflicting emotions, raised her eyes to his, she trembled visibly, and the word, “Marriage!” came from her quivering lips with an emphasis so nearly amounting to horror that Hempson was startled, and exclaimed—

“Why do you speak so—tell me? I have watched you, thought over all I have seen of you with careful retrospect. Surely your present circumstances are owing to misfortune. Why, with that thrill as of horror do you speak of marriage?”

“Oh, I have been so wretched. I hate the very name. No, no, never more; let me go. Let me go—thank you, you mean kindly. Once it might have been. No, no, never more.”

She clasped the child in her arms, and tried to extricate herself from his grasp. He held her arm and her dress, and with all the fervour of passionate appeal tried to detain her. Suddenly he paused, and said faltering, as if an unthought-of dread arose,

“Are you really free? All *my* life and its many faults I am willing to unfold to you, to seek and work for a future that shall atone the past. Do not so coldly refuse me.”

"Coldly! Ah, Mr Hempson, for your own sake avoid me."

"Are you free?" he reiterated.

"Yes, yes, doubly free in one sense. Oh, sir, I was a child, a beaten, neglected child, nearly driven into infamy by hardships. When I married, I only changed for a worse persecution than I left. I was deserted. Left utterly destitute at Southampton. Not knowing what to do, I spent all that I could raise on my clothes in trying to find some one on whom I had a claim. I traced my husband to London. I never would have sought him, but I expected to be a mother. At last I heard of him. He lived such a life, that when I was told he was dead, solemnly assured of it, it seemed to me more wonderful that he should have lived so long, than that he should have perished as he did of inflammation of the brain after a fall. Then I fell ill, and the people where I lodged took pity on me, and procured me a letter for an hospital. I had my marriage certificate, and I was admitted, wishing for death rather than life." She paused, and he seeing her reluctance, interposed with the question—

"And you have a child?"

"I had; it is like a dream; I was so miserable, so alone, the child seemed sent to complete my wretchedness. I did not know what I should do with it."

"Did it not seem a comforter to you?"

"Comforter! oh, no. It reminded me not of love but of hatred."

With a surprised pity, Hempson looked at the young face, wondering as he did so, at the dread experiences that must have been passed through before the heart had been so paralysed as to be unable to respond to the deepest feeling of a woman's nature; and yet a moment's reflection

enabled him dimly to comprehend that however remote it might be from the ordinary course, yet that one who had never known loving care or tender guidance might become chilled into an iceberg.

Something of what was passing in his mind was divined by his companion, as she said—"You think me very hard and bad. Every one thinks me so, all happy mothers, in particular, who knew me while my child lived. But I've heard of people being tortured beyond feeling, and that I suppose was my case. What was the man I had married but a cruel monster? How could I care for his child?" Very stern grew the beautiful face as she spoke. I would rather die this day, by any death however dreadful, than live over again one month of my married life. What, when famine, blows, curses, were my portion, you expect my heart was to be soft, do you? No, Mr Hempson, I am not able to return your love. I dread the name of marriage."

She turned from him as he let her hand fall, and walked with a quick, determined tread down the pathway. In a few minutes, he came up with her, and said,—“I am too much in earnest; I have come too far to prefer my plea, to be easily repulsed. Your mood of mind may well be beyond my range of thought, because your experience has been so sad. Let the past, with all its terrible memories for you—its reproaches for me,—be closed like a hideous dream. Let us from this time wake to a better life, to brighter hopes. Oh, listen to me. We are both alone in the world; let us be a mutual help and comfort, and shut out the past for ever.”

She shook her head mournfully, but the tears coursed swiftly down her face. A thousand emotions she had never felt before swelled at her heart, and she walked on in silence, while he continued at her side uttering his plea.

It was evident he had no wish to make his interview clandestine, for he went with her to the house, and as he entered, asked to see Mr Tregloss. Sophy, who was in the fore-court, replied—"Master can't see no one. His sister, Mrs Vineingly, have come very unexpected, and he've given orders as he isn't to be hinterrupted.

CHAPTER XIII.

MORE THAN KIN, AND LESS THAN KIND.

MR TREGLOSS might well give orders that he should not be disturbed, for he was already in a state of great disturbance at the sudden invasion his sister had made upon him. Had he been at home in England he would have been better able to have preserved himself from intrusion, but in Baden his whereabouts and the means of obtaining an interview were easily discovered; and while he was cosily smoking his cigar in his own private saloon, the door had been opened by a German domestic, and a lady in deep mourning, and apparently deeper distress, presented herself, and almost before he recognized her, had thrown herself into his arms, and said sobbing—"Brother, I was wrong; I have suffered; forgive me."

How much of this emotion was acted, or real, it would be difficult to say, for Mrs Vineingly had many sufficient causes of sorrow, but her desire to propitiate her brother seemed as strong as her grief; so that as he put her from him, and spread out his hands as if he was resolved to be rid of her, she sunk to the ground saying—"I own it, you were right, and I was wrong; but one is dead, and the

other worse than dead, and now I have no one in the world but you."

The acknowledgment that he had been right was so far mollifying in its influence on him, that he paused and raised his sister, and put her in a chair near, saying—"Of course, I knew when you left me for Vineingly, you left home to make a fool of yourself; and as to that rascal, his name shall never cross my lips,—dead or alive he is nothing to me."

"Nor to me, brother."

"You spoiled him, cockered him up, hid his goings on from me for years, and, of course, it was but natural he should go to the dogs; and then when I naturally was indignant, you must turn upon me, tell me I had a hand in the wretch's ruin, and go and marry for spite a fellow that I knew hadn't any constitution left in him, and no means to provide for you; and now you come crying to me—to me, after all my forbearance. Why, if I had prosecuted that scoundrel, I could have transported him."

"I know it all, brother. Why do you reproach me? He has met his deserts."

"What, transported?"

"I heard he was in prison, but I've given him up for ever. I didn't come to speak about him. I came to ask you to forgive me; to let me see your wife and child."

Now, as Mrs Vineingly spoke of these nearer and dearer ties, the thought of the helplessness of his wife, and the delicacy of the child, of all the annoyances that he had endured for the want of some one to manage for him, in whom he could confide, swiftly crossed Mr Tregloss's mind. He remembered the long years that his sister, in her first widowhood, had kept his house, and the comfort that had then been his, and it occurred to him that after all it would

be as well to be friends with her. She was alone in the world, comparatively poor, and, moreover, had been brought by circumstances to think more highly of her brother's wisdom—or of the comforts of that brother's home. So after pacing up and down the room in silence some minutes, while Mrs Vineingly reiterated her words—"You were right, and I was wrong; I've bitter reason to know that;" he came up to her and said—"Well, well, Hannah, I did not think I should ever have shaken hands with you again. Your desertion and that fellow's ingratitude drove me to get marr—that is," hastily correcting himself, "on consideration that no mention is ever made of that wretch to me or my wife, why, we'll draw a veil over the past."

Mrs Vineingly embraced him, and was profuse in words and tears. A quiet half hour followed, in which she explained that her husband's income was merely a life annuity, and that his trifling personal property had barely supplied her wants up to the present time, and that she had come to offer to devote herself to her brother and his family. There was something a little sad in the tone in which she concluded, "for I have no other ties now."

Of course, as soon as these explanations had been made, Mr Tregloss went and prepared his wife to receive this unexpected relative. The little lady was half inclined to pout, saying—"Oh, your sister, of course she won't like me; husbands' sisters never do. Is she very old?"

The vulgar prejudice and folly of this speech annoyed Mr Tregloss. He coloured and raised his voice rather impressively, as he said—"My sister, if she had not married like a fool, partly owing to her son's bad conduct, and my resentment at it, had no other fault that I know of. She

has owned her fault, and she will be a perfect treasure to you, in your state of health, and to our son."

Mrs Tregloss, if she was inclined to rebel, was quelled, and received her sister-in-law with languid politeness. The infant was soon afterwards introduced, being carried by Foster, on whom Mrs Vineingly fastened her searching glance for a moment, and then gave herself up to all sorts of raptures and eulogiums on the boy. He was held in all lights, his features scanned, and his eyes pronounced, with a sigh, to be the true Tregloss shape and colour; and for the rest of that day no other topic was discussed.

Mrs Vineingly's luggage was sent for from the "Sonne Hotel," and that lady was fully established in her brother's abode, with the firm determination to make herself indispensable to him. She might not have given any particular attention to Foster, but it happened that among her acquaintance was a Mrs Pierceton, the old lady who had so admired Foster's face when she had spent an evening at Swillinberg House, and her description of the nurse had made an impression on Mrs Vineingly, who, while in exile from her brother's dwelling, took every opportunity of hearing by a side-wind all she could of the doings of his family. Certain it was, Foster, on that evening, would make but an ill impression on a shrewd observer. She was pale and absent in manner, her natural quietude was increased, and Mrs Vineingly strove in vain to induce her to talk on that generally fruitful theme with nurses—the child. Foster answered in monosyllables, and was truly thankful when at length her nursling slept, and she had time to retire into her own thoughts. Very desolate they were. In spite of the resolute reply she had given to Mr Hempson, her heart pleaded for him. A thousand previously unawakened feelings tortured her, representing that

his love must be real, for he had proved it by seeking her when she had been removed at such a distance from him, by overlooking the humble station and strange circumstances in which she was placed, and making honourable and open proposals to her. As the poor thing in her loneliness looked at the mental vision that rose before her, a home of love and peace, such as she had heard of but never known, the struggle became terrible. She wept and moaned the night through, and amid her desolation arose that highest and noblest suggestion of love, an earnest desire, irrespective of all selfish considerations, for the good of the object loved. "I should but disgrace him. All my past is such as he has no right to come in contact with. How can I tell him of my father, of my miserable youth, and to conceal would be but to keep on the hateful mask, and be unworthy every way of him. Ah, for his sake, it must be no."

Of course, after such a night, she rose pallid and weary, and a feverish restlessness was afterwards added when she learned from Sophy's chatter that Mr Hempson had been closeted with Mr Tregloss, and that the former had left the house apparently in anger. That day she was ordered to remain within; and Sophy had so far made her court to Mrs Vineingly that the child was taken out by her under that lady's auspices. However, if the family intended to prevent any communication from Mr Hempson being made to Foster, they were outwitted, for he contrived to get a letter to her, in which he renewed his offer, and begged her to think deliberately before she replied to it. The same foreign domestic who brought the note took her reply—a few despairing words.

"Leave me. It cannot be. You know not what you ask, nor how right it is that I should say, once more and

for the last time, No." She had written thus far when she was interrupted, and obliged hastily to put aside her writing. Mr Tregloss and Mrs Vineingly were walking in a verandah before her nursery window, and she expected each moment that they would enter the room. She was partially concealed by the drapery of the window curtain, but could not rise to make her escape without being seen. She heard, involuntarily, snatches of their conversation.

"Such low tastes, and to think I should sympathise with them."

"Oh, get rid of her, brother; she's an ambiguous person."

"I gave him the cold shoulder and a bit of advice at parting. 'If you want,' said I, 'to rise in your profession, now that you have to depend on your own exertions, you must look up and not down.'"

"To think of marrying her—shocking, absurd folly." As Mrs Vineingly uttered the words it never probably occurred to her how lax her code of morals was. According to her theory, and that of thousands in her station, libertinage was venial compared with an imprudent marriage. And yet this lady, and the class she represented, regarded with disgust and horror the inevitable victims of their social code.

To Foster's relief they passed on without entering the nursery, and she again drew out her note, and was folding it when a strong desire possessed her to add one word of warning drawn from the depths of her own experience, so in tremulous but yet legible characters she added—

"My present station and all the sufferings of a life of misery have been the effects of one vice—intemperance. Oh, beware of that, it has a thousand tempting ways, and all lead to shame, despair. and death."

To despatch this note to Hempson's hotel was not difficult. When he received it he tore it open eagerly. Hope and love were too strong in his bosom to admit the idea of failure in the pursuit that had led him so far. He read the first lines with bitterness not untinged with anger and jealousy. "Cold and cruel," he repeated, adding—"Her heart must be pre-occupied." Then came, after a pause, in which he had paced the room angrily, the reading of the last lines. He mused on them, and a tender glow checked the tide of resentment. "She must care for me, or why this advice? Intemperance, yes, that has been my snare, perhaps she knows that; assuredly she does, when her timely aid saved me from a frightful death. My folly might have sacrificed not only my own life, but hers and the household. She fears to unite her destiny with mine. She has suffered, and she fears."

This was both a natural and a salutary solution. He saw that there was hope in the future, if he could but get her to believe in his entire amendment. It might be a work of time, but his love defied time and absence. Give him any test that did not exclude hope, and he would bear it. All men, whether they admit it or not, prefer a woman who "will be wooed, and not unsought be won."

A chivalrous deference sprang up in the heart of the lover for this lowly woman. If ever a passing thought had disturbed him as to her past history and connections, he now felt assured that she was pure and virtuous in no mean degree. A woman of her beauty, to live in such a situation, and submit to the hourly humiliations that surrounded her, was a guarantee that a man in seeking her for a wife, might safely trust his honour in her keeping. That she should make conditions when she had suffered so much, was right and fitting. He would have an explana-

tion with her; her "No" should not be final. Accordingly, he wrote again, asking to be permitted to hope, assuring her that if he had not suffered as she had, he had seen the evil of intemperance as fully, and was resolved to pursue a course of strict sobriety,—that he was, if she had indeed so determined, willing to be for a time on probation. All he asked and implored was, that she would tell him her future plans, and allow him to hope. His stay must be limited to that week. He entreated her not to wreck his happiness and blight his prospects by sending him away hopeless.

It was the evening of the day after Mrs Vineingly's introduction to the family circle that this letter came. Foster had received it, but found no immediate opportunity of reading it. Mrs Tregloss had been low-spirited all day. She had wept and murmured like a spoiled child. In vain Mrs Vineingly tried to amuse, and Mr Tregloss to soothe her; nothing produced quiet but one of Flutterly's mysterious doses, and then she laughed and prattled in a way even more melancholy than her tears. Mrs Vineingly formed her own conclusions, though she did not whisper them to her brother. When so egregious a conjugal blunder has been committed by a man in mature life, he generally, from pride or obstinacy, abides by his choice, and tries to deceive himself and others, while the vulture of disappointment gnaws at his heart. So, when Mr Tregloss, bewailed his wife's nervousness, and expatiated on her sensitive temperament and superfine constitution, Mrs Vineingly neither whispered the words insanity nor intemperance, but she said "You must continue to give her change of scene, brother. She evidently must travel, but your son would be better if he were quietly at home in England. A cheerful nursemaid must be obtained for him; indeed, an entire change as far as he is concerned. Ah, I wish,

brother, until my charming young sister's health is re-established, you would confide him to me. I would be happy to take the charge of him, and of your house at Chiswick, in your absence, that is, if you purpose remaining abroad." This proposal though at first he received it dubiously, yet very soon it appeared to be a solution of the difficulties that he had to contend with. He answered dubiously—"As to Swillinberg House, I have just received proposals from a gentleman who offers to take it for three years. I'm inclined to close with him. But certainly that need not prevent our sending the darling home. He never was so well as at Brighton. A residence there would be *the* thing." Mr Tregloss wanted to go to Italy. He had set his heart on wintering in Rome. His wife always enjoyed travelling, but he could not conceal from himself that his son was drooping, and the constant care of a young child was troublesome. He could trust his sister, and he feared no real opposition from Mrs Tregloss. During the evening, the brother and sister talked themselves into high good humour over the proposed plan. Mrs Tregloss had been persuaded to retire to her bed very early. The child was unusually restless, for Flutterly, in some awe of Mrs Vineingly's questions or objections, had not given it the dose that produced quietness. And as Foster walked up and down the nursery, soothing him, Mr Tregloss and his sister adjourned there, and carried on their conversation, introducing merely such ambiguities as might be likely to puzzle a listener. They need not have feared Foster; she was just then too absorbed to attend to anything but her own thoughts. She paced the room and hushed the wailing child mechanically, Mr Tregloss deciding that as the walking seemed to lull him, he should not be laid down, and seemingly lingering to enforce his order,

a portfolio of prints lying on the table before him. Suddenly a name, in the little stream of talk that was going on between brother and sister, startled Foster from her abstraction,—it was “Topham.”

“Yes, that’s in Topham’s style,” said Mr Tregloss, adding, “if you were to go to—to where we spoke of to-day, you would see one of the best of his pictures. It was a bargain—a great bargain; any day I could get double, ay, it may be treble what I gave for it. Why Harding—you remember Harding, who sold old Mixty that Claude, years ago, the picture there was the law-suit about? Well, Harding and a lawyer called on me with a very pretty request. A sister of this Topham, who is now, it seems, a rich widow, wants a memorial of her precious brother, and made an offer—.”

“A sister of Topham’s! why, let me see, I once heard it said that Mr Lettsome—you remember that proud Lettsome, the indigo planter, who came home twelve years ago, from India, wife-hunting—married a sister of the painter Topham. It was a very fine catch for her. He forbade his wife having any intercourse with her own family, of course, and he was very much out of health. They came back two years ago. I saw him at Cheltenham, wheeled about, quite a cripple. I should think she is very well left.”

“Lettsome—ah, indeed, did he marry Topham’s sister? I had forgotten it, if indeed, I ever heard it. Any family?”

“I think not.”

“Foster, why are you standing? don’t you see baby is rousing? Walk gently, and ring the bell as you pass. I’m chilly, sister; do you like Roman punch?”

Neither of them had raised their eyes to Foster’s face, or they must have been struck by the change there. She was

staring with wide open, dilated eyes, and her breath came in gasps. As Mr Tregloss's words warned her to continue her patrol, she was unable to keep an even pace; she rushed along with hasty steps, and then, coming to a pause, sunk down on a seat, and burst into tears.

It is wonderful the difference with which people regard the emotions of different people. When Mrs Tregloss called up her tears, her feelings were always spoken of and compassionated; but when the over-charged heart sent up a real flood, that streamed from the eyes and would not be repressed, the one word that immediately rose to the lips of the two spectators was—

“Affectation.”

“If you are tired, Foster, you could say so,” said Mr Tregloss, loftily.

“Such airs are out of place, young woman,” coldly added Mrs Vineingly, while a glance was exchanged between them which said as plainly as words—this must be ended, she must go.

A man-servant entered, who summoned Sophy, and brought to Mr Tregloss the never-failing beverage that, in some form or other of alcoholic stimulant, enabled that gentleman to pass away his evenings. He turned over the prints, and wandered on, to the accompaniment of his sister's remarks, until his voice grew thick, and he was reminded by sundry yawns that it was time to retire.

Mrs Vineingly gave her orders to Sophy, taking no notice of Foster, who, tortured almost beyond endurance by the tumult of her feelings, was not sorry to find that her charge, under the care of Sophy, was that night to be transferred to Mrs Vineingly's room. Her excitement was so great, that the fidgety ways and tediousness of the lady and the nurse-girl seemed to be interminable. At last, however,

they left her to herself, and she was able to sit down and think.

Had Foster seen one ray of kindness in the face of Mrs Vineingly she would have spoken to her. But her shrinking nature was repelled into its stronghold of reserve by the looks and words of that lady. She must act alone; poor as her judgment was, she must rely on it. Had she been in England she would have left instantly, and sought Mr Harding, the picture-dealer, whom she had known in her childhood, and whose residence she had found out while she was at Swillinberg House, in turning over the leaves of a directory. But she could not so easily leave Baden. She was, of course, included in the general passport of the family, and a permit would be needed before she could leave them. But even the tumult of thought that agitated her on the tidings she had heard—for, surely, if her father's sister would at any price obtain a picture of his, she would not be indifferent to his only child—did not prevent Foster's thoughts reverting, with even greater strength, to Horace Hempson. She drew his letter from its hiding-place, and read the earnest plea that it contained; the new-born hopes that fluttered in her heart seemed to forbid a cold or melancholy reply. She resolved to write two letters before she slept. In the first, to Mr Hempson, she thanked him for the evidence of his esteem—his love. She told him that new prospects were opening before her, and that she believed she should not long remain where she was—that she waited the result of a letter to England, and though time must elapse before she could give a full confidence, she hoped he might not always have reason to think she made a cold return to the love he proffered her. It was but a few lines, but Foster spoiled many sheets of paper before she could complete her note. Not to say so

much as would unduly inspire hope, or so little as would extinguish it, was her aim ; and she, of course, felt dissatisfied with the result. Her next note was to Mr Harding, inquiring the address of Mrs Lettsome, for a person who knew that the only daughter of Mr Topham was living. She signed the name that had been given her, and asked that the letter should be addressed to that name, at the Post-office, Baden. After this she was able to lay her weary head down on the pillow, and sleep the deep sleep of exhaustion.

CHAPTER XIV.

PARTINGS AND MEETINGS.

It was soon evident to all the household of Mr Tregloss, that the reconciliation of their master with his sister would introduce great changes. She commenced her plan of rendering herself indispensable to her brother, by entirely removing the infant from the care of Foster, and superintending it. She was foiled in her efforts to make any other than a painful impression on her sister-in-law. Mrs Tregloss manifestly shrank from her, and became more under the dominion of Flutterly. She either was, or professed to be, increasingly nervous, and whenever the infant cried, had such hysterical attacks that there was a general disturbance. Some trifling alteration for the better took place in her health on the receipt of a letter from a dear friend of hers, with whom she exchanged epistolary communications. Miss Maria Mixty—old Mixty the distiller's daughter—who, with her father, was at Florence, wrote to propose that they should all meet

at Rome. No sooner was this idea in Mrs Tregloss's mind, than she was prepared to listen to the plans that Mrs Vineingly and Mr Tregloss proposed relative to the child's return to England forthwith. Accordingly, as the same post that brought Miss Mixty's letter brought also the conclusion of the agreement for the letting of Swillinberg House, it was arranged among the principals that Foster should accompany Mrs Vineingly to England prior to her dismissal. This plan would save the hiring of a German nurse, as had at first been intended; and Mrs Vineingly being well acquainted with Brighton, wrote to engage a residence there, and to order an old servant of hers to have everything in readiness for a comfortable reception. Mrs Vineingly was evidently well pleased that her negotiations with her brother had ended in her getting an establishment for herself—for Mr Tregloss, as much for ostentation as tenderness, agreed to give her a very good income, and was profuse in his directions as to the regimen and training of the child. In proportion to his own inefficiency to regulate his household while the child was under his care, was the minuteness of the directions he gave when that care was transferred to another. Indeed, this is by no means an uncommon thing. Every one engaged in the instruction of the young can tell of children confided to them whose parents have done their best to spoil them, in temper and in health, in mind and in morals, and then are exacting and dictatorial in demanding that the school shall make up for the deficiencies of home.

Foster was too much accustomed to feel and be treated like an alien in the house to complain at any usurpation of Mrs Vineingly's. As far as the future plans were made known to her she acquiesced in them. Mr Hempson had written again and again to her. He had ascertained from

her that she intended leaving, and was waiting the result of a letter, and he offered to be her escort to England. How pleasant it would have been to her to have accepted his attention! A thousand new and delightful feelings thronged her lonely heart as she read and re-read his letters; but one result of the dreary experiences of her past life was to be very careful of reputation. She had heard too much of the innuendos of Flutterly and her niece to be ignorant that, if she insisted on leaving Mr Tregloss at the time that Mr Hempson travelled, she would risk her character. The reviving hopes that began to dawn upon her gave her an interest in life that she had never felt before. The thought that she might yet belong to some one, who would be pleased with her good, or shamed by her evil repute, added a cautiousness to the reserve that was natural to her character.

Hempson, though both impatient and annoyed, was satisfied that she was right, and so deeply in love that he was inclined to make the most of the last gleams of hope that he gathered from her letters. He was too good a tactician to fail in acquiring all the information of the movements of the family; and though he and Mr Tregloss only in the very stiffest way recognized each other, he learned among circles where he visited the plan for the future tour of the parents, and the return of Mrs Vineingly and the child to England. So, pressed by the urgency of his letters from England, and compelled to submit with as good a grace as might be to the decision of Foster, Mr Hempson set off on his return; having forwarded his address and obtained a promise that Foster would write to him. The route Mrs Vineingly was to take, as the least fatiguing, was down the Rhine to Rotterdam and thence to London, where she would be met by her own attendant, and would

part with Foster. The latter feared that she should not receive a reply to her letter from Mr Harding before she left, though under present arrangements that was not of very great consequence. She would be in London, and could find out Harding. However, the day before they left Baden, Foster's repeated enquiry for a letter was successful; one was handed to her. It was short and business-like. "The writer of the former letter was to apply, without delay, to Mr Mitchell, solicitor, Parchment Buildings, Holburn."

It was part of the crooked policy of the family that Mrs Tregloss was to be kept in ignorance of the exact time of the departure of her child. She acquiesced so completely in any deception practised, that it could scarcely be said that she was deceived. The complimentary fiction as to her tender feelings had been repeated until she, at all events, believed it, and thought it fitting that she should be spared on all occasions. So therefore, she knew well enough when the child was brought one night to receive a parting kiss, that it would be on its way to England before her eyes were open the next morning; yet she humoured the deception by saying—"By-bye, pet; mamma will see him to-morrow." It was characteristic of a nature like hers to lay up in reserve a something as an excuse for future fits of crying and being petted; and she knew it would be capital stock, whenever she felt wayward, to be able to weep about her poor dear absent child. Flutterly's doses, too, would be in great requisition; and as Mr Tregloss had once or twice shown symptoms of interfering with her taking them, he would be over-ruled when she had such a sorrow to plead, or to be comforted for, as anxiety about her child. As to taking leave of Foster, it had been decided she was to do nothing of the kind.

"She pitied that young woman, and was truly sorry for the fate that awaited her; for Mrs Vineingly had explained to her that Foster must have given encouragement to Mr Hempson, and that she was perhaps in the habit of encouraging gentlemen; from her looks that was only too probable. It was a great misfortune she had not a face that would suit her station better, and look more respectable; as it was, she said nothing, but she pitied her."

Flutterly had been strangely subdued during the whole time of Mrs Vineingly's stay; and no one, except that lady herself, more heartily rejoiced when the preparations for the journey were complete, and the child and his aunt and quondam foster-mother were to go. It was wonderful so stern a moralist, and so delicate a damsel as Flutterly, entirely omitted giving any parting cautious sneers to Foster; indeed she did not favour her with one hint or innuendo about Mr Hempson, or one reference to her favourite theme—"Hospital riff-raff." Perhaps the reason of this reticence might be gathered from Mrs Vineingly's private parting words to her.

"Now, Flutterly, take good care of your mistress. It's my belief, unless you are all very careful, she will lose her mind. And, remember, as long as you conduct yourself to my satisfaction, I shall never say a word about your misfortune in years gone by. Sophy is a quick, bright girl, and you are doing your best for her, as you ought for your own child, though I advise you to be careful and keep your own counsel, for you know my brother. He is not in the least aware that you were once in my service, or the circumstances under which you left me."

Very different from the usual primness and glibness of Flutterly was the awkward curtsy and the stammering thanks she uttered; while her secret resolution was

strengthened to do her best to keep Mrs Tregloss abroad as long as possible.

So the little party, consisting of Mrs Vineingly, the child and Foster, and a German man-servant whom Mr Tregloss was sending home to a friend, set out on their journey; and though the weather had become very cold, they suffered no inconvenience, and encountered no adventure until they reached Rotterdam, where they were to stay a night. The hotel at which they put up overlooked the quay where the steamers for England were moored. The child had been restless during the journey, and Mrs Vineingly was so worn out that she gladly acceded to Foster's offer, and for a few hours retired to rest. The thought that in another day or two she would be finally removed from her charge, made the young nurse additionally attentive to him; and, in accordance with the bad custom that had deepened into habit, she walked the room for hours, lulling him, in his fitful dose, by her measured tread. The grey dawn of morning gave place to the clear light of the risen day, when the bustle on the pavement below attracted her attention. Had it been earlier in the autumn, the fine trees before the windows of her room would have prevented her seeing so clearly the arrival and the disembarkation of the passengers from the London steamer; as it was, the leafless branches furnished no obstruction to her view. She was interested in observing the greetings that passed between groups who had waited on shore, and the jaded-looking passengers. But she noticed with even greater interest those who seemed more strange, and one or two who looked isolated and lonely. Her own condition enabled her to understand their feelings as they stepped ashore in a foreign land. As the vessel seemed to be clear of all its passengers, and the doors of the little office of the

custom-house were thronged, she was about turning from the window, when something caught her eye that sent a sudden thrill through her whole frame. She stood rigid, clutching the child to her mechanically, her eyes staring in fixed gaze at a shabby-looking man, who emerged from among some luggage on the deck, stepped ashore, and removing a battered hat as he did so, wiped his forehead, looked up and around with an air of satisfaction, and was apparently crossing towards the hotel. A momentary frenzy seized Foster. Entirely forgetting that she was secluded in an upper room, she turned quickly round and fled towards the door, gasping out in a choking voice—"No, no; oh, no." But the fright or spasm that shook her was too powerful; before she could get the door open she fell fainting on the floor.

How long she lay she knew not. When she recovered, the crying of the child was added to the surging noise that rung in her ears. She looked round the room feebly, and as consciousness was restored, hushed the wailing of the infant, and gathered up her trembling limbs. Her cry and fall had not been heard. She sat down on the bedside, and tried to think; then crept to the window. Was it all a vision? No, there was the vessel; the very bales against which he had leaned a moment, as he took off his hat. Suddenly she retreated and drew the curtain, trembling meanwhile so much that she evidently feared again losing consciousness. She could not keep a limb still. She was young and healthy, yet a minute's glance had been powerful enough to shake the very foundations of life.

Perhaps the crying of the child was the most salutary means of rousing her. She was afraid she should faint, and exerted herself to repel the gathering weakness. Tottering to a water bottle, she drank off a large draught,

managed to dash a little on her face, and then sat down to think. All the stony reserve—the rigid calm that had belonged to her former manner, and that of late she had nearly lost, returned. She was conscious of but two thoughts, the necessity of keeping silence, the desire to get away as quickly as possible. Had Mrs Vineingly come in when the first struggle was going on, she must have betrayed her emotion, whether she explained it or not. But as she thought, fortunately, that lady's slumbers were sound, and time was given to Foster to regain something of outward composure before that lady joined her. Yet the traces of what she had suffered were even then so apparent that, on Mrs Vineingly entering the room, she exclaimed at once, "In the name of wonder, what is the matter with you? Have you been frightened? You look as though you had seen the dead."

"Seen the dead," repeated Foster, vaguely.

"Yes, what is it? are you ill, or what?"

"I'm ill," faltered the poor girl, repeating the words, and unable to frame any excuse; for readiness of words, still less of falsehood, was not natural to her. Mrs Vineingly had a dread of being detained or put out of the way by Foster, and therefore, taking the child in her arms, she said, "Oh, I thought you'd been frightened, and had something to tell me. As to feeling ill, why, nobody is over well on a journey. I'm ill, if I give way to it. You must rouse yourself. Go down to your breakfast.

But Foster entreated to have her breakfast sent up, and as in a few hours they would embark, Mrs Vineingly consented, and advised Foster to lie down and get some sleep, a proposal which, whether she would be able to obey it or not, was so far acceptable that it gave her some time of privacy and quietude.

The interval passed, and the increasing coldness of the day prevented Mrs Vineingly making any remark at the way in which Foster had muffled herself up, and slouched her bonnet over her face. Whether such precautions were really necessary to her safety or not, one thing was certain, they all got on board safely, though, had Mrs Vineingly been very observant, she would have seen that Foster trembled, either with weakness or terror, and cast a strange, furtive glance around, as she passed some bales of goods that were lying on the pier, as if she expected some one to come round them and seize hold of her.

The next morning, when they landed at St Catherine's wharf, a servant was in waiting, who received the child, and Mrs Vineingly, pausing a moment before she entered the cab, said, with cold civility —

"I think you understood, Foster, that we were to part here. I suppose you have friends to go to. I leave town to-day, or I should have been happy to have rendered you any assistance; but my brother's liberality to you has been great. Take care of yourself; good bye."

Foster made one sudden rush forwards to the hackney coach, to take another look at her nursling, while Mrs Vineingly exclaimed, "Pray don't make a scene, and attract attention." At these words, as if she was still feeling the effects of her recent fright, Foster shrunk back, and the lady entered the carriage. Fritz, the young German footman, with a glance of compassion at Foster, mounted the box beside the driver, and, in less time than it takes to write it, they were gone, leaving Foster, pale and sick, staring after them.

The bustle of the place was unfavourable to reverie. She was so pushed about in a few seconds that it roused her; and a porter, who was keeping guard over her box, which

had been duly separated by Fritz from the rest of the luggage, asked her for the third time where it was to be taken. The man was not much surprised to see her bewilderment. He had often noticed it in foreigners on their first arrival, or English people who had expected to be met by their friends, and were kept waiting by any misunderstanding; so he paused for Foster's orders, while she, calling up her scattered thoughts, began fumbling in her pocket for the letter containing Mr Mitchell's address, and looking, meanwhile, confusedly at her box, which seemed, just then, an incumbrance. The man solved the difficulty by offering to call a coach, a proposal that she agreed to with a sense of relief. In a few minutes, she was being driven towards Holborn, and striving to recall what had been her plan before she had received the shock which had so shattered her. Never, in all the vicissitudes through which she had passed since we introduced her to our readers, had she been so prostrated with a feeling akin to despair. At her early age, every day of the last year had aided the development of her mind and the formation of her character. She had not been without opportunities of improvement, and the more recent events had called up feelings of hope and affection that had been crushed and repressed from her childhood. Now a blast had swept over her, deadly as the East wind after a warm spring day, and all was blighted and desolate. She felt as if she hardly cared now what became of her. And yet, poor tempest-tossed creature, she was drawing near to a haven of rest, if not of happiness. If the thoughts and feelings that had recently gathered round Horace Hempson, and made her construct a future in which he was to be a principal person, had within a few hours been miserably disappointed, still she was not long to be a homeless wanderer.

In what seemed to her a very short time, she was at the door of Mr Mitchell's office. A clerk came to the carriage window, to reply to her questions, and to invite her to alight. She sent in no name, but merely said, "The person who recently wrote to Mr Mitchell from Baden wishes to see him." She was ushered through an outer office, into a large room, dim with the murky hue of a London sky in November.

Her attention, on entering, was so concentrated on Mr Mitchell, as he advanced from the centre of the room and placed a chair for her, that she did not notice there was another person present, sitting in the shadow of the heavy window curtains. Foster sat down timidly as Mr Mitchell said, "I understand, from a letter sent to Mr Harding, that you can give me information of Mr Topham's daughter."

"I am his daughter," said she, in a faltering voice, that broke into tears as she added, "his miserable daughter!"

The beating of her own heart, the difficulty of repressing her emotion, prevented her from noticing that there was a sound, almost like an echo of her sob, that went wailing through the room as she spoke. Mr Mitchell was raising his hand as if for silence, and then, in his cool, legal way, said, "I shall require proof."

There was the rustle of a silken dress rapidly approaching, the old bonnet was dragged back from the poor girl's head, and a pale, proud face, strangely quivering with agitation, bent over and panted out the words, as she put aside the heavy masses of tumbled hair that were falling forward—

"It is—it is my niece, named after me, Lilian Topham. I should know that face among a thousand."

There was a pause, in which aunt and niece gazed at each other fixedly, as if each would pierce the veil, and

read something of the soul of the other. As they thus were confronted, it was easy to see a more than common family likeness, allowing for the difference that one was in the morning, and the other past the noon of life, and that the elder was taller, and cast in a larger mould. The leading characteristic of the lady's face was pride. And even while she was evidently trembling with emotion, her glance wandered over the humble garb, and then passed uneasily to Mr Mitchell, before she fairly gave way, and taking the trembling hands of her niece in hers, stepped forward and kissed her, saying, "You cannot remember me? My brother's habits made us strangers even before my father died. My husband allowed my father an annuity while he lived, on the express condition that I should have no further intercourse with any of them. But that condition was not, at any period, strictly kept. Your father, whenever he could, applied to me for money. Then his wretched marriage and utter degradation compelled me to become a stranger to him. Yes, my only brother, who in my youth had been my joy and pride. You know his fault, Lilian, and its consequences. Heavily they must have fallen on you, poor child. I hear that, to escape worse miseries, you married."

"Oh, that I had died! It seems as if I could not die." The tone in which she said this was so heart-rendering that Mrs Lettsome involuntarily said—

"Poor thing, poor thing," and added, "Do not distress yourself with any further explanations; tell me only that you are free from—from—any association that I cannot approve."

"I am alone," was the reply.

"Then you shall come to me, for I also am alone."

"Do, not, Lilian, look so hopeless, or think that you only

have known sorrow. Was it a common grief, think you, that I was rent away from my early ties, and compelled to blush for, and ultimately disown my brother—that I was bereaved of my only son by death—that I had other burdens to bear from my husband's family, who contemned my birth, and were not wholly unsuccessful in making my married life hard; and the world, meanwhile—the false fawning world—was loud in commendation of the position I had attained—the brilliant marriage I had made. Oh, girl, there are as sad hearts beating under satin and velvet as any that throb under lowly serge. Not that I condemn my station, or would in aught degrade it. Years have wonted me to it, to use an old Northampton word, and if you come with me to share my solitude, the past must be to you, as it has been to me, a thing apart and done with for ever. Do you know this, Lilian?" she added, holding, as she spoke, a miniature that was suspended by a gold chain from her neck.

"Yes, it was grandpapa," was the reply.

Mr Mitchell, who had stood apart a short time, while this conversation went forward, now drew near, and enquired "when the young lady arrived?" and then our poor wanderer remembered the coach at the door, and her luggage, and spoke of having come from Germany direct, Mrs Lettsome explaining that the hope of a letter from Baden had brought her that morning to the office of the solicitor. In a few minutes, the driver was dismissed, Mrs Lettsome's carriage was announced, and the humble luggage transferred to it. Like one in a dream—a strange, yet still a sad dream, one to whom her name of Lilian sounded like a reminder of sorrow rather than of childhood, she was led by Mr Mitchell, obsequiously attended by bowing clerks, to a well-appointed close carriage. Just as she was seating her-

self, and her head was slightly bent forward so as to be seen from the street, a gentleman was approaching Mr Mitchell's door. He paused in speechless astonishment for a moment as the word "Home" was given to the coachman, and as the carriage drove off, the eyes of the younger lady met those of the gazer. The recognition was mutual—it was Horace Hempson.

CHAPTER XV.

A HAVEN OF REFUGE.

IF Mr Hempson expected to gain from Mr Mitchell any solution of the strange mystery of the sudden appearance of the object of his thoughts and affections in circumstances apparently so different from those in which he had left her, he was disappointed. He said cautiously, on entering the office "I think I know one of those ladies who have just left you, Mitchell?" when the reply in the lawyer's driest tone was, "Oh, an old client of mine." Mr Hempson was fully aware of the professional etiquette that forbade further enquiry when that peculiarly impenetrable manner was assumed, and therefore, with a heart ill at ease, and an abstracted look, he tried to enter into the comparatively indifferent business that had brought him to the office. A constraint was on both, for each wanted to know what the other had to tell without giving up any portion of their own reserve. Mr Hempson in particular felt that silence as to where he had seen the younger lady was not only prudent but right. He might unwittingly injure her. So without learning anything, they parted. Mr Mitchell doubtless congratulating himself that he had been the

means of obliging a good client, and Horace Hempson to meditate on the strange vicissitudes of life.

He was now studying hard. The indolence and restlessness of the days when he thought himself sure of an independence had passed, and he was making up lost time, and fighting pretty earnestly the battle of life, beginning with that chief foe, whose conquest is ever the hardest—*self*. Somehow the feeling that the object of his love was certainly in more congenial circumstances was mingled with a dread that the change of station boded no good to his suit. As it is the brightest sunshine that calls up the deepest shadow, the yearning tenderness of his love was accompanied by constant apprehension. True, she might, in a worldly sense, be more his equal, but he had been in a state of delightful enthusiasm, in which the opinions of the world were as nothing; and the romance that he had constructed was, that he would rescue the woman that he loved from an unworthy fate, that she should owe everything to his tenderness. He was almost inclined to be jealous of the lady that he had seen with her. Lovers are proverbially sensitive, capricious, and rash, and he was no exception. In the times not so far back, when he put no check upon his desires, half the mental conflict he now endured would have sent him to wild companions, and to the wine-cup, as an escape or solace; but he really was earnest in his determination, come what might, to face his destiny with a clear head and a trusting heart—neither to muddle the one, nor harden the other, by bacchanalian indulgences. So, gravely enough, he sat down doggedly to his books, and resolved to watch patiently for that promised letter on which so much of the happiness of his future life depended. It did once cross his mind that possibly Foster's might be only a change from one employment to another,

but, rapid as his glance had been, he had seen that the elder lady sat by the side, and laid her hand caressingly on the shoulder of the fair, pensive girl, whom he could not think of in any of the characters assigned to her, as servant, mother, or widow. While he thus dreadingly but resolutely pursued his studies, hiding the gnawing at his heart under the mantle of silence, the aunt and niece were at their destination, a secluded country-house, surrounded by a garden, in that quietest of all metropolitan villages—Hendon. The name of Foster, dear reader, from this time drops off like a tattered cloak from her, who now assumes her rightful Christian name—"Lilian."

Mrs Lettsome, who had explained during the drive home what, indeed, her niece remembered to have heard in years gone by, that she had married, as some thought, very advantageously. Mr Lettsome, an Anglo-Indian, had fallen in love, like a prince, with her portrait, which he had seen at the exhibition, and sought, wooed, and won her. Without exactly proudly interdicting any intercourse with her own family, her husband was glad that a voyage to India put the ocean between his bride and her kindred. Then came tidings of misfortune and misconduct from them—appeals for help—the blindness of the aged father—and, after his death, apparently complete estrangement. Clandestinely Topham contrived to have some intercourse with his sister, and when Lilian was thirteen he sent her portrait to her aunt. The childless woman had yearned towards this niece, who bore a refined resemblance to herself. When she returned to England, two years back, the inquiries that she had secretly instituted only revealed the utter degradation and dispersion of the family, the wretched marriage of Lilian being the bitterest drop in the cup of disappointment and humiliation. And even now, as Mrs Lettsome surveyed

at leisure the poor attire, and downcast, spiritless look of her niece, she felt that there was much to mar the joy of her discovery. She entered into explanations of the causes that led to her coldness to her brother, from a vague wish to remove from her niece's mind any prejudices that might lurk, or have been instilled, against her, and in the hope of inducing an equally frank explanation. Nor did she attempt to conceal from Lilian that she had acquired, in the course of years, much of her husband's pride, and that she was quite as greatly shocked and annoyed at the degradation to which her family had sunk, as she was distressed at the sin that had caused their fall. Mrs Lettsome had lived a retired life during the long invalidism of her late husband, and in coming to her present residence was bent rather on shunning than seeking society. Lilian had been disciplined in too stern a school to be very much astonished or hurt at the incidental remarks of her aunt. "And you have been quite neglected in your education? the companion of low people? how very horrible! You must tell me all, and then we will devise means for keeping the degrading facts a profound secret, never to be mentioned afterwards, even to each other."

The manner in which this was said touched painfully on the already wounded spirit of the listener, and she was not sorry that the arrival of the carriage at the house, had for a time terminated the conversation, with the understanding that explanations were to be resumed at a later period of the day.

When the poor girl, whom we have known as a friendless wanderer, was ushered into a spacious bed-room, and told to make herself at home in the house of her kinswoman, it must be confessed that tears, by no means free from bitterness, filled her eyes. A settled gloom was on her spirit, and

as she changed her humble garb, and laying aside her disfiguring cap, arranged her rich abundant hair, she was half inclined to wish that her aunt might be ashamed of her, and might consent to place her in some seclusion, where she might pass the rest of her life unseen and unknown by any one. But there was that in her appearance when she rejoined her aunt that forbade any such feeling as shame. Mrs Lettsome kept no company, but she sighed, as her niece came across the drawing-room towards her, and said, "My poor Lilian, sit down by me, and tell me how it is that I find you thus friendless. You, formed by nature to adorn any circle, seem by fortune to have been consigned to the—the——"

"Lowest," said Lilian, and then in a very few words, the fewest that she could employ, she said, "My father's home was miserable before grandpapa died; it was equally so afterwards. He married a woman who sat to him as a model. She treated me very ill when—when my father was not himself. The house became a rendezvous for boon companions and dissipated idlers. Among them there was a young man named Smith, who at times came professing to study with my father. He interposed often to save me from the cruelty of my father's wife, but he also drunk hard, and his visits were fitful. Sometimes he came with lavish means at his command. Sometimes, I now think, he was in hiding from creditors. He had great talents, I think, as well as great faults. But whatever he was, and I had no clear perception of his character, he seemed to me the only creature that treated me with kindness. He professed love to me. My stepmother considered me an incumbrance, and plotted, as I was told afterwards, to make him marry me. At least he taunted me, afterwards, that he had been entrapped into a marriage. I'm sure I never entrapped him."

"You, poor child! why the supposition is preposterous," interposed Mrs Lettsome.

"My father's wife had relations in America, and she managed, by inducing my father to sacrifice his pictures and his connection, to induce him to go to America. The first thing I heard from my enraged husband, three days after our marriage, was that my father had absconded in his debt. He had married me, I fear, under the impulse of mere passion, stimulated by drink; and he tired of me and hated me. Yes, you look surprised, he hated me for faults I could not help—childishness, timidity, ignorance. In his estimation and language, I was an idiot and a burden. I need not tell you how we lived for some months. He either had no family or decent acquaintance, or he was resolved never to introduce me to any. He gambled and drank, and went from one raceground to another, often leaving me in peril of starvation, sometimes taking me with him, and putting me in dread of my life. Oh, those dreadful months! They seem like many long years as I recall them. I would die any death rather than live one of them again with him. At last he took me to Southampton, intending to go to the Channel Islands, and there deserted me. I made my way to London, and found out a woman with whom he often lodged. She taunted me, and told me he was dead. I did not believe her until she showed me the certificate of his burial."

"Dead," said Mrs Lettsome in a satisfied tone, "then my dear Lilian," you are free? Why do you shake your head and look so gloomy? You cannot ever have loved this man; you were a child, married by the mere caprice of a bad man. I'm truly thankful, poor wretch, that he is dead."

"Aunt," said Lilian, lowering her voice to a whisper,

and looking round the room as if she feared to utter the words, "Within these four-and-twenty hours I have seen him in life. Yes, if ever I saw him, it was he."

"Saw him! where?"

"On the Quay at Rotterdam."

There was a long pause, each looking blankly at the other. Mrs Lettsome half rose, making towards the bell, as if she feared his coming, and would have summoned a domestic to give orders against his admission.

"He did not see me; he is not likely to seek me—thinks or wishes me dead, doubtless," said Lilian, "and it was wonderful I did not die, in the state I was in when he left me, for I had to go to an hospital."

"An hospital! You were ill, then?"

"I was a mother."

Mrs Lettsome manifestly drew back. There was something revolting to all her prejudices. This swindler or drunkard husband—the hospital—the child. Her newly-found relation had a most objectionable history. "A mother!" she gasped, "then where is the child?"

A chill spread over Lilian; she shuddered. Very hurried was her account that, while she lay thinking in her bed what she was to do for a living on her recovery, having sold her clothes and spent all before her confinement, she heard the women speaking of the custom of some women going out into families as infant nurses; and she had caught at the idea, and mentioned to the doctor her wish to do so, and the result that followed, adding, rather hesitatingly, "I don't think I should have gone, but the kindness of a little woman at the hospital in offering to take my child, her own having died, helped me in my plan."

"Horrible!" said Mrs Lettsome, drawing back her chair. "You left your child!"

"I knew not what to do. I had been all but starved before I went in. I was utterly friendless! You know not what it is to be destitute."

"And the child?"

"Is dead, and the kind little woman too. I was not allowed to go out at Mr Tregloss's, but they sent their maid, and made every inquiry. He lived some few months, and died when we were at Brighton."

"Mr Tregloss! Why, that is the purse-proud man who refused my request, through my agent, to sell me my brother's favourite picture. And you were actually wet-nurse in that man's family. My brother's only daughter!"

"Aye, madam, all this degradation was the work of intemperance. It's all very coarse and low. You required me to tell it you; but the cause, is the real wrong."

A flush was on Lilian's face, that died away as she relapsed into silence. She had meant to have related all—all that was in her heart. It was a momentary relief to her to think she might find a friend as well as a relative in Mrs Lettsome; but the pride of her aunt repelled any farther confidence. She could tell of facts, or what she thought such in her history, but she could not allude to feelings; so she shut close in the inmost recesses of her heart, the name of Horace Hempson. She thought, indeed, that she was, by that act of silence, casting him out from her remembrance. She said to herself—"What is he, or can he be to me? No need to name that; it's all over—all."

"Well," said Mrs Lettsome, with a long sigh, after a thoughtful pause, in which she had evidently been revolving all that her niece had told her, "so I find you, Lilian, free, indeed, as to any actual associations or incumbrances, yet needing not only protection but seclusion. You cannot

go into society. Those Treglosses have a large circle. You must have been seen ; and, gracious heavens, only to think of it, you might be recognised—my niece—as having been their servant.”

“I want no society,” said Lilian, adding, as she saw a half-angry flush mount to Mrs Lettsome’s cheek, “if I can be your companion in your lonely hours, and at any time promote your comfort——”

“Oh, child, no doubt you’ll be a comfort to me, but I’m irritated. It’s all so annoying. This horrible man—this wretch may find you, and think it worth his while to annoy us. I hate scenes, or to be the subject of any remark. However, I’ll protect you to the best of my power. I cannot tell how you could part with your child. I had once a son.”

“Born in happiness !”

“Ah, true, child, true. It’s not possible, I suppose, for me to understand the feelings of one so differently circumstanced. What did you call this child of yours ?”

“Lawrence, after grandpapa.”

“Ah ! Then you did love something ; you loved him. I began to think there was no love in your nature. Pardon me, Lilian, yours has been such a strange experience.”

No love in her nature ! Poor Lilian at that moment wished that the frozen depths of her heart had indeed never been melted by the glow of affection. She drew herself up erect, and called the old stony look to her face as her aunt concluded. The prosperous woman, looking down from the sunny height, could not tell how chilly the winds blew in the deep valleys of poverty. She expected, as people generally do, that the heart shall send up flowers of loveliness, no matter the atmosphere it has had, or the surroundings ; forgetting that in human nature, as in the outer

world around us, weeds will grow in the uncultured waste in rank abundance ; but if flowers are to bloom, and genial fruits to ripen, there must not only be a right condition of soil, but careful culture, and more than all, an atmosphere of light and warmth.

"Yes," said Mrs Lettsome, after another long pause, "seclusion is your only security against this man—this husband ; and, indeed, it is also my only security in protecting you, that you are not identified as having moved in such a station as cannot but reflect disgrace—I must say it, Lilian, disgrace on all connected with you. If you had been a governess now, or a teacher of any kind ! Dear me, you surely could have taught drawing ?"

"I could teach nothing, for I knew nothing properly," was the reply, in a gloomy voice, adding—"Besides, I had no connexion—not a single friend ; but I do not want to be an embarrassment—a—a disgrace."

"No, no, child, in yourself you are nothing of the kind ; I did not mean to wound you. We will speak of this no more. I see no company ; you will have plenty of occupation in studying and making up your deficiencies. Why, Lilian, you are not nineteen ; there may be better days in the future ; at all events, as my niece, you will have to fit yourself for a station somewhat different to that you have filled. Hospital," she added, as if to herself. "Wet-nurse ! Whatever would my poor Mr Lettsome have said to such revelations. One thing more before we close this record for ever. If your father should return to this country, I will neither see him nor help him. With such a wife as he has taken, and after such treatment of you, he is no longer anything to me ; I wash my hands of him." She rubbed her palms over each other as she spoke, and then waved them as if throwing something off.

"My poor father," sighed Lilian; "but for one vice he was never unkind."

"Oh, nonsense, child. What's the use of talking of *one* vice when that includes all others—is the seed-pod of every crime?"

Mrs Lettsome had clear views about the evil, but was by no means as clear about the cure, as was obvious to Lilian when she saw the appointments of the dinner-table that day. How much easier it is to denounce a fault than to remedy it. How few, comparatively, whatever their disgust at the evils of society, will deny themselves the smallest personal luxury as a means to overthrow those evils.

It was arranged before the aunt and niece parted for the night that Lilian was to be called in the household by her real name—Mrs Smith. Mrs Lettsome had the dislike of an honourable, as well as a proud mind to all ambiguities, and while she winced at the thought that any mischance might reveal the whereabouts of her niece, she derived some comfort from the reflection that Smith was such a common name that it was all but impossible to trace any one by it. Indeed, that recollection was so far satisfactory that she parted from her niece for the night with a smile as she ordered the servant to bring Mrs Smith's chamber candle, adding, in a whisper, a quotation from Lord Byron,—

"'Tis a name so spread o'er sir and madam,
That you might think the first who bore it Adam."

When Lilian found herself, after all her agitations of the day, in her own room, she tried, as she looked around, to chide herself for her melaucholy. Despite the fact that now she was no longer a menial—that she had a relative and a home, both competent to afford her ample protection, and leisure for the improvement she pined for, yet she never in

all her wanderings felt more gloomy. Her sense of rectitude sternly told her that she must at once and for ever shut out the image that she had innocently enshrined in her heart. Crime, such as she was not previously conscious of, was, she knew, incurred by allowing her thoughts to stray in the direction of Horace Hempson. She was not a widow. Her husband lived! And therefore she must tear away the feelings that had begun to germinate in her bosom, even if her heart-strings bled at the effort. Poor Lilian! She knew not the only power that could enable her firmly and resolutely to act up to her sense of duty. "Take up thy cross and follow me," would be a command impossible to follow, if it were not that every panting feeble follower of that commander, who asks, is aided by an Almighty arm in bearing the yoke. Moreover, Lilian was impressed with the fact that a proud woman like her aunt was evidently shocked at her having parted with her child. She thought too of the little Tregloss, and a sense of regret arose. A thought shaped itself—"If my child had lived, there would have been now some purpose, some comfort in life for me." Dimly she perceived in her desolation the possibility that in treading a new path, and sharing the home of her aunt, if her child had been with her, they might both have been better and happier; for is it not a truth of many otherwise impervious natures, that "a little child shall lead them?" Another remembrance came also to her mind—her promise to write to Mr Hempson; and her knowledge that, if she did not do so, he might apply to Mr Tregloss, and set on foot means to discover her, which would only bring mortification to her aunt, and prolonged anguish to herself. So she wrote a few lines:

"Since I saw you, I have learned that I am no longer free to listen to the proposal you made. I thank you for it

—deeply, deeply thank you. It cannot be. For you and for me there is but one right course; and between us there can be but the one sad word—farewell.”

She folded and directed this letter to the address that had been given to her, and retained it, intending to take the very first opportunity of putting it into the post herself; and then, dejectedly, she sought her pillow.

It was three days before she found an opportunity of stepping out of the grounds into the village, and posting her letter. Mrs Lettsome, true to the plan she had proposed, did not advert again to any past experiences. Nothing could be more regular than the habits of the lady and her household. A little reading, a little letter-writing, a good deal of embroidery, and some music in the evening, with a gentle, constitutional walk on fine days in the morning, and a carriage airing before dinner, made up the routine of the easy life.

The quietude of Lilian was as great a recommendation to her aunt as was her beauty; and though the pursuits of the house did not seem to remove her dejection—that, if possible, increased—she certainly improved by intercourse with her aunt, and opportunities of reading and study. It was easy to see that the Lilian of Mrs Lettsome’s house would soon become a very different person from the Foster of Swillinberg House. And so, safely moored for a time in a sheltered haven, we will leave her.

Meanwhile her letter had duly reached its destination. Horace Hempson tore it open in all the fervour of hope, and read the brief words that to him seemed so hard—so deadly cold. He flung the paper from him in a storm of rage. “And it was for this heartless creature that I went to Germany—that I hoped to work and make a home, and place her above the groundlings that she served.” The

thought of all he had purposed for her, intensified his bitterness, as through his shut teeth he muttered—"And she leaves me thus. Gives me no explanation. If she really has found friends to lift her to her true sphere, she is worse still—selfish!" But as he uttered the harsh words, he took up the letter from the ground, bent his head over it, and the words swam before his eyes indistinctly, and a strong spasm heaved his chest. We will not display his emotion. Enough that as he folded the paper, and locked it up in a little desk that held his dead mother's letters, he turned to his books with a paler and sterner face, saying—"That's over, and now for work."

From that time, Horace Hempson was noticed among his legal friends as a reading man, a plodder, one who had the right stuff in him, and would rise—a water drinker moreover. "Who would have thought," said one, "that a fast fellow like Horace would pull up so strongly, and turn right round out of his old path?" "He's conquered himself," said an old lawyer, adding—"A man may conquer anything, who begins by conquering himself."

CHAPTER XVI.

ADOLPHUS MAKES A DISCOVERY.

Our old acquaintance Adolphus Stubbs, or as he chose to be announced and to sign himself, "Adolphe S. Vernon, Esq.," had not escaped sundry annoyances since we last encountered him. He not only felt indications of his good constitution breaking up, but he did not succeed so well as he had done in the earlier part of his career in obtaining admiration for his oratory. It is in the nature of things, that

flowers should fade; and a speaker who has just one or two smart blossoms, that he waves and spreads before people, may chance to tire his auditory unless he can renew them. The simple-hearted working men, honest and true, even when mistaken, had seen the entire stock of Adolphus's gestures and starts—had noticed his pauses and perorations—had clapped his flowing phrases, and shouted themselves hoarse at some favourite climax. When these had been repeated, over and over again, they somehow began to pall both on the eye and ear. A dim suspicion that there was much "sound and fury signifying nothing" in the grand words and stately sentences of the handsome orator, was making itself felt, and there speedily came a time when yawns and not bravos greeted the speaker, to his no small disgust. For, to do Adolphus justice, he never for a moment failed in his admiration of his own eloquence. He was faithful to the conviction that the bar and the senate had sustained a severe loss in not having the benefit of his talents; and these indications of weariness and doubt among his hearers, he instantly concluded, merely proved that they were not worthy the efforts he made and the florid eloquence he presented to them. Nevertheless it was a vexation to lose his hold of them. And he became convinced that he had better leave the difficult topics of politics and polemics, as they certainly required study and hard argument, and cultivate the lighter graces of dramatic recitations and singing, where a good voice and person were the prime requisites. And in pursuing this department of public life he had no hard-hearted politicians to meet, and no fear that his indulgences would excite remark or provoke censure. Therefore, during the winter that followed on the events we have recorded, Adolphus was more the hero of the public-house concert-room than the

platform. Mrs Bouncer, of the "Friend at Hand," had built a large room at the rear of her house, and obtained a music licence. Adolphus figured there as a personage of importance—a master of the ceremonies on ball nights—a director of the entertainments on other occasions; and, rising in his patroness's good graces, it must be confessed that poor Kate saw very little of him. And though, whenever he did condescend to visit her, he shone resplendent in jewelry and showy attire, and wore the very handsomest moustache, he always found himself too short of money to contribute anything to her support. When he wanted nursing, or his linen required replenishing, he patronised Kate; at other times he was too much occupied in his important pursuits to trouble himself about her. He explained to her that "a public character must sacrifice private feelings," which, as the said feelings were his wife's rather than his own, was a maxim of philosophy that Kate did not quite cheerfully acquiesce in. Doubtless it was beyond the range of the female intellect.

It might have happened that our little milliner, under the garb of feminine curiosity or jealousy, would have paid some visits to Mrs Bouncer's, at seasons that would have sorely tried the friendliness of the Friend at Hand, but that her health was much impaired during the whole winter. Work alone seldom breaks down youth and energy, but add worry to it, and a far stronger frame than Kate's must succumb.

Every day the stratagem she had practised in reference to the child became a yet more intolerable burden. If any personal event could have added to the bitterness of her self-reproach, it was that she again expected to be a mother. This time, as, despite her husband's neglect, her business was good, she had no idea of going to the hospital;

indeed she shrank from the thought, as possibly tending to a discovery that each day made her dread. True, her loving heart never for a moment flagged in its tenderness towards the innocent child; but she naturally wished either that her husband would manifest some regard for it, or that she never had encumbered herself with it. To feel that she had stained her conscience with a sin, that brought its constant punishment, was a bitter experience. She did not know—though grief had made many rifts, through which light had penetrated to her soul—yet she did not know that her feeling of the bitter burden of her sin was part of God's way of bringing her to Himself. Very hopeless, in comparison with our poor little Kate, was the condition of those who were at ease in their sins. Day and night, working or waiting, her sin in that one act of falsehood was ever before her. From the time that she had signed the pledge she never missed an opportunity of hearing the speakers at the weekly meeting. As the cold weather had caused the windows of the school-room to be closed, she managed to steal an hour from toil, and go to listen. On the Sundays, she attended a religious meeting there; and, though the more she thought the deeper grew her self-abasement, amid all her conflicts, she was still able to utter a cry for mercy. She might truly have said—

————— “But what am I?
An infant crying in the night—
An infant crying for the light—
And with no language but a cry?”

And, though she knew it not, that cry was heard; she was led on by the Almighty hand that gently leads his burdened children.

One boisterous evening in March, after a day of unusual restlessness, Kate resolved to set out in search of some

tidings of Adolphus. He had not been home for a month. She had received two letters from him, stating that he had several places to visit some distance in the country; and one purported to be written from Portsea; but she observed that both letters bore the Vauxhall Road post mark, and she was haunted by the not unnatural thought that Adolphus was deceiving her. A wedding order had kept her very busy; her eyes sometimes filling with tears, as she arranged the blonde and flowers, for the bride's bonnet, and thought how joyously she once had wrought at her own humbler adornments in that happy time, when the expectation of being the wife of her Adolphus seemed a bliss too great to realise. And now, with a desolate wonder she looked back. The shipwrecked mariner, sitting solitary on some dreary rock amid the howling waste of waters, and seeing a gallant bark go by, that he has no means of signalling, could not have a greater anguish in his heart, than Kate had as she completed the wedding millinery and sent it home. A dread that, if she did not immediately make some effort to find out whether Adolphus were really in London or not, she would be too weak to do so; and that her confinement would again take place without her being able to apprise him instantly, and have the solace that she yearned for—one kind look from him as she lay upon her pillow—all prompted her to set off for her old quarters. She would call on Mrs Bouncer, there could be no harm in that; and if, as she had her misgivings, no satisfactory tidings of her Adolphus were to be had there, she would see the Wiggsons, who had never been near her except to take Lizzie away two days after Kate's former interview with them. Perhaps they were not now in so bad a state as they had been on that summer Sunday when she called on them.

In pursuance of this plan, she set out on foot. No omni-

bus took the cross-road from Paddington to the Vauxhall Bridge, and Kate was very feeble. As she went through the Park she could scarcely stand against the wind, and was therefore in a very spent condition when, panting for breath, and trembling both from weakness and agitation, she pushed open the easily-swinging plate-glass door that admitted her into the bar of the Friend at Hand. A young woman, wearing a sort of diadem of bugles on her head, came to Kate, with the set stare of one waiting for orders, her hand resting ready to turn a brass tap. The usual formula of addressing a customer was not followed. It was evidently expected that the customers were only too eager to signify their wants; and therefore, when Kate said she wished to speak with Mrs Bouncer, the young woman altered her blank look to one of scrutiny, and said, with the glibness of falsehood, "She didn't know whether Mrs Bouncer was at home. What was her name and business?" Kate perceived that, in the time that had elapsed since she lived in the neighbourhood, the house had greatly increased its range, and added to its style. Timidly she gave her card, and the young woman, seeing the word "milliner" on it, said—

"I don't think, if Mrs Bouncer is at home, she can see you. All tradespeople must come before nine in the morning."

"I'm not come about work; I want to see Mrs Bouncer on business."

Three tawdry women and two lads came in, and the waitress, putting her ready hand to the tap, began pouring out glasses of gin for the party, calling as she did so to a boy, who took Kate's card from the bar, and favouring her with a stare, went to seek his mistress. It did not escape Kate that the boy returned and whispered to the young woman, and that there was some little giggling and mystery

going on, as they eyed her, before ushering her through the bar into a parlour, where, dressed in a silk gown, flounced to the waist, and gorgeous in chains, rings, artificial flowers, and ringlets, sat Mrs Bouncer. Kate made an awkward, hesitating curtsy, and felt very much inclined to cry. There was a swell in her foolish little throat, and her voice came trembling from her quivering lips—facts that were duly noticed by the gorgeous dame she addressed, who replied, very leisurely—

“Oh, Mrs Stubbs, is that you? Shut the door, please; there's a draught when the wind is in the east. Your husband, did you say? Umph—yes—we see him sometimes, in the way of his perfession, certainly; but, of course, I don't know anything more of him than as a perfessional. How should I? I thought you'd come back for my custom again; though you could not expect I should gave it you, when you neglected me so, after you moved. All my things I have now from a French house—Madame Quilliber's. I've no work to give you. You don't want work, eh? Your husband? Oh, he may be here, or he may not. The wives of perfessionals, than is, the respectable ones, never comes here asking about their husbands. It lets a man down, and it taint a woman's place. I'd advise you, Mrs Stubbs, unless you want to disgrace your husband, to go home, and wait till his perfessional purshoots permits him to come. I've seen a man that aggravated, with a woman coming after him that he's not been able to keep his hands off her. There's a woman—by-the-by I think you used to be intimate with her—a low body, named Wiggson, at the back here—had one of the best of husbands—but she took to coming after him and letting her tongue run; and though I took the trouble to warn her, she wouldn't mind, and, two days ago, she aggravated the poor fellow till he gave her an

unlucky blow, and now she's in the hospital. They talk of a warrant, but they've got to catch Wiggson; and a warrant for him won't take off what he's put on her in a hurry. Poor foolish woman!" Under the affected compassion of this insolent speech it was plain there lurked a cruel satisfaction.

"Mrs Wiggson—the mother of his children!" gasped Kate.

"Oh yes, she could fill his house," sneered Mrs Bouncer, with a scornful look at Kate, whose temper began to rouse as she replied—

"It's a pity Wiggson came here quite so often. He was a good kind creature once, and it's hard, I must say, that you don't give me an answer about my husband; he's not been home for a month."

"That's nothing to me, woman. Hoity-toity, please to take yourself off, and that pretty quick. If your husband's a fool, and lets you come dangling after him, I'm not. You've had your answer, and now go. What have I to do with it, if your husband never comes home? I've seen many a better-looking woman than you knocked down, and kicked out of that door, for daring to come after their husbands; and the men are in the right of it; I tell 'em so. There, you've got a bit of my mind to carry away with you; don't you come here again in a hurry."

Kate, before this speech was finished, tottered out of the room, and reached the door-way as the virago's voice sounded the last words after her. The cold air of the street revived her, for she felt giddy and faint. She looked round the corner and across the road at the deserted shop of the Wiggsons, wondering what had become of the children—one, she knew, was in prison—and she concluded the rest were in the workhouse. With a heart so sad that she did

not feel the weariness of her frame, she went homeward, the insulting words of the cruel woman ringing in her ears, and the tormenting feeling in her mind that Mrs Bouncer knew far more of Adolphus's whereabouts, than she chose to say, and that the anger she had roused was so much keener than the occasion warranted, that she had a motive in it. At the corner of the Vauxhall-road, a girl, bent nearly double and shivering in the wind, held out a lucifer box to her, and, in a husky voice, said—"Please buy." Kate knew the voice. It was Lizzie Wiggson. The girl burst into tears, and, in reply to Kate's remonstrance, said she would have come to let her know the trouble they were in, but Lizzie felt Kate had been ungratefully treated when her parents took her so suddenly home, and she was ashamed to come. She confirmed what Kate had already supposed, that the rest of the family were in the workhouse. "I kept out to try to earn a trifle, and get poor mother a bit of tea, and manage to go and see her, for she's very bad." It was but natural that Kate should ask Lizzie home, and assure her all had been forgiven and forgotten. As the two plodded home, the night came down dark and cold.

On reaching her own door, a surprise awaited Kate. Mr Munro, the surgeon, was leaving. He paused a moment on the threshold, and looking, with a concerned, compassionate gaze, in her face, said—"Do you live here?" And, as with an agitated voice, she replied in the affirmative, he said—"Then it's your husband, I suppose, that I have seen home. You must not be alarmed, he's not much hurt; but take care of him, and keep all strong drink from him." Kate did not wait to hear more. She rushed into the house, and was presently in the back parlour, where, laid on the bed, his face tied up, and his arm in a sling, a contused miserable object, reeking with drink, and groaning

out oaths, was Adolphus. Mr Munro had followed her steps back to the room, and explained that the man now on the bed, was thrown out of a gig, which he had been furiously driving. The accident happened just opposite his (Mr Munro's) surgery. A companion, not utterly intoxicated, was with him, who had waited while the hurts were dressed, and had ordered a cab, and asked Mr Munro to go home with his patient. "But," he said, as if suddenly recollecting himself, "he called him Vernon. How is that, Mrs Stubbs? If he is your husband, is Vernon his christian name?" Kate stammered out something about its being his mother's name—too intent on adjusting the bedclothes, and gazing through her tears at her Adolphus, to notice that a quick look, as if he fully apprehended the reason of the adoption of the finer name and that it was an alias, had passed over the surgeon's face. There was another question evidently hovering on Mr Munro's lips, but Kate's distress suspended it. He repeated his consolations and his directions very gently; and it was Kate herself who recovered sufficiently to ask who the companion was, that had been with her husband. "One whom I knew some years back," said Mr Munro, a little cautiously, adding, "Do you know him—this gentleman—this Smith? Is he a companion of your husband's?" Kate shook her head. She knew two or three Mrs Smiths, but could not call to mind any one of them, or their kindred, as known to her husband. The surgeon left. Through the long night, Kate, assisted by Lizzie, was busy applying the soothing lotions and giving the cooling drink. For some days the fever ran very high. Mr Munro attended very diligently, and was evidently wonderfully prepossessed in favour of the gentle, untiring wife, whose nursing was so perfect, and whose love of her husband was so apparent. Lizzie had, at Kate's

desire, kept the child entirely out of the way, so that no noise should disturb the invalid. In the absorbing anxiety she felt for him, all her minor causes of anxiety were cast aside. It did occur to her once, as very desirable that Mr Munro should not see the little toddling fellow, who now could call her Mamma, and with that precaution all other fears vanished.

Sooner than, from his habits, might have been expected, Adolphus began to mend. Had he been a sober man, he would, perhaps, have escaped the fever and inflammation that he had suffered from. But when these had spent their rage, his good constitution and Kate's nursing triumphed. He began to gain strength; and as he improved in health, he grew worse in temper. He considered it fortunate that the right arm was not the injured limb, for he could soon answer his letters, and they were numerous. While he had been very ill, Kate had looked into them, in order to arrange for some reply if they were on business and urgent, but she was unable to make anything of them. They were signed merely with initials, and referred to matters that were as algebra to her. When he could raise his head, and hold a pen, he took them under his own charge; and she was too happy to see him mending to murmur at not having his confidence. Even when he was impatient and scolded, she would first apologise for him. "It's so hard for a man to be ill;" and then she would say, as if it conveyed some sort of satisfaction, "he must be much stronger or he couldn't scold. People are always cross—that is, men are, when they are getting well."

Poor Kate! She was made to be a dupe, or a martyr, whichever the reader pleases to term it. She had not the utilitarian, nineteenth century, divorce court principles. She was a fond, foolish woman. God help her!

As Adolphus grew better, Mr Munro was less frequent in his attendance. Hitherto, Kate had always been present at all the interviews between the surgeon and his patient—never leaving on any matter of business, however urgent, until after his visit. Her spring work came in. Her apprentices were now able to be a good help to her, and, as usual, she never spared her own toil. One evening, when Adolphus had been sitting up the greater part of the day, she went out directly on his retiring to bed, never expecting that Mr Munro, who had been detained by a case in the day, would pay his visit at night. Nor was she greatly startled on her return to hear that he had called, and stayed rather longer than usual with Adolphus. When she went to his bedside, he was apparently sleeping very soundly; and so she sat down, as was her wont, and worked far into the night.

On the next day, in reply to her inquiries, she learned from her husband that Mr Munro had pronounced him convalescent, and would call no more. Kate remarked incidentally—"Not till I want him, I suppose?" For though she did not think much about herself, she had once intimated to Mr Munro that she wished him to attend her. Adolphus was reading his newspaper, and did not reply to her remark. He was unusually silent all day. Once he flamed out when Kate proposed his taking toast and water with his dinner. "No—no more slops. Ale—I'll have ale. I'm not going to be kept on a parcel of trash any longer. And as to Munro, I'm glad he took himself off. He forgot his work; he was for turning parson. He is a pretty fellow to come preaching to me; but I've a rod in pickle." Thus grumbling and surly the day passed on. He walked out in the fine spring afternoon, and came in looking so much better, that Kate's simple eyes overflowed with tears. The

secret consciousness that she had really most energetically contributed to that recovery, caused a hope to spring in her heart that the remembrance of her patient love would win him from his faults. She argued, in her one-sided way, that "A man could not be expected to own that he was wrong, but he might none the less purpose turning over a new leaf." So, when Adolphus's abstraction continued, and degenerated into a sullenness that frightened Lizzie from his presence, and made the child, with the strange precience of infancy, avoid him more than ever, Kate concluded that a great change was taking place, and she was comforted.

In the next few days, the convalescent treated himself to a few airings in a cab, and then one evening, in a casual way, announced that an engagement long made would call him for some days into the country. Kate's heart immediately sank. She rose from her seat, and, throwing her arms round her husband, said—"Not for a week or two. Don't go, my dear Dolph—Adolphus, till they're over. Do wait and see how it will go with me—wait and see your child." He looked at her strangely, as she afterwards remembered, and said, in a constrained voice—"Oh, as to our child, haven't I seen and heard enough of him for one while. It must be. Let's have no scene; it makes my head ache." Too full of pain to know whether it was her head or heart that ached the most, Kate packed up his linen for him, and, in a state bordering on distraction, parted from him. There was something she could not make out, but he promised faithfully to write to her.

In three days from that time Kate, was lying in her bed, a little baby girl on one pillow at her side, and a sealed letter waiting until she was strong enough to read it, on the other. At last she broke the seal. It contained very

few words, but they were all the more likely to be remembered :—

“Kate,—Mr Munro made a remark about what he called your maternal sufferings, when he thought fit to lecture me on my conduct, that led me to think you had put some fraud on me. I went to the hospital, and found there the entry of the birth and death of our child—a girl. A woman capable of foisting a pretended child on me has no further claim on, and will be from henceforth a stranger to—

ADOLPHUS.

CHAPTER XVII.

CROSS PURPOSES.

THE consequences of the letter Kate had received may readily be imagined. Had she been in her ordinary health the cold, hard brevity of the cruel sentences would have struck to her heart's core; now, when she was weak and ill, it seemed as if she had received her death blow. With that fidelity which belonged to her loyal and tender nature, she had sufficient power left to crush the wretched scrawl together in her hands, so as to prevent any one seeing it, while she lay uttering low moans, that now and then broke into suffocating sobs. Her illness was attributed to natural causes. And while some pretty free comments were made by neighbour women who hovered round her bed, on the absence of her husband, they did not know the active share which he had in producing the sufferings they witnessed. Kate would not openly condemn him, bitterly as she felt his cruelty. Days and weeks passed, and still the little milliner continued an invalid. She had neither delirium

nor fever. Never, for one waking hour, had she lost the consciousness of her husband's anger and desertion. But she felt crushed; all rallying power was gone; a weary, aching sense of utter misery oppressed her, and kept her from regaining strength. Over and over again, she reproached herself. Whenever she tried, as she often did, to find an excuse for her husband, her own conduct, in that one single act of duplicity which she had practised, was bewailed with all the intensity of self-reproach. The poor little boy who was the innocent occasion of so much anguish was able to smile and prattle, as he sat, surrounded by his simple play things, on her bed, or romped about the floor. Never for a moment did the claims of her own infant, or the sorrow she was enduring, chill her motherly heart towards him. Little "Jus"—that being the undignified abbreviation to which the grand name of "Junius" had shrunk—was, if anything, dearer now to her heart. But, with her lengthened illness, poverty once more entered her dwelling. Her customers, tired of waiting for her recovery, took their best orders to other milliners, and her apprentices scarcely had enough work to keep them out of mischief.

In this dreary time, Lizzie Wiggson was a great comfort to the invalid, not only by taking the entire charge of little "Jus," but by going on exploring expeditions for poor Kate. Like a moth, that will singe its wings by circling round a flame, so Kate would try to learn tidings of her unworthy husband; and she employed Lizzie, who was old in experience of sorrow, to watch at the Friend at Hand, and bring word if she saw him. To her torment, tidings were brought of Adolphus being seen, great and gay, the celebrity of the New Saloon. Once Lizzie contrived to get a note from Kate to him, in which the foolish little creature owned her fault, deplored it, and promised, as soon as she

was well, to work, if possible, harder than ever, so that the boy should not be a burden to Adolphus. Then she spoke of the little girl, in all the touching, simple rapture of maternal affection. But her letter, which had cost her such pains to write, at long intervals, over which she had wept and prayed, was returned to her in a blank envelope. It was manifest that Adolphus was glad of an excuse to cast her off—to throw the blame of his desertion of her on herself. Such affections as he had were otherwise bestowed. Slowly the entire facts of the case took possession of her mind, and she began to understand that her married life, and love, as far as her husband was concerned, were over. "He is not without faults; he might have forgiven mine," she murmured to herself. Alas, poor Kate! The difference between her and her husband, as sinners, was, that hers was the sin of a life, and his was a life of sin; and it is ever the attribute of guilt to be severe on others.

While sickness and poverty were desolating the poor milliner's neat dwelling, the spring had warmed into summer, and she was at length able to sit in a chair part of the day, and give directions to her apprentices. One evening, in twilight, when she was more than usually weary, a lady called upon her. Kate knew her voice instantly, it was Mrs Vineingly. She was not surprised to see her, for Lizzie Wiggson had come home the previous day, from a walk in the Park, with a glowing account of that lady's kindness to little Jus. Indeed, the girl had been led, by the lady's questions, to tell of all the sickness in Kate's dwelling, and had not failed to add her own comments as to the conduct of the husband. The purport of the letter that had so shattered Kate was not known to the girl, or any one; and there was no shadow of suspicion on any one's mind that the boy was not Mrs Stubbs'. In any colloquy

between Mrs Vineingly and Lizzie, the advantage would be all on the side of the lady, who doubtless understood all about the illness and poverty of the poor milliner, and the desertion of her husband, while Lizzie would be hardly conscious of having given any such information. Mrs Vineingly ended her inquiries by giving little Jus. a half-crown, and making a promise of calling soon to see his mother. When, therefore, in the twilight, Kate saw the lady enter, and strove, in faltering accents, to thank her for her kindness, though not taken by surprise at the visit, she was astonished that Mrs Vineingly, in talking to her, seemed agitated, even to tears. Kate had not given her credit for so much feeling. Tremulous from weakness, as Kate was, she could not refrain from telling Mrs Vineingly of her pecuniary distress. Kate did not blame her husband; indeed, she avoided, as much as possible, naming him. But her unpaid rent, and bills, she could and did speak of, while the tears ran down her wan cheeks.

"And you have two children to provide for; how will you be able to do it, weak as you are?" remarked Mrs Vineingly; to which Kate, with a deep sigh, said, "I know not," clasping, as she spoke, her little baby to her bosom, and, with a burst of anguish, exclaiming, "Oh, that we might lie down in the grave together!"

"No, no; I will help you, poor soul," said Mrs Vineingly, soothingly. "You require a change of air. I will pay your expenses to some quiet, sea-side place, on one condition."

"Oh, dear madam, what is that?" said Kate, the almost extinguished hope of restored health reviving in her bosom, "what condition?"

"Let your little boy come to me. I will take every

care of him—educate him; and when I come to town you shall see him.”

“Oh, my darling little Jus.,” sobbed Kate.

“Now, be calm. You have told me—at least, from a scene I witnessed in this house, nearly a year ago, I inferred, that your husband did not like the child; and certainly, forgive my saying so, he is not likely to set him a good example. Now, if you agree to my plan, all will be well; your burdens will be lightened, your health restored, you will resume your business, and your husband—if, indeed, it is possible such should be your wish—may be won back again to his home.”

Amid the conflict that agitated the affectionate heart of poor Kate, she was certainly by no means insensible to the force of the last appeal. If she could get a letter to her husband, telling him that the poor child, whom he regarded as such an interloper and incumbrance, was provided for—gone, it might have great influence with him. And besides, had she any right to prevent the child having the advantages offered it? What was before the boy in her poor home?

Mrs Vineingly saw the hesitation, and pursued her theme. She said, perhaps with truth, “I was struck with the child the first moment that I saw him. I have never forgotten his eyes. I shall be such a friend to him and you, as Providence seldom raises up. But you must decide without delay. I give you until to-morrow to think of it. Send word to-morrow morning to that address (putting, as she spoke, a card on the table), and if it is ‘Yes,’ I will come at this time to-morrow night, and take the dear little one. Never mind anything about clothes. Let him be put to bed as usual. A clean night-gown is all that is needed. Of course you will not be so selfish and foolish

as to prevent the child having the advantages I will give him."

"Selfish and foolish"—yes, those were the words, and they rung in Kate's ears, as she lay awake in the night. She could not deny that they were appropriate to her case, seeing she was not, indeed, the mother of the child. Yet it cost her many a pang to come to the conclusion that she ought to write the one word, "Yes;" and she resolved to make conditions as to seeing him, and to guard against any deception by making Lizzie a witness to the whole transaction.

Accordingly, when the evening came, and little Jus., as the lady had directed, was put into bed, Kate, who had been unusually weak that day, lying down by his side and sobbing out a lullaby, she was relieved, in spite of her better judgment, when the hour appointed passed, and Mrs Vineingly did not come. She looked with added satisfaction on the sleeping boy, until Lizzie came to her timidly, and said, "Please, Mrs Stubbs, the baker won't let me have the loaf. He says he can't send no more bread till he has his money."

Ah, a message like that from the baker, and an empty pocket, often makes rough work with the affections and the morals!

There was a rustle of a silk dress in the room, as Kate half rose, and supporting herself on her thin arm, looked round, wondering what, among her already diminished wardrobe, she could part with for bread. The voice of Mrs Vineingly settled the question. "I am come a little late, I fear. Here are ten sovereigns."

"But when am I to see him, and where do you live?"

"You shall see him twice a year, or oftener. If you are ill, I will come to you. A note to that address will always

find me. I am chiefly resident at the sea-side. Why do you hesitate? What motive have I to deceive you? I am fond of children. This child particularly interests me. Do not many people adopt children? Are there not plenty of mothers who would, on such terms, let me have a child from their over-crowded houses? And you are sickly—will die, if you have not some comforts, as diet, and change of air."

"I never knew poverty was so hard," said Kate, feeling the truth of all that was urged. Mrs Vineingly seemed anxious to prevent a scene. She said, "I will call on you again to-morrow, and tell you how the darling is. She lifted the sleeping child, as she spoke, from his pillow, wrapped him in a large shawl, and before the poor weeping creature on the bed could collect her bewildered thoughts, the lady and child were gone. "Run, Lizzie, run," sobbed Kate; "see where they go." But in a few minutes Lizzie returned, saying the lady had got into a coach, at the corner of the street.

Kate consoled herself that she had known Mrs Vineingly a long time; and Lizzie, who had heard the conditions, was full of assurances that they would be fulfilled, adding, "and little Jus. will be made a gentleman of."

Next day Kate was much worse, though paying her rent, and her baker's bill, was some sort of comfort to her. Yet it was a far greater consolation when, with the dusk of evening, came Mrs Vineingly, with a flourishing account of the child; and short as her stay was, she entered so completely into the history of Kate's circumstances, as to arrange that she should go forthwith to Hearne Bay. She laid down a plan for her going, giving particular directions to Lizzie, who was to accompany her, and giving another ten pounds.

With this interview, Kate's fears and fretting as to the child passed away. She was assured it was best for him, and comforted that she should see him; and now all her efforts were to be given to obtain the restoration of her health.

Following Mrs Vineingly's directions, and having established a plan of correspondence with that lady, in three days from the departure of the child, Kate was breathing the sea air, and gathering something of strength, though her old cheerfulness was gone for ever.

Lizzie had shared in Mrs Vineingly's benevolence, and was able, before she left London with Kate, to visit her poor mother, in the Parish Infirmary, and leave her some simple luxuries.

While Kate and her infant, aided by the care of Lizzie, were gathering strength at the sea-side, Adolphus was rapidly rising (in his own estimation) to the rank of gentleman. Resplendent in chains and rings, and redolent of perfumes, he would drive out Mrs Bouncer in the pretty pony chaise she had set up. And if, now and then, a thought of little Kate crossed his mind, he dismissed it by instantly recalling the deception that he had discovered. It is a rule in logic, as in morals, that two wrongs do not make a right; but it is, notwithstanding, a constant practice, adopted by both the weak and the wicked, to justify their own sins by recalling other people's.

Mrs Bouncer, whose whole life was a shameless fraud, could declaim against poor Kate in strong terms, and never let slip an opportunity of telling Adolphus "how duped he had been by that mean-looking, little bit of an artful cretur, that she had sent flying, when she came with her impudent inquiries to the Friend at Hand." There was another very intimate associate of Mrs Bouncer's and

Adolphus', a foreign-looking man, with a military air. The manners of this man—who was known among them as "The Topper." whatever that phrase might imply—were the model by which Adolphus regulated his deportment. The Topper was considered by all Mrs Bouncer's circle as a perfect gentleman, and his swagger, his stare, his careless airs, and cool assurance, were the objects of intense admiration. The Topper was noted among them as a wonderful card-player. And when Adolphus, disgusted at the apathy with which his later orations had been received by the working classes; turned to other methods of fleecing them, he thought it a very capital achievement when, at a gambling house in the Quadrant, he had made the acquaintance of The Topper; and as that worthy seldom expressed himself satisfied with any one, and always affected airs of condescension, Adolphus and Mrs Bouncer considered themselves particularly fortunate in enlisting such an ally. Betting and card-playing, under the rose, formed no small part of the pursuits of the Friend at Hand, and in these The Topper was great. Certainly he drank deeply, and when Mrs Bouncer made him free of the bar at her establishment, she winced a little when she found how capacious a human vat he was; but Adolphus, whose ascendancy over the widow increased daily, assured her that "The Topper was a trump card; there was no winning without him, in the present increase of business."

Nevertheless it did sometimes happen that, with all the skill of Adolphus and The Topper, there were losses and annoyances. Sometimes their distinguished ally would be in hiding from some unfortunate creditor, and the expense of his maintenance fell heavily on "The Friend at Hand." Sometimes he absented himself for some weeks, and contrived to make his absence felt by some misadventure occur-

ring. Indeed, the old story was realized by Mrs Bouncer and her co-adjutors. They were certainly very acute, keen folks, but their cleverness, as contrasted with hard-working honesty, was a very uncertain, dangerous, expensive profession. When Mrs Bouncer grew impatient at any long continued series of losses, the Topper would sometimes absent himself a few days, and then return with ready money, and give himself very lofty airs. Adolphus always solved the problem of this by saying—"The Topper belongs to some first-rate people, and he knows how to come over them."

One thing was very manifest among this community. It mattered not how large their gains were, or how ample their occasional income, their wants always went beyond their means, and therefore they were always in difficulties. Mrs Bouncer, indeed, managed to keep the actual amount of her income a secret. Her customers, it seemed, particularly the poorer among them, liked to look at her gorgeous dress, as they sipped their vitriolic gin, or drank deep draughts of black and bitter porter. Men, whose own wives and children might have been decently clad with the produce of the money spent at Mrs Bouncer's bar, consigned their helpless ones to rags and hunger, in order to decorate the ample person, and heap the full platter of the luxurious landlady.

While this kind of life was being led by Adolphus and his friends, Mrs Vineingly kept her promise of writing regularly to Kate. When the latter came back from Hearne Bay, she met Mrs Vineingly by appointment in Kensington Gardens. She was alone with the boy, who now looked so grown and so beautiful in his handsome clothes, that the little milliner was, for the first time since he had left her, perfectly reconciled. The little fellow did not seem to

remember her. He was better provided for in all respects by the change, and Kate's own child had begun very naturally to engross her thoughts. Those who had seen her constrained, nervous manner with her former nursling could not help observing the change, and saying, as Lizzie did,—“Fond as you were of Jus., you never made such a fuss over him as you do over little Annie.” So, when Kate learned, by a short note from Mrs Vineingly, the day after she had seen her, that she was leaving town for Brighton, the little woman was content. Her business had to be rallied, and with restored health came the old industrious habits of her life; and the words of religious instruction and consolation that had borne her up as she was struggling in the deep waters of sickness and affliction, had retained their power over her. A new spirit was created within her. She knew the comfort of prayer, and, though her earthly idol had been shattered, her heart being terribly bruised in the process, she was able in her bitterest hour of desolation to keep fast hold of the new and living faith that had been awakened in her.

It would almost seem as if the anxieties that had long racked the little milliner were transferred to Mrs Vineingly, who seemed unable to rest long in one place. She went, as she had said, from London to Brighton, taking with her two new servants whom she had hired in London; but in a fortnight from the time of her having seen Kate, she suddenly resolved to go to Scarborough, where she remained some months, duly writing to Kate, though it was rather strange that she never mentioned the child by name, but merely said—“I know you will be glad to hear that we are all well.” She remained at Scarborough until the time of the Doncaster Races, when she hastily determined on going to Cheltenham. She always lived in furnished lodgings,

being attended by the servants of the house, and merely keeping, as her own special domestics, two maid-servants. If her income was large, she must have lived much within it. And it was sometimes noticed by her maid that, when she was alone, she would weep—that her spirits were very fitful. In particular, whenever letters came, she was terribly dull. She saw no company, and, altogether, lived, as her different landladies remarked, “a very hum-drum life.”

She had not been at Cheltenham a month, when one evening in the twilight, as she was sitting in her parlour, a room with French windows opening on a terrace, a man passed to and fro, and looked very hard into the room in which she was sitting alone. Mrs Vineingly was too abstracted, at the moment, to notice him. She had her desk before her; and, while light had served, had been arranging bills and casting up accounts; then she had leaned back on her chair, and indulged in the habit of reverie that she had recently formed. The click of the fastening of the window roused her, and she looked up just as the man who had been watching her, stepped into the room, and stood, with folded arms and a defiant face, before her.

“Again,” she said, in a tone that sounded like a groan.

“Again are you here?”

“Yes; and many more ‘agains,’ unless you do the handsome, the right thing by me,” was his reply, in a harsh voice.

“What can I do? Already you have impoverished me. No means will suffice; your rapacity is beyond all bounds.”

“Pooh, pooh! My precious uncle gives you a capital sum for taking care of his rickety brat. If he cared nothing for the little wretch, he would pay well out of ostentation. I know him—a pompous empty head; but I’ve heard he’s mighty choice of his heir. It’s a pity his

mad wife keeps him so long abroad. He's ashamed to produce her at home, afraid of the laugh at him. The prudent Mr Tregloss, to marry a flighty chit, and let her drink herself crazy."

"There are plenty drink themselves crazy."

"Yes, yes, the disease is common enough; but I am not crazy, if that's what you mean. I should be, if I let my family off scot free. What, I'm to put up with being cast on the world for only doing that, which I saw done by my virtuous uncle every day? He taught me to drink. But I'm not come here to prate, nor to hear prating. I want money—I'm hard up—and money I'll have.

"When I gave you the last, you promised to come to me no more."

"Oh, when I promised that, I didn't know I should have some confounded losses."

"Well, but it's impossible for me to continue this. You persecute—you haunt me."

"Yes, it's in vain for you to attempt to escape me. I always find you out—always shall."

"How?"

"Never mind; here I am, and here I stay until you make it worth my while to go. Come, now, I'll be bound, you can be mighty tender to young Ricketts. Show a little of the motherly, just for a change, to your own son."

"Do not call yourself my son; I have no son," said Mrs Vineingly, rising in anger. "I'll never own a felon as my son."

There was a moment's pause, in which they both, with threatening looks and stern faces, singularly alike, now that they were both under the dominion of rage, confronted each other. With a growl through his shut teeth, the man

said—"What hinders that I take what you deny me? What hinders ——"

"Your interests, miserable creature. If I were dead at your feet, the little personal property I have would not pay for one carouse. If I live, you will still wring from me the means to supply your rapacity."

"Yes; you're right there. I'll not live below what I think fitting while my relations are rolling in wealth; and if you refuse me, I'll be revenged. I'll find means to squeeze the breath out of the body of little Ricketts. Mark me, I say it, and I mean it."

Mrs Vineingly sank down on her seat, and covered her face with her hands, as she rocked to and fro in anguish, muttering—"And this is my son—my only son?"

"Yes; and a pretty mother you are, to be living in luxury, and denying me."

"But I cannot keep pace with your demands. An end must come."

"Now, no nonsense; you had a remittance yesterday. I know it; I'm not to be deceived."

The miserable woman took her watch and chain from her neck, drew a bracelet off her wrist, emptied the contents of her purse, and putting them all together on the table, said—"I paid away nearly all the cheque I received. There, take these things, and go. I can give you no more—no more."

He greedily snatched up the valuables, grumbled, as he put them into his pocket, that the amount was so small, and then, with a scowl at his mother, went out, as he came, through the long window; departing only just in time to avoid being seen by the servant who brought lights into the room.

The next day, as Mrs Vineingly was walking in the

Mall, she saw her son and a companion driving swiftly in a dog-cart. Casual as her glance was, as they passed her, she remembered having seen the other man before. It was the husband of the little milliner. What was it made her hasten after the servant maid, and hurry her and her charge into the house in a panic of fear? What was it induced her that very night to resolve on a journey into Dorsetshire? She would go to some remote village on that coast. Meanwhile, her journey should be through London. She would see Kate, and partially confide in her. At all events, she would prevent Kate having any fear about the child; and, in a few months, children alter so, she would be safe.

So Mrs Vineingly wandered forth, chased as by fiends—and what else are evil thoughts and deeds but emissaries of Satan? The wretched woman was bitterly punished for all the wicked idolatry that she had offered to her son in his infancy and childhood—all the unchecked licence she had permitted. She had sown the seeds of luxury, selfishness, and intemperance, and now was reaping the harvest.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HIDE AND SEEK.

MRS VINEINGLY, when she retired into Dorsetshire, took the precaution of having her letters directed to a post town some ten miles distant from her dwelling. She had revolved all the circumstances of the painful fact, that her residence, change it as often as she might, had been discovered by one who used his knowledge only to injure and annoy her;—one from whom she felt she was not safe, even from per-

sonal violence;—a desperate man, whom any exigency, brought about by drink, extravagance, or any sort of dissipation, would drive to utter recklessness. How did he, since her visit to her brother, succeed in discovering her retreat? She was careful to keep up no general correspondence, and to seek no society. She wrote regularly to her brother a journal of health, for nothing less would satisfy him. And she knew well enough that Mr Tregloss would mention to her if any enquiries were made; and that he would not give her address to any one. Nay, she had herself told him that, in order to devote herself entirely to her charge, she would live in great retirement, at all events, until he again established his family in England. Yet, notwithstanding all these precautions, the one person, who of all the world she wished to avoid, had broken in upon her repeatedly. But from the time that she was settled in her cottage on the coast, not far from Bournemouth, and had her letters directed to Wareham, she was not molested.

While she was in seclusion, the household at Hendon maintained an equal quietude,—Mrs Lettsome, from reserve, blended with weariness of a world she had not found very attractive, and her niece Lilian, from sorrow, never expressed in words, but none the less felt. As the latter relieved the tedium of her life by self-culture, and her mind expanded by the combined influence of books, leisure, and companionship with an accomplished though proud woman, many things in her past history assumed a different aspect on the retrospect. Two settled subjects of intense painfulness dwelt in her mind. First, her child, whom she had known but for three short weeks, whom she had regarded as an embarrassment, an incumbrance; and parted with to send to destitution, pestilence, and death. All this was like a dreary dream—a nightmare! yet the remorse that

was aroused was real enough. The other source of trouble she tried resolutely to expel from her mind, the very struggle, it may be, giving strength to the rebellious thoughts. Horace Hempson! oh, was it not enough of bitterness that she should have been utterly miserable as wife and mother? Was she destined to discover that she had affections only by the agony they caused? Her life, from her childhood, had been made miserable by others; and, now, in the gloom, as if to make the darkness of her lot more intolerable, there had been a vista opened, in which she saw a prospect of light and joy, that she was compelled to turn from, if she would avoid a self-condemnation more bitter than any she had yet endured. In her stern process of self-examination, Lillian had learned the salutary truth that conscience avenges sin. However the sinner may escape human punishment, the whips and stings of the inward monitor cannot be escaped. Offences that the world knows not of—offences long ago committed—will yet wake up in the tortured breast—

"The worm that will not sleep,
And cannot die."

There were times in her mental history, when weary of the contest with herself, she felt inclined to break down the barrier of her reserve, and write to Mr Hempson; but she struggled against the temptation, and was driven by the sheer force of grief to think of something higher, and better, and purer, than this world.

We have seen that of religious instruction the poor girl had known nothing. To her, the highest Name was but a name—nothing more. Mrs Lettsome was a mere formalist; but yet even in that form there was something beneficial to Lillian. She listened at church as to the utterances of a for-

eign language, but, by degrees, the meaning feebly dawned on her soul. Echoes as from a far off land woke a faint response in the depths of her nature; and by the time she had lived six months with her aunt, she became a diligent student of that ONE BOOK, which never yet was in a humble, inquiring spirit, without imparting strength to the weak, and light to them that sit in darkness. From that time, a great change was, by slow and almost imperceptible degrees, taking place in Lilian. Its outward manifestation was an increased considerateness for others. Mrs Lettsome observed a softer look on the pale beautiful face, a gentler manner. She became anxious about the poor of the neighbourhood, and restricting her personal expenses far within what her aunt's liberality allowed her, she gave freely both in public and private charity. Whenever a poor woman with an infant in her arms casually passed her, in her brief occasional walks, the increased pallor of her cheek, and the starting tear, told that her thoughts wandered to the bitter past, and that she pined amid the comforts of the present, as she recalled the mistakes and miseries of her friendless girlhood. The poor of the neighbourhood followed with their blessings the sweet young lady, whose words were so few, and her charities so many. They seemed to have a prescience of her having suffered deeply, and many reports were current among them about the lovely, pensive lady.

Time, which was passing thus with some of the personages of our narrative, was conducting Horace Hempson forward in his course of successful study. Old influential friends of his family, who had been estranged for a time by his wildness, were won to approval by his diligence. He was in no danger of wanting money, or, when called to the bar, practice. All seemed smooth before him as to his

outer life. He adhered rigidly to the temperance principle; and among his connexions, while some thought him ultra in his views, all respected the consistency with which he practised them; all admitted that if it was in any sense an error, it was an error on the safe side; and, moreover, that it was wise and noble in a young man thus to relinquish the sins and follies of his past life, and set an example that, in proportion to its distinctness and consistency, would be likely to be beneficial to others. But while the tide of prosperity seemed to set full towards Horace Hempson, in his secret heart he was conscious of a sorrow, none the less deep that it was hidden and unsuspected. His outer success, his outer life, might be enviable and prosperous, but there was a sense of want, a perpetual grief, that dimmed the brightness of his inner life. He could not forget the fair face that had first flashed upon him on the beach at Brighton, that had beamed with compassionate animation when rousing him from the fire that was so near proving fatal to him—the face that had led him to forget all worldly distinctions, and rush to Baden—that had inspired him with reverence, as well as love, by its purity, and awed him by revelations of sorrow entirely beyond his experience. No, whatever of coldness and mystery had led to the final and abrupt parting letter, he could not forget. Nay, more, the memory was so vivid, and so dear, that henceforth he would have to walk the journey of life alone as to domestic ties. That face had obliterated all others to him. He had made some inquiries through a friend who encountered the Treglosses on the continent—inquiries that ended in nothing, or merely in the announcement that Mr Tregloss's child was, in consequence of Mrs Tregloss's ill health, being brought up by his sister, Mrs Vineingly, who resided somewhere on the South coast. Mr Hempson knew that

the lady with whom he had last seen the object of his affections was not Mrs Vineingly. He had called repeatedly on Mr Mitchell; indeed he had frequent business transactions with him, but he never again chanced to see the lady there, in whose carriage he caught the last glimpse of the face that so vividly dwelt in his memory and his affections. Horace Hempson was not a man to break his heart and die of baffled love. Does any man, with a strong brain and active pursuits, allow a grief of that kind wholly to master him? But he was changed, saddened, capable of settled constancy to his unrequited love.

Thus three years passed away. In that time Mrs Vineingly, true to her promise to poor Kate, had come up every summer to London. The first two she had sent for the little milliner, and let her see the child, now a blooming noble boy, looking so well-cared for, and so thoroughly happy, that all misgivings about him vanished from Kate's mind. He was far better treated and cared for than he would have been, even if her husband had been kindly disposed to the child, or a good husband to herself. In giving him up, she had but transferred a charge, which she ought never to have undertaken, to one able and willing to perform all the duties it involved. And how had she fared meanwhile? By the help of Mrs Vineingly she had regained her health at the sea-side; and on her return to London had made a desperate effort to see her husband. She had written over and over again, but the letters had been returned. Assisted by Lizzie, she had watched for him, and it was not till he repulsed her with brutal words and even blows, that she brought herself to acquiesce in the desertion that she had suffered. Worn and heart-sick, she again removed her dwelling; and in constant attention to her little girl, and industrious pursuit of her business,

found some alleviation from her sorrows. Many friends were raised up for her among the members of the temperance society. Her story was so far known that they understood she was a woman "grieved in spirit," "a wife of youth," cruelly deserted, and some good women were able, in their own prosperity of home affection, to feel for, and aid her.

The third summer after she parted from the child, Mrs Vineingly came to London and saw Kate alone, explaining to her that it was inconvenient bringing the child, but employing her to make him several articles of dress, and stilling her murmurings at not seeing him by assurances that he was well. It did occur to Kate that probably Mrs Vineingly did not want the child to talk of having seen a stranger; but Kate reproved the thought as it arose, by saying—"Because I was wicked and practiced deception, am I to conclude that this lady, who has always kept her word with me, is doing the same?"

One thing greatly surprised Kate; Mrs Vineingly was more altered in the time that had elapsed than seemed possible. From comely middle age she had become completely old and worn-looking, and comparatively careless about her dress. She always came to Kate in the twilight, and had a way of looking about that was suspicious. She invariably asked Kate about her husband, and in reply to the sorrowful answers of the little milliner, would tell her, in commonplace phrases, "that she should forget him; she was best off without him," &c. Kate knew all that; it had been repeated, over and over again, until it wearied her to death. She would answer, with a sigh—

"Yes, it's very true, but he is still my husband; I married him, not to part, but to live with him till death."

One evening that Mrs Vineingly called on Kate, while

she was seated with her, Lizzie came to the room door, and made a gesture, which Kate understood to imply that she was wanted. She rose, and excusing herself to Mrs Vineingly, stepped into the passage, and was immediately confronted by a man whose face was not wholly unknown to her. She had seen him more than once in company with her husband. It was the man called "The Topper." In a flutter of expectation that he brought her tidings of Adolphus, she asked him into the back room, telling him she was engaged for a few minutes with a lady. On her return Mrs Vineingly said, hastily—

"Am I interrupting you? I thought your customers came in the morning."

"Not interrupting me," said Kate, "but I am wanted just now."

Mrs Vineingly looked round alarmed, and said, "I have done for the present. If I come on Monday, pray contrive to be quite at leisure and alone."

So saying, and putting a gift into Lizzie's hand, she departed. When Kate, after seeing her to the door, returned and crossed the room to open a middle door and ask her visitor in, to her amazement he had departed. Lizzie was called, and explained, that in a few moments after he had been shown in, he had returned into the passage and left, saying he would call again.

In great vexation Kate resumed her work. Hour after hour passed, and he did not return. She was just thinking of retiring for the night, and had stepped for a moment to the door, to look out upon the night, when she was suddenly accosted by the same man, who came hastily up to the step, with the words—

"Mrs Stubbs, I want a word with you."

"At this hour?" said Kate, retreating into the passage

in alarm, for the manner and look of the stranger was by no means prepossessing.

"Hour!" said the man, "my business cannot wait for orthodox hours, woman! You put me off before; hear me now. I'm come from your husband."

"Oh dear—well—pray what is it? He is not ill—."

"He is worse than ill."

"Oh, don't say so—oh no, you don't mean it; he can't be dead!"

"Pshaw—fool! don't make an outcry. Can't you think of anything that's worse than illness and death? Isn't a prison worse?"

"A prison!—my husband?"

"Listen; he's in trouble about—about—some little affair—a money affair. There, I can't enter into it; you would not understand it; but the long and short of it is, he wants money for his defence. Law and lawyers are dear commodities—dear and dirty often—and money is what he wants and must have."

"Money!" said Kate, helplessly.

"Oh, of course," interrupted the man, "of course you haven't any. Now let me tell you young woman, you are not separated from your husband. All in your rooms belongs to him. If he has not enforced his claim hitherto, that's his forbearance. So I don't mean to threaten you, but let me tell you this for your comfort—if you don't send him the needful he can send an order to sell you up—you understand?"

Kate had no thought of refusing the money. She had received the payment of a bill from Mrs Vineingly. It was true she had many ways for all the money she earned; but there, untouched, was the money paid her that evening. But the man's manner, the odour of strong drink that per-

vaded him, suggested, even in the midst of her agitation, a doubt as to the propriety of letting him have it, so she said, timidly, "What lawyer is employed? give me the address, and I'll go the first thing in the morning. I'll take all I can get together."

"Umph, I understand; you 'fight shy' of letting me have the cash. Well, be it so; I promised, for old acquaintance sake, to let you know, and get some cash for this poor simpleton!"

"If you mean Adolphus," said the wife, firing up at the tone of contempt assumed, "I dare say, poor fellow, that he is a simpleton, who has been deceived by rogues, that leave him to take the consequences; I dare say that is it. Oh, if he only would have kept sober!"

"Well, but he didn't, you see. How can a man keep sober when he gets out of the beaten way into bye-paths and ruts in this cursed life? Sober! why, woman, the only bit of comfort left a man, who lives a life like your husband, is to drown reflection in a good stiff glass of grog. Sober, indeed! but if you won't trust me, why, you'd better go to Mr Mitchell's, the lawyer's, No. — Parchment Buildings, Holborn. Be there early, as soon as the office is open, or you'll be too late."

Humming a snatch of a song, interrupted by a slight hiccup, the man departed, walking with a defiant air, as if he congratulated himself that he could walk without assistance, for he was certainly not sober; though, had Kate seen him an hour afterwards, as he threw himself on a sofa at the Wine Shades—which he visited directly on leaving her, and where he spent his money as if he was as eager to be rid of it as he was to drink—she would have seen that intemperance has many stages—the earlier, dangerous; the later, brutal.

The next morning, before the office she had been directed to was open, Kate was in Holborn. She walked up and down impatiently before the door, and, after what seemed to her a torturing delay, she was admitted. She did not see the principal. In the outer office, a clerk replied to her inquiries, and took the money that, with tearful eagerness, she produced. She did not clearly understand what it was her husband was charged with. The clerk spoke ambiguously, merely saying, "It was an awkward case; had an ugly outside look;" and then, as if to comfort her, though he was pretty well used to crying wives and mothers, he said, "Well, well, there's no good in being down-hearted; we'll do our best to pull him through."

Kate was told that very probably, as the sessions commenced that day, her husband would be tried on the morrow.

She left, resolving to go to the court. In his trouble Adolphus would want her; she felt sure he would—not only her money but her sympathy. Her clever Adolphus might be a little wild, a little above work of any kind, and, alas! more than a little addicted to intemperance, but he was not dishonest—oh no, impossible! As revolving these thoughts in her mind she went her way down Holborn, taking but little notice of anything that was passing in the crowded thoroughfare, she at length came to a crossing, and paused a moment until a private carriage passed. A lady, as if oppressed by the heat, at that instant let down the carriage window, and in so doing, leaned a little forward. The face caught the glance of Kate, for a moment merely, but it effectually roused her from her reverie. She uttered a cry of astonishment, and was riveted to the spot for some seconds, looking after the carriage, which was being driven rather rapidly. Could it possibly be that it was the face

Kate remembered as that of her fellow patient in the Hospital. No, no; it was surely a delusion; yet Kate had a far more vivid recollection of the countenance than if she had only seen it in casual intercourse. She had been, as it were, domesticated with its possessor three weeks—had seen it in sickness, and in all the changes that emotion gives. She felt convinced it was the same person—changed, certainly, and seemingly surrounded with affluence. Yet those rich bands of soft golden hair—that pale, composed, and slightly melancholy face,—she could not be deceived.

Perhaps this discovery would, at any other time, have led to some immediate result. As it was, Kate had enough on her mind as to her husband's affairs, without any further embarrassment; but she resolved that, as soon as Adolphus's acquittal was over, she would lose no time, she would go to Swillinberg House again, and ascertain whether the family had returned from the continent; she would try to see the lady's maid, and endeavour to trace the young woman whom she had known so destitute; and that now, she believed, she had seen so differently circumstanced. Might it not be her duty to the child to make this inquiry? She had done wrong by concealment once; she would not, if possible, offend again.

"When Adolphus was acquitted!" Ah! if poor Kate was to wait for that time, she would never go to Swillinberg House. On the second day from the time that we have recorded, poor Kate, with breaking heart, and straining eyes, was crowded into a corner of the full court, where, amid all the concourse of faces, there was but one for her—her husband! Could that pale, gaunt, down-looking man—every feature bearing the stamp of evil habits and passions—could that be her Adolphus? And his accuser—was it really Mrs Bouncer?

Yes ; she accused him of fraud. He was, according to her testimony, in her employment. His offence was all the more grave that it involved a breach of confidence.

The trial did not take long. No particular interest was excited. There was some laughter at the cross-examination of Mrs Bouncer, but nothing shook her testimony. Adolphus was found GUILTY, and sentenced to four years' penal servitude.

Kate, in her agitation, had clambered up against a barrier that surrounded the seats of the legal gentlemen, and when the verdict was given she uttered a cry—only one, so sharp and shrill, close to the ear of one of the counsel, that, used, as he doubtless was, to such scenes, he turned round and looked compassionately at her, as she was borne senseless out of court. The miserable man at the bar had not looked up during all the trial, but at that cry he started, as if from a heavy blow. Those who saw his face, as poor Kate was borne away, had a revelation of what lost spirits feel when, in the midst of their torment, they are reminded that they have wilfully cast away their mercies, and wooed and won destruction. A few minutes after, when Kate was recovering in the outer lobby, a policeman at her side advising her to go instantly home, a gentleman, in a wig and gown, came towards her, and inquiring her address, desired the policeman to call a cab, and put the poor distracted woman in it. He paid the fare and spoke to her soothingly, though it merely consisted of the words, "All was done for your husband that could be done, my poor woman."

"How can I see him?" sobbed Kate.

"By a magistrate's order; come to me," said he, giving her a card. She looked at the name—it was Horace Hempson.

CHAPTER XIX.

REACHING HOME.

WHILE Kate was weeping and murmuring over her husband's fate, Adolphus, sick in mind and body, was revolving the bitter consequences of his long course of intemperance and profligacy. With ample time in the solitude of his cell to contrast the difference between the wife he had deserted, and the woman who had used him as the mere instrument to increase her unhallowed gains; and then, when some more supple or attractive decoy to allure custom was found, or when her temporary caprice ended, as the passions of the weak and wicked generally do, in disgust and hatred—then she had turned upon him and laid a trap for his disgrace and utter ruin. While these experiences were being undergone by two persons of our narrative, time had not failed to work its silent changes on others. Mr Tregloss was coming home to Swillinberg House. The mansion had, early in the spring, been put in thorough repair, and made ready for its master. But there was none of the usual bustle and eclat in the mode of his taking possession that he once affected. It was understood that Mrs Tregloss was coming home a confirmed invalid, and that, in consequence, the family intended to live in strict retirement. A suite of rooms was prepared in that wing which had once been injured by the fire; and a very tall, powerful woman came from some distant place, and superintended the arrangements, and remained in waiting for the arrival of the master and mistress.

To the surprise of some of the neighbours, who expected to renew the intimacy broken off by long absence, the

family arrived late at night. The carriage entered by a gate at the rear of the premises, and altogether the coming home was so quiet, and had such an air of secrecy about it, that there were many painful surmises, which became confirmed when Mr Tregloss declined to see any callers, and intimated that for a time he could neither visit nor receive any one. They brought several foreign servants with them; only Flutterly and her niece (?) Sophy remaining of the former establishment. There were rumours that on the night of the family arriving, strange cries and screams were heard; and that the room, which had first of all been fitted up as a bed-room for Mrs Tregloss, was changed for one with windows looking into an inner court-yard, and from which no such sounds as had echoed across the lawn, for the first few hours of residence, could be heard.

At the other side of the house—many rooms intervening between—were some apartments for ordinary use, and to them came Mrs Vineingly and her charge. To judge by the looks of all the elders of the house, a strange blight had fallen on them. Mr Tregloss was much stouter than when we last saw him; but his old, self-confident, pompous air had given place to a worried, restless, gloomy, abstracted look; his hands shook perpetually, and his eyes worked nervously. He was a feeble, irritable, and yet strangely sleepy old man. His sister, with firmer nerves and health, had a settled gloom on her face, and, judging from her manner on the first interview with her brother, was sorely discomposed. She was urging something that he querulously demurred to.

“No, no, sister; I’ve been too long separated from him. I’ve dragged about, up and down, hither and thither, hoping she’d get better, and now see the end. As bad as

can be—hopeless, I fear. I'd send her away, but I don't want it talked about. Madness! why, we never had such a thing in our family. It might injure my son. No, no, it must be kept quiet. Many persons are low and nervous—can't see people. Why, upon my word, I really am so shattered that I feel unequal to any effort myself. But *he* must stay with me."

"Well, brother, the sea-side has been of the greatest service. I really dread this house—this place."

"Pooh, pooh! it's spacious. We can each have our separate apartments, and see as little of each other as we choose. I'm amazed, when I see it now, that I put up with some places we've lived at."

"Oh, it's not that; it's the air."

"Nonsense! I'm tired with the very words 'change of air.' Every change I've tried has been for the worse; and here I stay, I'm resolved; and I'm sure *he* does not look delicate. No, no, Percy's well enough."

Mrs Vineingly paced up and down, as if unable to keep still, and her manner and look were even more urgent than her words. Mr Tregloss was struck with them, for he said—

"If you're tired of me and mine, say so. Desert me. I don't expect any one to show me much consideration. But I've yet to learn that you can do without me."

The last words were said in the old patronizing manner, while Mrs Vineingly instantly took a seat at her brother's side, and began, in conciliating tones, to explain that he had misunderstood her.

It was evident that, despite all the wealth and luxury that surrounded them, care—gloomy, anxious care—was heavy at the heart of each. The only ray of light that came into Mr Tregloss's eyes was when refreshments were

brought in, and his sister poured him out a bumper, that he drank with feverish haste, spilling part of it as his tremulous hands carried it to his lips. However strong the draughts he drank, it was evident they had not made him strong. And as to happiness, the labourers who worked in his garden, if they were sober and honest, were a thousand-fold happier.

It was rather a strange caprice of Mrs Vineingly that she would have her bedroom, and the nursery, on the ground floor. She alleged her fear of fire; and the servants also concluded that she was afraid of the inmate of the other wing of the house, who was at times both violent and dangerous. Flutterly was no longer her mistress's attendant. She had done her work. A mind naturally weak and excitable had been thrown entirely off its balance by the sipping and dosing process that the waiting-woman had promoted. Not that she ever intended to drive matters to such an extreme, she merely sought to foster a habit that she knew, from previous experience, more than any other, threw a mistress into the power of a servant. In Mrs Tregloss's case, she overshot the mark certainly. But though it was vexatious, and she had her full share of trouble from the ruin thus wrought, yet there was one comfort—no one exactly suspected the cause, or, at all events, charged *her* with it. She was still retained in the household, if not to wait on the lady, yet as housekeeper, and her only annoyance was that Mrs Vineingly, whom she feared, was installed in the same dwelling.

"I could have sworn," she said to Sophy, "that that child hadn't six month's life in him when he left. It was my belief that it was that young nurse—she was wholesome and healthy, if she was nothing else—kept him alive, a poor, fretty, wakeful thing—all eyes as he looked, and a

cough always tearing him—but then, children, like cats, have nine lives.”

“Well, he has eyes enough, now,” said Sophy. “If the Treglosses is a bit shaky and red nosed, they’ve eyes, and no mistake.”

Of course the newspapers came regularly to Swillinberg House; and Mrs Vineingly, having nothing to interrupt, and not much to amuse her, was in the habit of reading them all through. She had seen the trial of “Adolphus Stubbs, alias Vernon,” and instantly concluded it was the little milliner’s husband. She wrote a note, merely signing her initials, as, indeed, was her custom, and promised to call upon Kate soon, with some money. She counselled her to leave London, assuring her that, at some of the watering-places, as Scarborough for example, she would soon get a good business, and regain health and cheerfulness, where her husband’s circumstances were unknown, for they must injure her—people never in such cases discriminated between the guilty and the innocent, but regarded the disgrace as equal. However, Kate was to rest assured that, in her trouble, she had one friend.

Mrs Vineingly took the precaution to go to town with this letter, and posted it from the borough. She reflected with great satisfaction, as she returned, that she had never, in any intercourse with Kate, mentioned a single name, or given any particulars about herself. Indeed, all the conversation had been restricted to three topics. Dress, in the first instance, and then the child, and subsequently Kate’s health and circumstances. Mrs Vineingly was under the impression that she knew all about Kate. With the egotism which belonged by nature to a Tregloss, she never supposed her discernment was at fault, or that there was anything under the surface that had escaped her.

Part of the grounds of Swillinberg House, like many residences at Chiswick, sloped down to the Thames; and as Mr Tregloss, did not either go out or receive visitors, he spent a good part of every fine day smoking in a summer house that was erected, not merely on the margin, but a little overhanging the river. A luxuriant and graceful willow dipped its pensile branches in the water, and formed a canopy over the trellis work and thatch of the sides and roof of the little harbour, while the floor of thick oak planks was just sufficiently raised to be a few inches above the river. Indeed, at spring tides the floor was often flooded, but, nevertheless, it was a pleasant secluded retreat; and the boats and steamers on the broad bosom of what, in that region, is really the "silver Thames," made it a place where he could doze, and dream, and drink, while the tide of life bore him on its dark waves towards the great ocean.

Oftentimes boats would pass so close to the harbour that the branches of the willow would sweep their sides; but it never could be seen that Mr Tregloss took much notice of them, or of anything, except, perhaps, the child, and that was as much from pride as tenderness. One summer's afternoon he was, as usual, dozing there, when a small boat, with one man in it, was rowed cautiously past. The man wore a slouched hat low over his brow, and a handkerchief round his neck was pulled high up, so that very little of his face was visible. He gave one quick glance under the willow branches, and soon saw that the occupant of the harbour was asleep; his pipe had fallen from his hand on to the table, and his glass by his side was empty. The man rested a minute on his oars, then laid them down inside the boat and rose cautiously, for the purpose, it appeared, of having a good look at the sleeper. He gazed intently on him a few minutes, and then resuming his oars rowed

swiftly away. The next day the same boat again passed the harbour, which, however, had not the same occupant. A child was there; a sprightly, handsome little fellow, with flashing dark eyes, and a laugh and shout so strong, that at the sound of his voice, as if taken with a sudden panic, the boatman made his light wherry dart through the water, giving, as he departed, a glance at the child, full of the most concentrated hatred.

Mr Tregloss had been called up the night before. His wife had had a terrible paroxysm of her malady, and he was in consequence too low to leave his rooms even for the quietude of the harbour. The child, who never seemed so free when papa was near, had been enjoying himself fully on that summer day, all unconscious of the evil eye that had been cast upon him.

That night, as Mrs Vineingly, who sat up late, was preparing to retire to rest, there was a tap on her window, which opened on to a little balcony that led by a flight of steps into the garden. She knew that tap. It was the agony of her life to have to obey it. Drearly she rose, closed and bolted the door of communication between her chamber and the nursery, and then opened the window, sighing as she did so—

“Kill me at once,” she said; “anything is better than dying by inches of anxiety.”

“No, no, your death would do me no good; but don’t be always grumbling. It won’t, I see, be for long that I shall be in this cursed poverty, more shame to those who keep me out of my rights.”

“Hush, hush, don’t speak so loud. If it’s money you want, I have none, literally none. You drive me to desperation.”

“Oh, I’ve been driven there, and a little beyond, long

ago. But I'm in better spirits just now; I've seen my precious uncle."

"Seen him!" said Mrs Vineingly, aghast, "if he thought you were at large, and that I saw you, there would be an end of the income he allows me at once; and, I need not say, that income is more yours than mine."

"A paltry trifle! But as to seeing me, that's another thing. I saw him asleep. Why, he couldn't look worse if he were in his coffin."

There was something in the tone in which this was said that made Mrs Vineingly close her eyes and cover them with her hand.

"Oh, I suppose you're shocked at my plain-speaking, eh?"

"He is your uncle—helped to bring you up; have you no heart?"

"Heart!—what, when he cast me off? Better he had never brought me up. Heart, indeed! I've hardened and preserved mine——."

"With spirits! true, you have."

"Ha, and my respectable uncle—is *he* a sober man, pray? But come, give me the cash, and I'm off for one while. I shall come in again with the coffin; it's not far off."

Mrs Vineingly, the image of despair, searched her pockets, then rose and unlocked her dressing-case, and bringing out a five-pound note, said—

"You forget your uncle's death will bring you nothing."

"Oh, the brat; I've seen him, too—a sturdy rogue; but I don't fear him."

"Oh, God! it's more than I can bear," gasped the miserable mother, as she sunk back in her chair, "I'll leave this; I can bear it no longer."

"As you like; go where you will, I'll find you," sneered the son, as he undid the fastening of the window, and retreated stealthily down the garden path to where, moored under the willow, was his boat. The night was dark, his oars were muffled, and no sound broke on the vigilant ears of the river police, as he rowed away.

Amid the heartless, insulting banter of her dissipated son, Mrs Vineingly had a pained conviction that he uttered one truth. She had been herself startled at the change in her brother. At times, he was so lethargic that she could not rouse him. An entire day would often pass in which all he did was to sit and smoke, and sip his glass, and utter a few monosyllables. When, seriously alarmed, she had spoken to him about his health; contrary to his wont, he treated her fears lightly. She remembered the time when, for ills so trifling they were nearly imaginary, he would seek the most eminent advice, and manifest the greatest anxiety. Now, when he was really very ill, there was no convincing him of the fact. The current of the deep stream was so swift as to be unfelt, it was bearing him on smoothly towards the mighty fall. The voice of his sister was as powerless to arrest him, as the faint call of a distant passenger on the margin of a river, to stop a boat swept on by a strong tide. From the time of the night scene we have recorded, Mrs Vineingly rarely left her brother. She seemed haunted with a nameless dread of impending evil. For the child she seemed to have no fears. He wandered at will in the grounds, and played in the arbour; indeed, as was but likely, it became his favourite play-place, whence he could launch the paper boats that were made for him, and watch them float away down the river.

There is one expressive word, used in the idiom of the common people, that better describes Mr Tregloss's condi-

tion than any other—he was “muddled.” Just, as a slatternly housewife never knows, in her muddled house, where to find anything or what to do first, and sits down helpless in her confusion, letting all go to rack and ruin,—so Mr Tregloss seemed never to have a distinct thought or a settled purpose. He was certainly sometimes fidgety, with a purposeless, impotent worry, and then he relapsed into his dozy state, such energies as he had being expended on his meerschaum and his bottle. If he slept too much, it could not be said of his sister that she at all resembled him. Had there been any one enough interested in her to ascertain the fact, they might have heard her pacing her room, to and fro, many hours of the night—then starting, as if she heard a sound, and opening the window on the balcony, her eyes full of terrors, her bosom heaving with sighs. For three nights after her son had paid her the visit we have recorded, she never slept. Her mind was revolving a purpose that wounded pride, shame, and fear, kept her from carrying out. The conflict was long and bitter; but, unable longer to bear the strain on mind and body, she came to a decision. She sent word to her brother, who always breakfasted in his dressing-room alone, that she wished to see him, and received a reply, that he was unable that morning to see any one. She waited until the after-part of the day, and sent again, her messenger returning with the words, that his master was asleep, and that, of course, he could not disturb him. Unable to control her feverishness, and longing to put her plan into execution, Mrs Vineingly took upon herself the responsibility of invading her brother’s apartments. As she entered his room, the soft summer air gently stirring the pale green curtains of the window, she was startled, accustomed as she now was to his looks, at his pallor, and she paused a moment on

the threshold, and then referred the tint she saw upon his face to the shade cast by the curtains. She approached and touched him. He started—opened his eyes wide a moment—uttered a peevish interjection, and began to settle himself again to sleep. Mrs Vineingly, alarmed, shook him and roused him. He stretched himself, complained that he never had any rest, and at last seemed to see her, and muttered, "Well, what now?"

"Let me order you a cup of coffee," said Mrs Vineingly.

"Ah, I'm thirsty—very thirsty," said he, opening and closing his dry lips wearily. Mrs Vineingly rang for the coffee, in momentary fear that he was going to sleep again, saying, as she paced the room, "Oh, heavens! what a house is this! I'm in a high fever, my miserable sister is raving mad, and here's my brother in a stupor that's perfectly frightful." Yes, it was indeed true; the great distiller's house, that day, resembled, as to its chief residents, the homes and destinies of those inebriates, who had helped, by their reckless waste and folly, to heap up the wealth which, in shining mockery, surrounded these miserable ruins of humanity.

The coffee was brought, and Mrs Vineingly held it to her brother's lips, and almost forced him to drink it. After a few sips he put it back, muttering, "Ah, disgusting, how bitter! *Eau de vie*—what's coffee without *eau de vie*." Yielding to his wish, under the belief that it would help to rouse him—had he been in pain, and wanted tranquillity, she would have adopted the same course, for she was no wiser than thousands of her class,—Mrs Vineingly went to a chiffonier in the room, that was amply supplied with decanters, full of various compounds. She selected one, with its silver label, "Brandy," and brought it to the table. Before she had raised it, with a sudden clutch, Mr Tregloss

seized it, filled up his cup, and drank it off eagerly. In an instant after, he said, looking at her as if he saw her for the first time—

“What, are you here? Well, what do you want?”

“Your attention a few minutes, brother.”

“Oh, then, be quick—be quick; I can’t be trou-troubled.”

He spoke thick, and settled himself among the cushions of his chair, while his sister seated herself at his side, and began in a rather rambling way, as if she knew not how to introduce the topic, to speak to him about herself. She fumbled in her pocket as she spoke, and drew out a little pocket-book; and while her fingers were nervously busy undoing the clasp, she was speaking of her first widowhood—of how fond she had been of her son—of the days when they both, she and her brother, had high hopes of him. Gradually, as she spoke, she became interested in the subject to the extent of not noticing its effects on the hearer. As the past unfolded itself to her, she lost herself in it. Then she came to her quarrel with her brother, and said, earnestly, “You have learned since then a parent’s feelings towards an only child, and surely you can pity me. I could not cast him off; no, not when he was in prison. My marriage, even, had reference to him. I hoped to have the means of helping him, so that some honourable pursuit in life might yet be his; but it was, as you know, a mistake—a miserable mistake.”

“Mistake?” drowsily muttered Mr Tregloss.

“Brother, *do* keep awake; I shall soon have done. I’m coming to a very sad event—very. I knew by my own feelings what you would feel. I was afraid, amid all your troubles, to add to them. I was perplexed, not only for myself—afraid that **you would blame me**; indeed, if I had

thought of the responsibility involved, I would never have undertaken it."

"All a mistake," muttered the poor dozing creature at her side, evidently repeating mechanically the last word that had struck upon his dull ear, and woke its dimly slumbering echoes.

"Do you hear me, brother? you must hear me."

"All a mis-mistake," he repeated slowly, as she put her arms out towards him, only just in time to receive his head on her bosom, as he fell heavily forward. Unable to support his weight, he slipped from her trembling grasp to the floor, dragging her down with him. Her shrieks brought help, for she could not extricate herself so as to rise and ring the bell. The little pocket-book, that had been open in her hand, let fall its single enclosure; it was a burial register, and contained the name of Percy Douglas Tregloss, aged one year and nine months. It fell on the face of the prostrate man, but he would never behold it, or know its contents; he was in a fit! Attendants rushed in and raised him from the floor, and placed him, breathing heavily, on a bed in the adjoining room, Mrs Vineingly instantly sending off for medical aid. In ten minutes they had three doctors there, but, though life was not quite extinct, he was beyond all human aid; a few hours, at most, would end the struggle. He would never speak more. He had summed up the record of his life in his last words—It was "all a mistake."

CHAPTER XX.

DISCLOSURES AND INVESTIGATIONS.

DURING the few days taken up at Swillinberg House by the events recorded in the last chapter, some curious revelations had been taking place in other quarters relative to persons and incidents our narrative has described.

It was indeed Lilian whom Kate had seen in the carriage in Holborn. Mrs Lettsome, who seldom left home, and, like most persons of rather sedentary habits, was increasingly disinclined to leave her retirement, had yielded to her niece's request, and allowed the latter to make a call on Mr Mitchell, to consult him about a letter which Mr Harding, the picture-dealer, had received from America, and transmitted, through Mr Mitchell, to his client at Hendon. The letter was from the governor of a house of refuge at Boston, in America, stating that among the most afflicted and destitute of their paupers was an English artist, who had once obtained celebrity, but by a long course of dissipation had become a complete outcast; that he was suffering from a chronic kind of ophthalmia, and was otherwise too depressed and diseased to venture on a voyage to his native land. His statements as to his family connexions—a wealthy sister in particular—had induced the writer of the letter to apply to Mr Harding, in order that the condition of the poor creature might be made known to his kindred, and also that, in justice to the claims of industrious and deserving poor, the institution might not have to bear the entire charge of his maintenance. A postscript was added to the letter, that a low, intemperate woman, who called herself Mr Topham's wife, had deserted him. Lilian

had to explain to Mr Mitchell that twice, during the last three years, her aunt had sent money, through Mr Harding, to America, on her father's account—once to pay an alleged doctor's bill, and once actually for funeral expenses. Indeed, in accordance with general custom, both aunt and niece had worn mourning for their miserable relative. It was to ask Mr Mitchell whether he believed in, or could test the genuineness of, this letter, that Lilian had come; and also, on her own part, if the lawyer thought it was all true, to arrange to send a yearly stipend, out of the sum her aunt allowed her, towards her father's maintenance, in addition to anything Mrs Lettsome might be inclined to give.

It happened that the name of the gentleman writing the letter was known to Mr Mitchell, and there was also a reference to an English clergyman, so that the lawyer did not hesitate to give credence to the statement made. While none of the glow of heart with which, under ordinary circumstances, a child would hear of a father being alive who had been reported dead, was in this case possible, yet, in the clearer perceptions of duty which had come to Lilian, and the softening of heart which time and circumstances had developed, she had a sense of satisfaction in contributing to his support—a consolation in being able yet to pray for and forgive him. Humbled by a feeling of her own unworthiness, which is the first effect of a real Christian change, she forbore to condemn the sinner—while she hated the sin.

Intemperance had been to her the cruel oppressor of her life. Childhood and youth, the past and the present, had been overspread by that one cloud, which shut out the sunshine and darkened all the prospects of the future. The only comfort that was left her was to give out of the money

that could bring no happiness to herself, some aid to the poor and needy, beginning, as was right, with her own flesh and blood.

Her business was soon over, and she returned to her aunt, who, much as she had been tormented and deceived by her intemperate and yet gifted brother, was willing to send such a donation to the institution that sheltered him, as should not only save them from loss, but help their funds.

While this matter was being settled, a desire that had long been pent up in Lilian's heart grew every day stronger—she yearned to see the child she had nursed. Any mention of Chiswick in the most casual conversation—any reading about its flower-shows, in the fashionable season, would suffuse her face with blushes, and fill her eyes with tears.

Once Mrs Lettsome had made an excursion, in a pleasure-boat on the river, to Twickenham, and as the aunt and niece, attended only by a servant and the watermen, passed Swillinberg Lawn, Lilian heard incidentally that the family had returned. She was afraid to look towards the place that she remembered as the scene of so many humiliations. She was conscious of a great change in herself from what she once was—a change for the better in mind and spirit; but in proportion to the power of that change was the wish to see once again the child that had been the innocent usurper of the rights of her own child—that infant born in sorrow, parted from in coldness, lost in misery, and now avenged by being a rankling memory, full of reproaches—a memory that oftentimes banished sleep from her pillow, and that sent her, for pardon and comfort, to the Divine consoler—the “Man of Sorrows acquainted with grief.” Yes, come what might, she would find some way of seeing her nursling.

While these thoughts, like heavy clouds on a dark and windy day, were sweeping rapidly across the gloomy sky of Lilian's life and thoughts, our poor little Kate was bearing *her* troubles very badly. It was in vain that her little girl smiled in her face, and prattled to her with all the winning sweetness of early childhood. The poor mother found her husband's looks in the innocent eyes of the pretty Annie—heard the softened echo of his voice in her baby blandishments; every feature, every gesture of the child pleaded for the father, and that to a heart only too ready to admit the plea. And as to any attempts at consolation made by the poor, faithful drudge, Lizzie, Kate was unreasonable and harsh at once, went into paroxysms of tears and feverish wailing, that wasted her little remaining stock of health and strength, and sorely tried the patience of poor Lizzie.

Where she now lived was not far from the Comptons. From the night that Kate had signed the pledge, Mrs Compton had been always very kind and friendly. She had come to Kate, and helped her not a little in her illness; but as Mrs Compton, being a very neat, managing housewife, and therefore with no time for gossip, had restricted her visits to our little milliner to times when she was urgently wanted; and Kate, from dread of saying anything to add to the bad opinion she knew people had of her husband, had been very silent about her affairs, their intimacy could not be called exactly friendship. Yet, as far as a wounded spirit, shut up in the inmost recesses of its nature to bleed unnoticed and alone, could respond to a cheerful, active, kindly woman—too happy herself to know much of the depths of such a sorrow as Kate endured,—as far as these two opposites could blend, they loved and esteemed each other.

When Adolphus was found guilty, the Comptons read it in the paper. They had known more than poor Kate of his doings at the "Friend at Hand," and were well aware, from reports that reached George Compton, that when Adolphus's health had failed him, and he began to pine in secret for the wife whom he had deserted, then his former temptress and ally, became his scourge and tyrant. She had openly boasted she would ruin him. It seemed she had at one time allowed him to pay money for her, and to sign cheques in her name. Adolphus, accurate in nothing, never kept correct accounts. He was reckless of expense, and nothing was more easy than for Mrs Bouncer, when she was tired of him, and wanted completely to get rid of him, to entrap him into her toils, and get up a charge of embezzlement that she could prove; and that he, intemperate, dissolute and extravagant, could not refute.

While Kate was in the throes of her first anguish, and had told Mrs Compton, showing her the card, that one of the councillors had promised to tell her how to apply for an order to see her husband, it occurred to the happy wife to offer that her husband should go with poor Kate to this Mr Horace Hempson's, "For," said Mrs Compton, "my George knows that gentleman; he has taken the chair once for us when we had the anniversary of our society, and he gave us a donation towards our Working Men's Hall; he's a capital friend to our cause, he is. You see I feel as if we could make free with him, that is, in asking him a favour, for he belongs to us. Ah, I have my own opinion that for all as learned and good as he is, he once was nearly falling—all but gone—that is, of course I don't presume to say anything against him—goodness forbid! but I certainly remember him not the kind of man that he is now. However, if you like George to go with you, say the word, and

he shall be ready at eight o'clock in the morning, and you can go to Mr Hempson's chambers, and see him before he goes away to the court."

Kate caught at this offer; she felt so shattered in nerves, and so utterly desolate, that the thought of the strong arm of George Compton to sustain her, and his voice to speak for her, was a relief. She even intimated her wish that he should go for her and make the inquiries, but Mrs Compton, wishing, perhaps, that others should take as kindly an interest in Kate as she did, overruled that, and urged that Kate had better go, merely taking George as her friend.

Accordingly, the next morning, the two presented themselves at Mr Hempson's chambers. How different they looked, as they came up to the desk at which the lawyer was writing. Both about the same age, indeed Kate was, perhaps, a little the junior; but the young man was so tall and strong in the might of his prime of early manhood—the other so broken and tremulous! As Mr Hempson raised a much more thoughtful face than he had three or four years since, to listen to their requests, he was evidently struck by the contrast of strength and weakness, tranquillity and wretchedness, which was before him. He recognised the little woman, whose grief in the court had been so great, and he knew at a glance his honest, humble, teetotal friend, George Compton. It was evident that the career of Adolphus had been fully enquired into by the careful and acute lawyer. He explained to Kate, who, however, did not comprehend much beyond the fact, that Adolphus was ruined—a convicted felon. He explained that Mrs Bouncer had paid Adolphus a salary for his services in her house; that he was, therefore, her servant, and that, however Adolphus might construe his infamous association with this woman, the law dealt with it as that of mistress and

servant, and he was, in that sense, guilty of extensive embezzlements. He spoke very gently while he explained this to Kate, and then pausing, he said, with an increased kindness in his voice, "Pardon my asking you, but something I was told while investigating the case causes me to ask, what was the reason of your husband leaving you? Had he, as he alleged, grounds of complaint against you?"

At this our poor foolish Kate, altogether ignoring the fact that he had left her often for months at a time previously, fell into a great fit of weeping, and said, taking all the blame on herself, "Oh yes, I deceived him. I was in fault; I own it. My poor, dear husband!" And then, as if she cleared him of some of the blackness that clung to him, she began relating, in a rapid, incoherent way, about her going to the Hospital—the death of her own child—her taking to the child of a young widow there;—"the youngest widow, poor thing, that I ever saw." Then it was that a deep flush overspread Mr Hempson's face; he shaded his eyes with his hand, as if conscious that he was changing countenance, and as Kate was wandering off into descriptions of the child, he brought her back to the account of the mother.

"What was this widow's name?"

"Mrs Smith; and the baby, sir ——."

"Stay a moment; answer me. You took to this Mrs Smith's baby; then what became of her?"

"She went away from the Hospital to be a nurse, a baby's nurse, in a family at Chiswick; and, sir, the dear baby ——."

"At Chiswick; do you remember the name of the house?"

"Yes, I do," said she, musing a moment as if perplexed; "dear me, it's on the tip of my tongue. I'm so

worried, sir, I've forgot for the moment; but the dear child, sir ——."

"Was it Swillenberg House?"

"Yes—oh yes, that was it, and ——."

"Stay, answer my questions; this Mrs Smith, whose child you took, went to Swillenberg House, as nurse to an infant there?"

"Yes, but she didn't stay."

"How do you know that?"

"Why, after I had waited a long time, I went to inquire, and they told me there had been a nurse that went away in a day, and no one of the name of Smith was known there. The family was gone abroad."

"What was this Mrs Smith like?"

"Very fair and slight, sir, and the baby was ——."

"Pardon me, Mrs Stubbs, did you ever hear the name of Foster?"

"No ——."

"If I may be allowed to interrupt you, sir," said George Compton, "I may say that the young creature called Foster—that you, sir, re——." He paused. What his wife had told him about Mr Hempson's Brighton doings were not such as that gentleman would like recalled; but Mr Hempson lifted up his head as George made an awkward pause, and supplied the words—

"That I remember at Brighton." "Well, go on, man."

"What I mean to say is this. I know something about it, for the nurse that went away was my wife. Foster wasn't the real name of the one that stayed. My wife found that out. Not that she was deceiving by that, but it was the custom there, as it is in many families, and a bad, lying custom—growing out of pride—it is, to call servants out of their names. Why, I know a family where

they always call the cook Willis, because years ago they had for a long while a cook of that name; and every housemaid where my sister lives is called Mary. I think myself, if it's wrong for people to take a false name, it's wrong for their employers to give them one."

"Very well. You think, then, that Foster and Smith designate the same person?"

George gave a gesture of assent, and was about adding something, when Kate interposed, saying—

"She never wrote or came about the dear child—never, and he was——"

"Well, my good creature, you insist on telling me something about this infant. I'm sure you were good to it.

"Yes, that's how I deceived my husband. He hadn't been able to write while I was away ill, and when I got home, I somehow—I hardly know how—didn't like to tell that it wasn't my own; and when I didn't say it at first, I couldn't find a way to say it afterwards. Oh, but it was dreadful keeping up that falseness. Everything went wrong, and at last Adolphus found it out from the doctor, Mr Munro, who attended me in the Hospital, telling him my own child was dead, and then he went away because I had deceived him. I owned my fault."

"No doubt you did," said Mr Hempson, "and a great deal more."

"Of course I did, as in duty bound," said poor Kate, unconsciously what she was assenting to. "But he didn't forgive me; it was so bad of me; and when the dear child went away—bless him, he's well off whatever comes to——"

"Went away, where?—with whom, his mother?"

"No; some one that's better than his mother. A lady I worked for was very good to me when I had my long ill-

ness. She took a fancy to the child—pretty dear!—and adopted him, though I made an agreement to see him every six months, or year at least.”

“And this lady’s name is——?”

“Mrs Vineingly.”

Mr Hempson mused a few minutes in silence, while George Compton seemed anxious to speak, but afraid to interrupt.

“Where does she live?”

“She travels about, I think; but I have an address, where, once a quarter or oftener, I can write to her.”

“And you have never seen Mrs Smith, the mother of this child, since?”

“Never, until a few days ago. And, sir, you won’t believe me, but it seems to me as certain as I’m sitting here, that I saw her in a carriage, dressed like a lady, though she always looked like a lady. I was certainly in great trouble about my Adolphus. Oh, sir, I can’t tell you any more. Do say shall I get to see my poor husband?”

“Yes, yes, all that can be done I will do for you; rest assured I will.”

“Excuse me, sir,” said George, “but I have a word more to say about this Mrs Foster, or Smith, that is, if it’s any consequence to anybody to know.”

Mr Hempson, with all his self-control, turned eagerly on the speaker with a questioning look, and George continued—

“I was employed in my business, some months back, at some upholstery work at a house in Hendon. The family was at home, and kept themselves very close. I believe it was but two ladies, but I’m very much deceived—and my senses don’t often play me false—or I saw a young lady walking in the garden, the very image of that Mrs Foster. And I ought to know, for the poor thing was turned away

all of a spurt once from Swillinberg House, and my wife met her and brought her to our house. I noticed her, for, 'pon my word, though it may seem strange to say it, but she put me in mind of pictures I'd seen of the Virgin Mary."

"Where did you say you thought you saw her?"

"At Hendon, sir, at the house of a lady named Mrs Lettsome."

This part of the communication, so interesting to Hempson, was nearly unheeded by poor Kate. She was pacified by having a note given her for a magistrate, and some words of kind inquiry after her child, which, practised as the lawyer was in the art of concealing his private thoughts and feelings, it sorely tasked him to utter calmly. Had Kate been at leisure from her own griefs, even she would have observed that the hand shook that gave her the note.

George Compton had a shrewd suspicion that the disclosures of the morning had stirred the depths of long-concealed emotions, for he told his wife, when he returned home, the whole narrative, adding—

"Mr Hempson is no longer the wild, harum-scarum gentleman he once was, or I would not have told him. He's a good man as well as a clever one; but rely upon it, my dear, it wasn't a passing bit of a fancy he took for that sweet young creature. He was in love."

"Oh, George, how should you know?" said the smiling wife, a little coquettishly.

"How? Those that have had a disorder pretty strong know the symptoms when they see them in others. And in my foolish days I think I was pretty well in for it—eh?"

"Foolish days indeed!" replied the wife, with a triumphant blush and smile, that said more than a whole volume on domestic happiness.

Our poor Kate obtained her order to see Adolphus. Now,

in his trouble, all was forgotten and forgiven. He was, once more, all the world to her. Away she trudged to the prison, never taking note of how she felt, or whether she had slept, or eaten, or what the weather was. Indeed, a swift summer shower that wet her to the skin, was all in harmony with the tumult of her mind. Sunshine, had she noted it, would have seemed a mockery to her. She had thought, in her utter inexperience of such dismal interviews, that she would have to enter a great terrible building, but that once past the outer gates, she would be shown into some room, or cell, or yard, where she would once more take her husband's hands, weep on his bosom, and tell him, in a whisper none should hear, that though all the world forsook him, she would be loving and true. It sadly discomposed her; sent all the little stock of fortitude that she had treasured up—"for fear of too much hurting Adolphus"—sent it all to the winds, when she found herself in a place before which there was a long iron grating like the door of a large cage. A stone passage-way intervened, where sat an official of the prison; and opposite to her, across this passage, was a similar grated door, and within it—oh, could it be?—that bent, pale, gaunt, trembling creature, with the hair cut close to the head, in a dingy felt dress, crouching together and clasping his hands tight over his chest, as if to keep his heart from bursting through his side—oh! could that be her husband? Poor forlorn little Kate! She beat against the grate like a caged bird that seeks to dash its life out. She clutched at the bars as though she thought her slender trembling hands could break them. She turned cold and shivered from head to foot. The official sitting between the two gratings coughed slightly, and seemed to have a cold in his head, as he at length uttered the words, very calmly, "Hush—silence"

Recalled by the words, fearing that she was injuring and distressing her husband in yielding to her feelings, Kate sobbed out—

“My dear love, I’ve done wrong to you; I know I did. Forgive me, dear; you will, I know. Oh, dear Dolph, what shall I do—whatever shall I do? No, don’t mind me, dear, I’ll keep up. I will, for your sake, my love, I’ll work hard; and when—when you come—come out—oh, my poor dear—my——”

“Kate, you’ll kill me. Don’t speak so; I can’t bear it. Kate, I shall never come out. Kate, I’m dying; I know I am. I deserve to die like a dog; I’ve been a brute and no man. Oh, fool—fool!”

“My love——”

“Don’t, Kate. Say only you forgive me. The memory of what I’ve lost, and what I threw away, is worse than a thousand deaths—it’s hell! Oh, Kate, keep up, girl, and when I’m dead and gone, and you think it all over, don’t curse me in my grave. Teach the poor child to be—to be industrious and—and sober, Kate—sober.”

We hide the rest of an interview that broke into inarticulate moans. Kate did manage to totter away, but she fell in an outer lobby, and it was some time before she was strong enough to creep into the street, where Mrs Compton was waiting for her, and so she bore the burden of her swollen and bursting heart to her home.

And these were the wages that Adolphus had earned in the service of his master. Oh, youth! if, at the beginning of an intemperate course, you could have but a glimpse of the end, as it has been to myriads, who set out gay and merry, revellers and boon companions like yourselves—

“Vice in his mad career would stand appalled,
And heedless rambling impulse learn to think.”

CHAPTER XXI.

SEARCHING OUT.

WHILE these billows of affliction were going over poor Kate's head, Mr Hempson was prosecuting the inquiries that his recent interview with the little milliner had naturally suggested. He had called on Mrs Compton, who agreed with him that the tidings about the death of both the nurse and child, which had been told the young mother, had resulted from the careless inquiry of Flutterly. Mrs Compton had a keen remembrance of the insolent airs of the waiting-woman, and had opportunities also of forming a judgment of the pert Sophy, "I wouldn't trust either of them if a lie would save them trouble, or be most convenient," was her comment, to which she added, that it certainly never had exactly occurred to her that the child was not dead. It was more likely to die than live in most poor, crowded London homes. She knew enough of the frequent condition of nurse-children in London, to know that any one capable of speculating on the death of a child, might place it in circumstances as nearly likely to insure that death as if they gave it a dose of poison. Indeed, Mrs Compton had some strong views on that subject, which she favoured Mr Hempson with.

"They talk, sir, in high life, about proxies; and our grandees stand godfathers by proxy, and princes I've read about were married by proxy; but, sir, when anybody puts away a poor child to such people that there's no chance of their being able or willing to take care of it, I call it—murder by proxy."

"Well, I think you're right, Mrs Compton."

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"And," she continued, not noticing his comment, "when my George told me that he thought he had seen that delicate young body, looking sorrowful for all her ladyhood, I'd a' gone at once and made myself known to her, if I'd thought for a moment that her child was alive; but then, I've plenty to do with my own affairs, and as to Mrs Stubbs opening her mind to me, 't wasn't likely when she was always weighing and measuring every word, for fear of hurting that crea——, but there, it's not for me to be hard upon him now—that husband of her's, I mean."

From Mrs Compton's, Mr Hempson took the resolution of going to Hendon. On the very day that "The Topper" had rowed his boat past the harbour, and beheld the child who was to him an object of greedy envy and jealous hate, Horace Hempson, half angry and half defying the tumult of his feelings, was waiting in the drawing-room at Mrs Lettsome's house, having sent in his card, and added, in pencil, a request for an interview with her.

The room in which he waited had a door that opened into the garden, and looking across a little lawn, he saw among some trees the flutter of a white dress, but could not catch a glimpse of the wearer. He waited some time, and then saw a maid-servant go towards the trees, and a minute afterwards a tall young lady emerged into the open space. She was very plainly dressed, in white muslin; and a garden hat, while it shaded her face, did not conceal the folds of rich light hair that he so well remembered. He observed that she walked quickly to a door at the other side of the house, and again he was left to his reverie. Not a doubt was in his mind as to the identity of the lady he had just seen, and his agitation was so extreme that it was as well, perhaps, that a little time elapsed before the room door opened, and a tall lady, in dark silk, followed by that

form of light, which comprised all grace and beauty to his eyes, entered.

Mrs Lettsome advanced to the middle of the room, and said, "I rarely see any one—strangers never, but my niece here——." She turned a moment, and Lilian had sunk down on a chair at the side of the table, and was trying to still her tremor by resting her arm on the table and shading her face with her hand.

"My niece—Mrs Smith, thought it best, as your visit probably refers to her, that I should see you."

"Madam, your niece is aware that I am no stranger to her, and, may I add, that some years ago I had—had hoped ——."

"If it is of hopes that you come to speak—hopes that refer to this lady, sir, they are vain—vain. Lilian, we may as well tell this gentleman at once, it will end all farther useless colloquy. Sir, my niece is not a widow."

Mr Hempson had risen up; he now sat down, breathed hard a moment or two, and then bowing, said, "My business does not wholly refer to myself. Whatever my feelings are, I can maintain silence—a respectful and despairing silence."

There was a pause, and through the white fingers that Lilian held before her eyes a few tear drops trickled, and she smothered a sob with a cough.

"But, madam, I have some facts, that have come to my knowledge as a legal man, to communicate."

"About my miserable brother?" said Mrs Lettsome, alarmed.

"No madam, about some information—false information—that was given, some years ago, to your niece. A person named Stubbs, to whom she confided a charge—a precious charge ——."

"Confided!" interposed Lilian, taking her hands from her eyes, and rising eagerly from her chair, "say, rather, that she kindly—that poor little tender-hearted woman, kindly took the child. Well, sir, what of her?"

"She is not dead, nor ——."

"Not dead!" interposed Mrs Lettsome, "nor the child! Oh, Lilian!"

Shuddering as if stricken with a pang of remorse, that made itself felt distinctly in the midst of other and very different feelings, Lilian gasped out "Where is the—where is ——?"

"But this will require proof, sir," said Mrs Lettsome, "We have been so deceived—you'll pardon me for saying that we may be deceived as to life, as well as death."

"Assuredly, madam, nothing but the fullest proof should satisfy you; and permit me to remind you that there is a great difference between the investigations which you can now have made, and the means so utterly scanty which inexperience and penury could employ."

Lilian felt that Mr Hempson was urging a plea for her. It was true; but yet, with her present enlightenment, she could not wholly excuse the past. Who are they that, in looking back even to simple words and deeds, do not see much they would recall? And though she had been, in some matters, as unable to help herself as if she had been borne along by the strong current of a river, she was angry now that she had so silently acquiesced in her fate.

To the incoherent and agitated questions of the aunt and niece, Mr Hempson replied, by giving them a full narrative of what he had heard.

At the name of Mrs Vineingly, Lilian was filled with wonder, and she exclaimed—

"Can it be possible? then doubtless he is taken to be a playmate for Mr Tregloss's child."

"As to that, I know nothing of the Treglosses, I have not resumed the acquaintance; I have heard of great affliction there. Mrs Tregloss is a confirmed invalid—indeed a lunatic. The very precautions they have taken to prevent her actual state being known, have directed attention to it."

"I must go there; I must lose no time, aunt, in prosecuting this discovery. All our reticence about the past—the melancholy, dreadful past—must be cast aside."

"Certainly, Lilian; I have been a mother; I know a mother's duties and feelings. You must claim your child. It was one of the things I could never reconcile, your having parted from it. There, my dear, don't cry so. I didn't mean to wound you. I know—dear me, I must be a brute not to remember—you were a mere child yourself, an ill-used, neglected, deserted child."

"Madam, that your niece kept unsullied her high, pure sense of propriety, that she tried to adapt herself to some honest mode of life, in such utter destitution, was no mean triumph of female virtue."

"True, sir. My sweet Lilian, I thank God that you will have something to live for, and to give you a hope and a purpose in life."

Horace Hempson heaved a sigh. Even before him they were mapping out a future in which he had no share. The child was to supersede him. Yes, it must be so; the very virtue that he had praised so justly demanded it. He looked at the pure expression of that face, in its saintly sweetness, and felt at once that on such a cheek and brow "shame would be ashamed to dwell," and he, too, never would allow any blush but that of generous purity, and

honest admiration, to crimson his cheek in reference to this fair Lilian.

As they arranged to lose no time in going to Chiswick, Mrs Lettsome made it a particular request that Horace Hempson should go with them. He was unable on the morning of the next day, but he proposed going in the evening, and suggested that it would be best to prepare Mrs Stubbs, and for this purpose to call on her the next day.

He explained how great was her affliction, and Lilian shrank from intruding on her. "She must have thought me so ungrateful, so odiously ungrateful. She can never know how I thought about her. I indeed wrote and received no reply. How can I go to her?"

"I think the best way to rouse her from the pressure of her grief is to call up another set of emotions. She loves the babe she has nursed with a"—he checked himself—"with an ardent love; in going with you it will comfort her to see him; and she is so well known to Mrs Vineingly, it will save any difficulty of very intricate investigations. The case is plain—not a link wanting."

"But you will go?" said Mrs Lettsome.

Mrs Lettsome was one of those well-to-do, dependent women who, at every turn, have always had a man's arm to lean on—a man's judgment to aid them, and it seemed impossible to undertake such a visit without a gentleman to chaperone the party.

Thus pressed, Mr Hempson assented, and shortly after took his leave—politely of Mrs Lettsome, gloomily of Lilian.

As he walked down the garden-path towards the gate, Mrs Lettsome looked at him through the window. She

sighed heavily. Something of the thought that L.E.L. expressed so charmingly was in her mind :—

“And when, warm from the heaven that gave it birth,
Dawns on our world-worn way, love’s hour elysian,
The last fair angel lingering on our earth,
The shadow of what thought obscures our vision?
—————We might have been !”

She turned, and saw that her niece was still standing by the table, in the same attitude as when Horace Hempson left. Every particle of colour had left her cheek, her lips were compressed, her eyes steady and tearless; she had called up to her face the old stony, rigid look, once so common there, and which the quietude and serene occupation of her recently-sheltered life had so completely banished, that to Mrs Lettsome that look was almost a new revelation of Lilian’s character. The aunt went to her, took her hand—it was very cold—and in default of any words to say, merely exclaimed—

“My poor Lilian !”

“Don’t pity me. Don’t by your compassion weaken me. If life has not joys for me, it has duties.”

“True—and joys too. Oh ! Lilian, while my child lived, life to me was full of joy and hope, and so it will be to you. It is a great privilege to be a mother.”

“Ha ! and so it is to be a wife—to some.”

“Well, Lilian, in many cases a child is permitted to be a compensating mercy. Let us hope it will be so to you.

“If a mercy at all, dear aunt, it will be to me an undeserved mercy, not a compensating one. Oh, I never thought in those hard, dreadful times, that seem now so distant and so strange, of all this tenderness of nature. Does not the searing iron on the surface of the skin leave a callous trace

impervious to sensation? Aunt, the heart may be so seared."

"And may, by nature, change, and time, recover from the process."

They embraced and parted, for a while, each full of thought; the younger not only to ponder on the tidings so eventful to her, and to try to separate, in the confusion of her thoughts, the memory of her nursling, and her joy at the prospect of seeing him, from her wonder about her own child. Searching the depths of her memory for that little faint photograph of a baby-face, that had lain some three weeks on her bosom; she not only pondered this, but intrusive regrets, sharp pangs of sorrow shook her on other accounts. Oh, just now, duty was indeed a steep and thorny path, choked up, as it seemed to her, with briars; but never for an instant did she think of turning from it. She sat in her room, before a little writing-table, silent for some hours. At length she said aloud, as if she was concluding a mental argument,—“However unfortunate and ill-used I may be as a wife, I am still a wife. Better, far better, suffer wrong than do wrong.” A small Testament lay near her hand; she opened it sighing, and her gaze fell on the words, “Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good.” Half-an-hour afterwards she was quietly talking with her aunt of the plans for the morrow. Her soul was strengthened for duty, armed for conflict with a power not her own. Happy those who in the trying hour know where to take refuge, and are able to pray—

“Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of thy wing.”

It was the afternoon of the succeeding day, when using the address Mr Hempson had left with them, Mrs Letts came

and Lilian were set down at the door of the little milliner. In the coming autumn, it would be five years since the two had met at the hospital. Kate, who was still under thirty, was some seven or eight years older than Lilian, but it was marvellous to note the difference in the way time had dealt with the two. Seven years before, Kate was bright-eyed, vivacious, voluble, even when struggling with recent suffering. Five years before, Lilian was pale, cold, with an undeveloped form, reedy in its slenderness. Now, the former was thin to attenuation, the roundness of the face was gone, and the eyes seemed so large and gloomy, as if they cast a shadow rather than a light upon the countenance, and the dark hair, once so neatly braided, had many threads of silver interlacing its neglected folds. Lilian's form had attained its symmetrical roundness, and looked not only fuller, but from the improved carriage, taller than before, while the beauty of the face, which neither poverty nor sorrow could obscure, shone now with a spiritual light that had once been wanting. Lizzie ushered the ladies into the little parlour, where, reclining on an easy chair, which her weakness rendered necessary, sat Kate. As Lilian followed her aunt, in timidly gazing over her shoulder at Kate for a moment, she was inclined to retreat. She would not have known her for that kind, active, friendly little creature, who had always a helping hand, a ready smile, and a comforting word for her fellow-patients in the hospital. That worn, shrunk woman—so many, many years older—no, that could not be the Mrs Stubbs, Lilian remembered. And Kate, on her part, looking wonderingly at Mrs Lettsome, and then nervously towards Lilian, was evidently perplexed by changes of dress as well as looks; still her own trouble was so over-mastering, she had no emotion to spare for other causes. While Mrs Lettsome was uttering some

general words of introduction, she at once broke into the subject of their coming, of which she had been apprised, by saying, almost harshly, to Lilian—"Ah, is it indeed the mother of that dear child? I shouldn't have known you."

"Nor I you, dear Mrs Stubbs," faltered Lilian.

"I've had trouble," replied Kate; "trouble enough to have killed twenty women. It would have killed me, only I feel as if I couldn't die."

"Can we do anything?" said Mrs Lettsome.

But Lilian, fearing her aunt would be making some offer of assistance that might grate on the poor sensitive nerves, stretched by grief to such a tension, interposed, going up to Kate and taking her hands, with the words—"And I have caused you some of this trouble; I and my ——,"

"Child," said Kate, anticipating the word. "Oh, bless him! he never caused me any trouble, only what I made myself. He has comforted me many and many an hour. You certainly troubled my thoughts. I didn't think you worthy to be the mother of that sweet darling. Oh, I wish—yes I do—that I had him here now. Since I've had this great, great affliction, I've wanted him as bad as if he was my little Annie." She began to weep, and then, as if she recollected herself, she said—"But there, I'm speaking roughly. I've got hard and cross, I know I have. I don't mean to blame you for not coming. Why, you were but a child; you're only like a girl now, and it's nearly five years ago. Ah! I was happy then; I had my Adolphus then."

Lilian remembered how anxious and unhappy the poor, little, loving heart had been about that same husband at the time referred to, but she said nothing. She understood how faithful a martyr might be, even if martyred in an unworthy cause. It was evidently a relief to Kate to talk about the child, and they led her to relate the simple history.

And though, when she described what she had suffered in parting from the child, and how she arranged to hear about him and to see him, Lilian winced as from an implied censure, she listened eagerly; and, at length, when Kate concluded, asked if she had ever heard Mrs Vineingly speak of Mr Tregloss's child? a question that elicited the fact that Kate had never known that Mrs Vineingly was related to Mr Tregloss—had never heard her mention Swillinberg House, and also, that Kate herself had never told the real history of the child when she resigned him to her. "It was my husband that I confessed to; as to any one else, I wasn't bound to tell what always hurt me to think of, much less to mention," said Kate.

When Mrs Lettsome proposed Kate accompanying them, she at first hesitated.* She was evidently so disabled with her recent shock that it needed a great effort to get her out, but it would be beneficial, they both saw it would, and the thought of seeing the child was a strong inducement; so, by the time which Mr Hempson had named as that at which he could meet them at Chiswick, the carriage, containing Mrs Lettsome, Lilian, and Kate, was approaching the gates of Swillinberg House. Mr Hempson was seen by Mrs Lettsome walking in the road as they neared their destination. He declined to enter the carriage, contenting himself with mounting the box.

The feelings of Lilian, as she drew near the place, though rigidly kept under, made her pale and tremulous. Kate wept in silence, and only Mrs Lettsome was sufficiently free from inward emotion to observe that there were two carriages waiting near the entrance of Swillinberg House—that the gates were open, and several servants seemed to be going in and out in great confusion. "They have company—they surely have company," said Mrs Lettsome.

She opened the window and spoke to Mr Hempson, who also had observed the signs of something unusual going on in the mansion. He agreed with the lady in thinking they had timed their visit very inopportunistically. In a hurried whispered colloquy, it was agreed that they should alight, send away the carriage for a while, and quietly make inquiries for Mrs Vineingly. As Mr Hempson gave his arm to Mrs Lettsome, and Lilian and Kate followed, entering the open gates without being observed, and going up to the front entrance, a man-servant was hurrying past them, too pre-occupied to ask their business, or even to notice them—the whole party were suddenly brought to a stand by a young girl rushing up from the lawn in frantic haste, and uttering piercing screams, her shrieks being faintly echoed by some distant voices. Kate's maternal instincts were instantly roused, and she cried out—"Oh, the child, the child—something has happened to the child."

CHAPTER XXII.

A CRISIS.

THE first time we introduced our readers to Swillinberg House, it was in a state of confusion from a joyful cause. The Angel of Life had entered, and the waving of his wings had ruffled the stillness with pleasant breezes. Now again there was running to and fro of feet. The Angel of Death was there—not calm and holy, with a serene solemnity on his awful brow, but clad in all the terrors of his darkest frown.

We have seen how Mrs Vineingly had been vainly trying to pour her confession into ears chilled with the lethargy

of impending dissolution. How, terror-stricken and aghast, she had summoned aid to the dying man, and filled the room with physicians, only to learn that they were powerless in that crisis. The servants had been so completely occupied in the exigency, that the child, who lived the greater part of every summer's day in the garden, was playing about, not only entirely unconscious of what was going on in the house, but himself being, in the hurly burly, forgotten. His attendant was in the habit of sitting with her needlework within call of the child, and was instructed not to let him out of her sight, and yet not to embarrass and annoy him, by seeming constantly to watch his sports. These somewhat difficult directions the girl, on the whole, obeyed well, but the child was bold and adventurous, and enjoyed nothing so much as giving his attendant the slip, or making feints of hiding from her—a sport not very hazardous in the grounds of the dwelling. On the evening in question, the little fellow had gone into the arbour, the maid following him at a distance. He was intent on his play, when the girl was hastily beckoned to the house by a fellow-servant, and did not return. The boy pursued his sport, and mounted on the seat of the arbour, improvised a carriage out of the arbour table, and was busy driving an imaginary equipage, when, stealing along the river like a coiled-up serpent biding its time to strike, came the little wherry, bearing its dark and ominous rower. The tranquil summer's evening—the western sun, with its piled-up retinue of clouds, gorgeous in crimson and purple—the broad bosom of the river, that shone like molten gold, shimmering in sparkles of light, as the gently dipping oars cleaved the boat's shining pathway,—all was singularly out of harmony with the occupant of the wherry. His brow was curved into a heavy frown; there was a

flush upon his dark cheek so lurid, that the crimson rays of the setting sun failed to soften it; and his white teeth were set, and gleaming with some savage determination, that gave a character to the features, part animal, part demoniac. He had "primed" himself, as he called it, with copious draughts of spirits, and only the night previously had boasted, to some drinking companions, that "what made others helpless only made him dangerous." This seemed to him a distinction to be boasted of. So, along the gleaming river—keeping in shore—the trailing tresses of the willows streaming over him at times, as if they would have wooed him from his fell purpose—on he came to the spot he meant to reconnoitre. The little boat shot quietly under the boughs of the overhanging trees, and there, just above him, sure enough, was the object of his hate! That boy, the heir to his uncle's wealth—that uncle, a worn, enfeebled man, whom any shock would kill—the child, the one impediment between him and wealth. These thoughts, that had long seethed in his brain, rose to boiling heat as he looked at the child. All of a sudden, the little creature climbed on the rail at the top of the balcony that overhung the river, and bestriding it like a horse, began his mimic riding with merry shouts, all the more gay that it was an unaccustomed place, and that no one was there to forbid his dangerous sport. The position of the boy was exactly what the wretch in ambush had desired. A touch would hurl the little child into the river. It would appear to be all an accident; nay, it really would be safe to give an alarm, and to profess to have tried to save him, a plan that, if Mr Tregloss survived, would surely reinstate him in that uncle's good opinion. He would be grateful even for the unsuccessful effort to save his son and heir.

Quietly he shipped his oars. Slowly, to the music of the child's laugh, he mounted on the thwart on which he had been sitting, and clutching hold of the boy's dress behind, swung him off the rail. But the child writhed suddenly round as he was borne off, and, in his panic, clutched with both hands the shaggy hair of the man—so suddenly, that the latter stumbled off the narrow thwart, on to the edge of the slender boat, and in an instant it upset, and man and child were in the water,—the latter clinging, with a clutch that did not for a moment relax, to the man's hair. Nor was this the only impediment to his rising and breasting the stream. As he went down clumsily, from the position of the child covering his face, his head struck heavily—a shattering blow—against an iron girder that bound the post, at one angle of the harbour, to the roots of the tree. The blow stunned him, while the screams of the child, whose head was not entirely under water, were heard by the occupants of a boat, that had been swiftly making way towards the spot. There were two men rowing and one steering in this boat. It was a party of the Thames police, and on hearing the plunge and cry, one of the men instantly leaped into the river, and striking out manfully, swam towards the spot, at the moment that the screams of the servant girl—who had entered the harbour just in time to see the felon hand clutch the child—called assistance.

With breathless haste, Horace Hempson and the group described in the last chapter hastened to the spot indicated. But Kate, as soon as she had uttered the word "child," had sunk, overpowered by faintness, on the ground. Mrs Lett—some, trembling too much to stand, sank down beside poor Kate, and supported her head in her lap; while Lilian, knowing all the turns of the ground, obeyed the natural impulse, and fled like a lapwing to the harbour. She was

just in time to see the child lifted back over the rail, and laid, streaming with water and nearly senseless, on the table. Raised upright by two policemen, his head bleeding profusely, and falling helplessly on his shoulder, was the murderous wretch who had planned the deadly outrage. The wet hair fell in heavy masses over his face. He was quite insensible. Help was given to lift him over into the arbour, Horace Hempson having, meanwhile, taken possession of the child, and carried him without delay up to the house. Lilian stood rooted to the spot. She neither spoke nor moved as they laid the man down along the seat, while a surgeon who, being at the house, was instantly on the spot, put back the hair, and gave to her view a face she knew but too well—a face that had been the anguish and the terror of her brief, married life. Oh, was it thus—thus—she was to find the husband and child of whom she knew so little? But while fright and amazement kept her rooted to the spot, there was a rustle of silks near her, and, rushing past with an impetus that nearly threw Lilian down, Mrs Vineingly dashed into the arbour, pushed aside the men, and with a sharp cry, less of fright than pain, as if, indeed, mere sorrow and fear were worn out, threw herself upon the body, with the words—the only words that rise to a mother's lips—"My son, my son!"

"Take her away, some one. Ladies, you must instantly withdraw; you hinder what is needful to be done," said the authoritative voice of the surgeon, seconded by the police, and now re-enforced by the arrival of other medical men. Mrs Vineingly was led by two attendants away, and Lilian, who had gazed her fill on that spectacle of misery and guilt, turned mechanically, like one in a dream, and followed the steps of those who were assisting Mrs Vineingly towards the house. Half-way across the lawn,

Sophy, who had been among the throng that were gathered in the arbour, rushed past them and fled, crying, to the house, where on the steps, impeded by the cumbrous size to which she had of late years swollen, was Flutterly, vainly trying to make her voice heard above the din of many hurrying feet and agitated voices.

"Aunt—aunt, it's him! drowned, I do believe!"

"What, the child?"

"No, master's nephew. Oh dear, and he was to have made a lady of me."

"Hush, you fool! What do you mean, you blab! Bite your tongue off, simpleton," said Flutterly, putting her hand violently over the girl's mouth, who, however, saved her any further trouble by going into those kicking and shrieking fits, that are the approved method, among a certain order of women, of showing emotion. This course had the effect of completely absorbing the attention of Flutterly, who seemed afraid to leave her to the care of others, and who contrived to whisper pretty audibly in the ears of the screaming girl, "Hold your tongue; I wouldn't have Mrs V. know for all the world that it was we as wrote to Mr Smith, and told him where she was. Hold your tongue, I say. If he's drowned, why, she's like to be mistress. Then do give over Soph., or I'll throw a bucket of water over you, and empty the salt box down your throat."

Leaving this pair, whose treachery had been bought by the miserable man now being borne by attendants to that cottage, where, at the time of the fire, the infant and nurse were taken, we return to Mrs Vineingly, who, only followed by Lilian, was borne to her own room, and laid on a sofa there. There seemed no one to give directions, to ask questions, or, in the shock of these awful events, to

express surprise at a stranger—if, indeed, the silent lady who threaded the passages so familiarly, was a stranger, and who, on entering Mrs Vineingly's room, went forward in a still, dream-like stupor, and threw open the glass door on to the steps, letting in a flood of rosy evening light, and a soft air, fragrant with the breath of flowers.

While a medical man administered some restorative, Lilian stood by the doors she had opened, the drapery of the curtains falling round her. In a few moments Mrs Vineingly spoke, saying languidly—"I'm better; nothing ails me. Go, pray, go and give assistance to my—to the unfortunate ——."

She did not finish what she said. The gentleman looked towards Lilian, and, bowing, said—

"Well, I leave you, in good care, no doubt. Shall I send your maid to you? I will look in upon you again before I leave; but I have to see Dr Sootherly upstairs. Pray keep quiet."

Mrs Vineingly waved her hand, and, as a woman-servant came in at the door, exclaimed—"Go, I wish to be alone." Where she lay, the scroll of the sofa prevented her seeing Lilian. The servant-maid retreated behind the doctor, and then there was a profound silence for a few minutes, during which Lilian slowly drew near, unobserved by Mrs Vineingly, who at last heaved a heavy sigh, and said wearily—

"I must not lie here; there's much to be done. He may be saved yet, and the child too. I must rise. Oh! my son. Would to God I had never been a mother."

"Nor I a wife," said Lilian involuntarily.

Mrs Vineingly rose up hastily and looked round alarmed.

as if she had heard a spirit voice. Her gaze encountered the face which, under the disfiguring garb of poverty, she had known, and yet remembered well.

"Foster!" she exclaimed, "you here? What is it you say? What do you want? You are strangely changed, like and unlike. In the name of heaven, who are you?"

"I hardly know," faltered Lilian. "At least, until this last half-hour, I did not know that in any way I belonged to you."

"To me!—are you mad? or am I crazed—crazed with trouble?"

"Are you indeed that man's mother?" whispered Lilian with a shudder.

"That man! Woman, how dare you speak with that tone of horror of him? Yes, I've known the time when I was proud of being his mother. Before—before—oh, God!—What do you mean by your words—your looks? Are you not the nurse who once was here?"

"Oh, poor desolate mother! I can pity you, for I too have been made desolate. I was a wife, while yet a child—deserted."

"A wife of whom?"

"Of the man now lying there."

"His wife!" said Mrs Vineingly, musingly. "He told me that he had been married, and that his wife only lived a few months. I disbelieved his story altogether; he was in the habit of—of romancing. His wife, did you say? Are you here then to tell me that?"

"No; I came to claim my child. I have been surprised into this statement by finding you were his—"

"Your child?" said Mrs Vineingly, not heeding the latter part of Lilian's words. "What child?"

"The infant you had from Mrs Stubbs. He was taken by her, when I was brought here as nurse."

Mrs Vineingly rose up and stared blankly in Lilian's face. It was plain that for a minute she did not comprehend the communication she had heard, and Lilian explained—

"Mrs Stubbs is here somewhere; she will confirm this; and now let me go to the child—to the children."

Mrs Vineingly rubbed her eyes as if trying to wake herself. At that instant, Horace Hempson, Mrs Lettsome, and Kate, looking about as if in search of some one, passed the steps leading up to the room; and Lilian, standing on the balcony, called to them—

"Where is the child—is he safe?"

"Here she is. Oh, Lilian, we have been seeking you," said Mrs Lettsome.

The whole party came up the steps, but seeing Mrs Vineingly in the room, paused on the balcony. Kate alone went forward, saying—

"I've seen him, the darling; he is not hurt. Oh, that wretch, 'The Topper,' I knew him at once. He has been the ruin of my peace. But for him, my husband ——"

"Your husband has himself to thank for his ruin. Did you come here to insult a mother's grief?" said Mrs Vineingly.

Kate took her hand and wept over it. "Forgive me, forgive me, my heart is broken; I don't know what I say."

It seemed necessary to calm the group, and make some-

thing like a coherent statement, and that Horace Hempson should take up the task of explanation. As briefly as possible he went over the facts, leaving a paper, which he had drawn up, and the certificates and testimonies that he had procured from the hospital. They saw that Mrs Vineingly was too over-wrought to reply—hardly to listen—and, ringing for her attendant, they left her. As Lilian was going from the room, the last of the group, Mrs Vineingly suddenly took her hand, and, looking steadily in her face, said—"You have known sorrow. Pity me. As soon as I can understand it all, I'll write to you; meanwhile do as you say, remove the child for a time from this house of death."

There were many to marvel at, but none to oppose, Mrs Vineingly's order, that if the doctor gave permission, the child, for a few days, should accompany the ladies who had come. The attendant of the little boy was to go with him, and cards of address were given, not only to Mrs Vineingly, but to the medical man, who did not at all oppose the removal. The little fellow had had a shock, but he was not ill.

Lilian and Kate entered the room, not that which had formerly been used as a nursery, and there was the child asleep. She looked round inquiringly, but there was only one child; and Mr Hempson drawing near, said to her impressively—"Ask no questions; doubtless all will be explained by-and-bye."

Kate hung over the child as he slept, and sobbed out her words of motherly endearment.

Lilian looked at him, half afraid, while tears coursed down her cheeks, and her pale lips uttered the words, at once a confession and a prayer—"Forgive me."

Much was contained in that little sentence. From so

reserved and truthful a nature, it was a pledge that the future should atone for the past, in motherly duty to that child.

They waited some time, while the servant packed up part of her own and the child's wardrobe; and the little fellow slept so soundly that he was wrapped in shawls and taken to the carriage, his slumbers being unbroken.

They set down Kate at her door. Mr Hempson saw Mrs Lettsome and Lilian with their new charge to Hendon. When the child woke the next morning, the face of his accustomed attendant at his bedside prevented his having any fears or fretting. In an hour's time, he was racing in the garden, and filling the quiet house with his merry voice; while Lilian, pale from recent agitation, was watching his sports, and learning from the best of all teachers—a young child, the sweet lessons of patience, hope, and love.

Ah, yes! teach children what we may, we never can impart to them so much of tenderest love as we learn from them. Blessings on them!

Meanwhile, far other sounds and sights were occurring at Chiswick. Order had been restored at Swillinberg House. And if there was not much real grief, there was all the stately observance of sombre pageantry in the mansion that held the remains of Mr Tregloss. Shutters were closed; black draperies and wax lights made the rooms sufficiently mournful. The servants, tranquillised now, moved about in silent groups. Undertakers' officials presided with the well-paid decorum of their trade. While in a secluded chamber, a lady, fantastically dressed, played like a child with a box of beads—rolled them over the floor, and ran to pick them up, shrieking if any one touched them, and

breaking into passionate wailing if there was any delay in supplying her tumbler which she kept by her side to sip out of, and which was made by degrees a little weaker every day; for such potations as had softened her brain would have soon completed the work of destruction. And it was needful to prolong her life, "Not," as the attendant said, "that there was any hope of recovery—oh, dear, no—but she was rich, could have every comfort, pay well for attentions of every kind, and being young she might have many, many years of life—such life as it was!"

In another room, there was a different scene. A lady walked up and down perturbed, miserable, with a mind not likely to be overthrown, and a heart full of wretchedness that was not lightened by any knowledge of where to cast her burden. Whether the salutary self-reproach she felt would lead to that higher knowledge was at present uncertain. In the dead of night, this mournful woman went to the adjacent cottage and there beheld the wreck that sin had made. The blow on the man's head had fractured his skull. An operation for raising a piece of depressed bone was performed. For two days there was a ray of hope; on the third, violent inflammation set in, and the hours of the miserable being were numbered.

"Had he not been an intemperate man he might have survived," was the opinion of the surgeons. "Far more severe cases of fracture have been cured, but in this case the man's habits were all against him."

He never recovered consciousness. A few shrieks for aid, many muttered oaths and curses, and then came silence and death!

"Nothing dies but something mourns;" and there were mother's tears wept over this miserable slave of drink and

debauchery. "He was good and clever, once," she muttered to herself.

Yes, in his outset he never meant to be the thing he became. Who that forsakes a safe path and recklessly treads the margin of a precipice, thinks of all the details of the headlong fall, the shattered limbs, the crushed bundle of tattered, bleeding remnants, that a false step will expose to view? If such a thought came, they would carefully avoid the slippery verge and giddy height.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

AND now our narrative draws to a close. The hand of death, and the results of sin, had diminished or scattered those whose history we have recorded, though consequences remained that could not immediately be dealt with. The week after the stately funeral of Mr Tregloss, there was in the mist of the early morning a singularly private burial in Chiswick churchyard. One mourner only attended—a lady deeply veiled, who seemed so bowed and wasted by recent events, that few would have known her to be the sister of Mr Tregloss; for she had emulated her brother in her confident air and manner, but now she was subdued both by inward and outward shame. Her brother, who had seemed to her as a tower of strength, was laid low; her son, whose career had disgraced her, and yet in whom she still had vaguely hoped, had perished, and rumour ascribed to him, as his last act, a murderous assault on one who was now declared to be his own child. The lawyer

employed by Mrs Vineingly, very skilfully, at the inquest, endeavoured to prove that the father had discovered the relationship to himself of the child who was under the protection of his mother and uncle, and represented that the seizure of the child was a sudden impulse of parental joy that, owing to an accident, ended fatally. The argument was so ingenious, and the real state of the family affairs so shrouded, that the jury accepted it, and returned a verdict of "Accidental death," without any comment on the evidence.

And then, of course, there was in many quarters the due amount of talk on Mr Tregloss's affairs. His wealth was exaggerated, and the hopeless madness of his wife became a very common topic of conversation. Relatives long unknown or forgotten started up with their claims—an uncle of Mrs Tregloss, sundry cousins of Mr Tregloss. These required to be fully satisfied as to the disposition of his property, the death of his son, and the legal claims of the grandchild of Mrs Vineingly. Mr Horace Hempson had all the necessary legal documents in proof of the marriage of Lilian Topham with Richard Smith, and the birth of the child named Lawrence Smith, whose consignment to Mrs Stubbs and all his subsequent career of innocent deception, as far as he was concerned, could be distinctly proved. Mrs Vineingly was roused from the despondency into which she had fallen, by these various claimants starting up and proposing to contest the validity of Mr Tregloss's will and the legal claim of the child who was now, after the wife and sister of the deceased, his next of kin.

An examination of Mr Tregloss's papers showed as complete a specimen as could be given of a mind in a state of continual fuss and muddle. It seemed that while he was

on the Continent he had amused his leisure by the dangerous occupation of constantly altering his will; revoking—adding codicils—altering. As his mood, or his wife's mental health changed, this went on, until it was next to impossible to pick out a distinct meaning from the heterogeneous jumble. Some charitable bequests were given, and some legacies; a provision for his sister, *as the guardian of his child*; a handsome sum, hampered with all sorts of conditions, for his wife. The result of all this confusion worse confounded was, that the great wealth of the rich distiller was destined to feed a great chancery suit. Mrs Tregloss was placed under the protection of the court, who appointed her competent keepers, and without knowing anything of change or loss, she was removed to a private asylum near the sea-side, where she played with her glass beads and sipped at her tumbler, growing more and more idiotic—a mournful wreck of humanity. Mrs Vineingly had a small yearly stipend awarded her, pending the legal investigations. And the claims of greedy kindred and urgent legatees were duly urged, Mr Mixty, in the meanwhile, denying, on his part, a considerable part of the Tregloss claims in the distillery; so that, altogether, there was as pretty a lawsuit pending as ever perplexed right and hoodwinked justice.

There was one person who made no claim, and little heeded all the hungry clamour over the ill-gotten wealth, and that was Lilian. As her heart opened to the child, she had no wish that he should succeed to that which had as yet conferred no blessing. Rendered wise by sorrow, she certainly knew that though poverty is a stern discipline, wealth, unless wisely used, is no blessing. She shrunk from the way in which this money had been obtained. She had several interviews with Mrs Vineingly, and heard from

her lips how "the hope of possessing his uncle's wealth had been the very first temptation to idleness and extravagance in her son's character and career." "Had I been a poor woman, and trained him in all sobriety to some useful, industrious occupation, he might have been respectable and respected; and instead of my being ashamed to mention his name, as he lies in his untimely grave, I might have had a son to be my comfort and my stay." This testimony was not lost on Lilian nor on Mrs Lettsome. The latter lady had taken a very deep affection for the little Lawrence. His name recalled her father—something also in his looks the child that she had lost; and though her right in the boy was less than that of Mrs Vineingly, her love was greater. The latter had been so bitterly tried and disappointed that she was never able entirely to throw off the feeling of dread and apprehension as she looked at the child. "Ah, he is all very well now; it's easy work while he is young to guide him—but by-and-by?" "We will, by God's grace, try to train him aright," said Lilian. And, as one very great means to that most desirable end, the boy was reared free from the contamination of strong drink. He was early taught to be obedient, gentle, kindly. An atmosphere of love and faith was round the tender human flower, in which it could grow and expand in all spiritual and mental vigour and beauty.

Meanwhile, how fared it with poor little Kate? She was no longer friendless; Mrs Lettsome—Lilian—Mr Hempson—the Comptons—even Mrs Vineingly—were all disposed to aid her with active kindness. But what were friends, in the estimation of that loving heart, compared to the one dear object on whom she had heaped and wasted the rich treasure of her affection. Wasted?—no, that is not the right word; in that martyrdom of self which such a love

involved there was permitted something of a compensation, —her soul grew stronger in that fiery trial. However dark all was around, there was light above, and she could look upward and behold that light, and feel that guidance. She was not ungrateful for the kindness proffered to her and her little girl — indeed she was always gentle, affectionate, and industrious — but she could not forget, — a nature like hers never does. The Retribution that had fallen on Adolphus gave him, according to her creed of wifely fidelity, a deeper claim to her love and pity. So high indeed did that tide of feeling swell that it frequently broke over the cold barriers of prudence. And when, to the surprise of all, she announced her intention, some seven or eight months after the events recorded, of going to take up her abode at Southsea, there seemed no motive but caprice in her determination. She was not to be prevented; she had worked hard and obtained the means, and so departed, Lilian and Horace Hempson alone divining that she wanted to be near the wretched convict who, forgotten by the world, was yet a world in himself to her.

She went, — though, as to any comfort to either Adolphus or herself from that nearer neighbourhood, she had better have remained in London. To her it was a perfect torture to recognise in the sallow lath of a man, linked in a gang, and dragging a heavy truck, who was employed on a part of the ramparts at Portsmouth, the Adolphus who had been the joy and pride of her heart. She felt, as she gazed on him, that she was inflicting a useless agony on herself and him, by trying to exchange a furtive glance with him. In a few months, there was another change. Adolphus was removed, in failing health, to Princetown, Dartmoor. Many a wreck is said to be restored to bodily strength there, the work being agriculture chiefly. There

for a time he toiled with his spade, in the pure air that sweeps over the fair West of England—in vain. The hectic cough became more hard and frequent, the thin frame more weak and tremulous; at length he was unable to work, and on a little bed, in the infirmary of the prison, he lay down to die. Then, as the weary heart longed for tender, pitying commiseration—as the failing eyes sought for the dear, familiar face that had never worn a frown to him,—all poor Kate's wrongs were avenged. He who had so lightly estimated the comfort of living with her—what would he not have given to have laid his dying head on her bosom, and felt her warm tears on his cold eyelids, as all earthly things but her love passed away. But this could not be. He had forfeited an honest name, and all home comforts and kindred ties he had put far from him. And now he must die alone—alone! Oh, if the voices from such death-beds could be heard, should we not shrink appalled from the cup that tempts only to betray—that sparkles to destroy. Other poisons make swift work with the poor perishing frame; this not only undermines the health, but likewise insidiously corrupts the principles, warps the soul, destroys the reputation, lures to ruin in its most terrible aspects, and to death in its most dreadful form.

Let us hope that poor Kate's fervent prayers were so far effectual, that some ray of light from another world was permitted to gild the gloom of this, ere the night of death came down upon that poor prisoner.

The tidings of Adolphus's death came just as Kate, ever restless and yearning towards him, had determined to leave Southsea, and take up her abode at Tavistock. She was planning for the future—for such a grief as hers could not be borne if there were not an escape into the region of imagination—she was planning that when Adolphus's

term was over she would emigrate with him to New Zealand, and she was working away with added diligence as she thought of this, when there came a letter, hardly legible:—

“Dear Kate,

“If the prayers and blessings of a dying man can comfort you, I send them. God ever bless you and our poor child! Oh, that I had been worthy of you! But that’s all over now. The ——.”

A few words in another hand told her he was dead!

And so it happened, in the mysterious arrangements of this strange world, that Adolphus was better mourned than many a better man. Then, and not till then, Kate listened to the voice of reason, and allowed her friends to recall her to London, and in process of time fell into her wonted pursuits. Her skill, which had maintained her when she was struggling and friendless, was now fully adequate to the wants of herself and child. It was fortunate for her that she had something still to love. And if, as she fondled her little girl, and in after years told her about her father, in such terms as her affection, rather than real fact, rendered true, it must have been a cold heart that would reprove the loving exaggeration. One lesson she had learned in her adversity that she clung to with unswerving tenacity—the lesson of strict sobriety. To her the drunkard’s cup seemed polluted with blood, and brackish with the bitterest tears, so she turned away from it with utter loathing and abhorrence. “But for that,” she would sometimes say, “I should not be a widow, nor my child fatherless.” She might have added—but for that her husband might have been such a man as his wife and child might have relied on and esteemed, and neither blushed for nor pitied.

Kate, in her own sorrow, did not forget her former neighbours, the Wiggsons. Lizzie still lived with her, and in time a younger sister of Lizzie's came from the workhouse as an apprentice to Mrs Stubbs; of the rest of the family, they were scattered. The mother never left the workhouse. She was just the sort of person to sink contentedly into the condition of a pauper. One of the boys was caught up from prison into a reformatory, and seemed inclined to do well; of the rest, it was a sort of wandering vagabond career, sometimes in the streets, sometimes in prison, always out of sorts—the kind of family that is often bred in dwellings where drink is the presiding power. The father had been a sort of cad or hanger-on to "The Topper" and Adolphus. When his patrons were overthrown he took to still lower and more desperate companions, and found his way, by a certain downward course, to the prison and penal servitude—one of the expensive luxuries that Government has to support as the inevitable result of strong drink. Neither useful nor ornamental to our social system are such families as the Wiggsons, but we grow them, in the hot-beds of intemperance that we make, and we must sustain them.

The Comptons were untiring friends of Kate. They bore with the waywardness of her grief, and honoured the fidelity of her love, even while they wondered at it.

"It's my belief," said George Compton, "that some women's hearts are like the great ocean—unfathomable; and it's not for us to be pretending to say how deep that ought to be which the Lord has meted out."

"Perhaps such love, George, is sent to remind us of His love, who while we were yet sinners, had compassion on us, and came to die for us."

"Ah! yes, my dear, it would be a bad thing for this

world if there were not plenty of love in it. You women are full of contradictions—a queer compound—but yet I suppose you're somehow the pulse that goes throbbing with tender life and love, through all the world."

"Contradictions!" said Mrs Compton, with a little airy gesture of assumed anger. "Why, if we hadn't some little defects, you know, we should shame you out of countenance altogether."

Such playful banter often passed between the sturdy teetotaler and his wife. They were a prosperous, happy couple, genial and cheery. And often did poor Kate and her little one come to their hospitable hearth, and share its homely joys, and warm themselves in its loving glow. From the time that catastrophe occurred at Swillinberg House, Mr Hempson had taken an active interest in Compton, and sought to promote his welfare, as also did the other influential persons of our narrative. But George Compton's best patron was—Sobriety.

And what of Lilian and Horace? They must have been unworthy the attention we have given them, if they were insensible to all the circumstances we have recorded. In the awful death of the bad man who, in a fit of drunken caprice, had won Lilian from her besotted father, there was a solemn lesson. Both felt that the deliverance of Lilian from such a connexion was effected by means that involved the hopeless death of a fellow creature. It was not while such horrors were fresh in their minds that thoughts of love and marriage could be paramount. Each required time to recover from the pressure of the past, to grow and develop in the new life that opened before them. Each felt it right, while fully confiding in the other, to subject themselves to the test of patient waiting and active working. Hempson knew that his feet had well-nigh

slipped. He thought with shame and regret of the time when he had, in his secret heart, planned the ruin of the lovely and friendless girl that had been thrown in his way. Whenever, like a sudden, inward pang, that thought smote him, he was more grateful than words can express that he had resolved on a course of strict, true temperance. He had become a Christian; and being therefore "of the light and of the day," he felt it became him "to be sober." He had carefully pondered the words—"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" and the answer, "By taking heed thereto according to Thy Word." As he apprehended it, that involved denying himself for the good of others—having "no fellowship with the workers of iniquity."

And Lilian had to redeem the time, and to avoid the errors of the past, by a devoted attention to her maternal duties. She experienced the truth, "And a little child shall lead them," for she was daily blessed in her deed as she tended and taught her boy. Nor did she forget the innocent usurper who had lain on her bosom, and been to her as her own. She often visited the little grave where he reposed, and thought over all the way in which she had been led, giving God thanks in her heart of hearts that, whatever of amiability or excellence she had failed in, she had been permitted to possess a sense of delicacy and personal reserve that in her most unhappy and exposed days had made her shrink from the thought of the seducer's wiles, and filled her with horror at an impure life. In this she traced a hand of mercy, and gave God all the praise.

At length, it seemed right that Horace and Lilian should yield to the promptings of their mutual affection. Mrs Lettsome earnestly desired their marriage, and would have celebrated it with all rejoicing; but in accordance with the

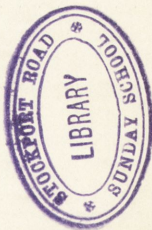
wishes of the parties most concerned, the ceremony in which Lilian exchanged a name she had borne with sorrow and shame, for one that she loved and honoured, was strictly private. They needed no gaiety of dress, no parade of joyfulness. In quietude, with her aunt, her child, and Kate, alone as witnesses; dressed in simple morning costume, Lilian gave her hand where she had long bestowed her heart. True, a grand array of blushes spread their festal banners over her face,—

“And loving hopes for retinues
About her sweetness wait,”

and that was wedding splendour enough for them. They made no continental tour, nor did they visit any of the places of gay resort for bridal parties in their native land. They went for a few weeks into Cornwall, and amid the majestic grandeurs of that iron-bound coast, or the fertile valleys of its inland scenery, refreshed themselves by communion with nature in her noblest, or sweetest garb. While in that county, they were not without frequent opportunity of observing, as they might have done also among the intelligent operatives in the north of England, how much a manly sobriety, a freedom from the debasing slavery of the drinking customs, elevates the mind and manners of the people. They returned to settle down in the neighbourhood of London. Mr Hempson was rising in his profession: practising it diligently and honestly, he made it honourable. Little Lawrence, provided for by Mrs Lettsome, would have not merely the advantage of good intellectual and scholastic culture, but that far more important aid in the work of training, a happy, virtuous home, and wise, as well as tender, parents. To him, it mattered not that what was called by his grandmamma Vineingly, his rightful inher-

itance, was likely to be dispersed among lawyers like prey seized on by hungry dogs. He would have a better inheritance in his good training, good health, and good principles. His was the real wealth.

And so we leave them, solemnly convinced that, though many apparently escape in the strange perplexity, as it seems to us, of human life, there is such a thing as "RETRIBUTION," even in this world, and that those "who sow to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption."



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