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THOMAS WHITTAKER
2 AND 3 BIBLE HOUSE, NEW YORK

THE CRASH IS IMPENDING

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FOUNDED ON PAPER

OR

UPHILL AND DOWNHILL BETWEEN THE TWO JUBILEES

BY

CHARLOTTE M. YONGE

AUTHOR OF

'Under the Storm,' 'The Carbonels,' Etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY W. S. STACEY

NEW YORK

THOMAS WHITTAKER

2 AND 3 BIBLE HOUSE

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FOUNDED ON PAPER

CHAPTER I

THE JUBILEE FEAST

When the merry bells ring round,
And the jocund rebecks sound,
And young and old come forth to play,
On a sunshine holiday.—MILTON.

IT was the Jubilee of Queen Victoria, and all England was rejoicing. The tables for the united parishes of Uphill and Downhill were laid in a big tent, with a huge flag of the Union Jack on the middle, and at one end St. Michael on his banner for Uphill, and at the other St. Lawrence for Downhill, both patron saints painted by Miss Estrid Carbonel to appear in choral processions.

The parishes were still united, for the present vicar, Mr. Oakley, thought they could be better attended to by himself with five curates under him than if separated, one of the five, Mr. Elwood, lodging at Hewlett and Co.'s, the carpenters and

builders. Still the two parishes, though they would join together against all the world, had their own rivalries, and whatever failed at Downhill was said to be owing to 'those old-world Uphill fogies,' and any mischief done at Uphill was sure to be attributed to 'that there lot at Downhill.'

For Downhill had grown a good deal, owing to a railway station and a new factory for *papier mâché* which had risen on the remnant of an old water-mill, and the inhabitants were a good deal smarter than their neighbours at Uphill, where the old ways were not very prosperous. The boys' school for both parishes was at Downhill, but each place had a separate school for girls and infants, the Uphill one under Miss Pucklechurch.

The chosen place for the festivities was the open bit of common at Uphill, as the most suitable for the beacon fire, the pile for which was already heaped up, and also as good for the fireworks.

Here stood the great tent, and not far off was the well-remembered metal sign of the 'Fox and Hounds,' crossing the Church lane, freshly done up, so that the hunters' coats were more scarlet than ever, the fox nearly as red, and the horses

and dogs brown, black, and white, a brilliant spectacle. All the houses in the parish were locked up, and there were hardly twenty people, sick or well, old or young, who were not on that common.

There had been a short thanksgiving service in the church, then came the procession in all its glory, with the band playing and the banners waving before it, and then 'the feast ate merrily,' and was ended with toasts to Church and Queen, drunk by many in ginger beer, the National Anthem, and a final adjournment to the common, where there were preparations for sports of all kinds.

First, however, as each of the population passed out, they found at the two doors of the tent a table with a small party of ladies beside it, and a heap of jubilee medals, with red ribbons and long hooks, to be fastened to coat, jacket, mantle, or bodice, as the case might be.

The Uphill table was attended by a grey-haired, bright-eyed, brisk little old lady, whose upright figure might almost have belonged to one of the girls in white who were assisting her in pinning on the medals, with a pleasant word exchanged with each old or young friend.

For Miss Sophia Carbonel had made her home at Greenhow Farm ever since she had come thither as an eager schoolgirl of fourteen, sixty-four years previously, to live with her sister and her brother-in-law. Their eldest son, a soldier like his father, was killed in India, and his wife did not long survive him, and their children had been brought up at Greenhow. The Edmund of this third generation obtained a Civil Service appointment in India, but his sisters continued to live with their great-aunt, after the grandparents had gone to their rest. Miss Sophia did not farm as her brother had done, most of the fields were sold or let; but she remained in the old house, and was still lady of all work to Uphill, and something between a mother and a companion to Estrid and Malvina, whose names betrayed the mother's fanciful taste, though for common use they were translated into Essie and Mally. Their dark eyes and brown complexions showed a different stock from the Carbonels.

Various were the acknowledgments. 'Thank you kindly, Miss Sophy. Why, as I says to my granddaughter, if you don't beat them all in your looks!' exclaimed an old dame, in one of the last surviving scarlet cloaks, her face brown as a berry

or as a walnut on her wrinkled cheeks; but upright, active, and with the merriest of twinkling black eyes.

'Thank you, Tirzah; I must make a curtsey for the compliment.'

'So must we,' said one of the nieces. 'We are all proud of Aunt Sophy.'

'Right! So you ought to be, Miss Mally. And how be Mrs. Gobbleall and all the rest? Why, Bessie Mole,' as another old dame came up, 'how do ye fight it out? I never seed you, but then you always crope like a titty mouse!'

Whatever the comparison might mean, it was a tiny, neat old woman, who was conducted between a tall, grizzled, stalwart son, and a cheery-looking daughter-in-law, accompanied by a troop of younger descendants, from the green velveteen railway porter to the knickerbockered infant, and the experienced cook to the short-petticoated monitor.

'You are tired, Mrs. Mole,' said Miss Carbonel; 'here is a seat,' pushing forward the wicker chair intended for herself. 'Or had you better go home?'

'Will has got a seat for Granny, thank you,

ma'am,' said the younger Mrs. Mole; and the old woman responded: 'There never was one like Willie for taking care of his Granny. Ah! here he comes.'

'Come, Granny,' cried the bright-faced boy, 'Jack is sitting on your stool to keep it for you, and you'll see me knock you down a cocoa-nut.'

Another granny who succeeded, bent almost double, tarried to communicate for the twentieth time her recollections of the jubilee of George III., when she could, or thought she could, recollect the great fun round the ox roasted whole, stuffed with potatoes, and most folks said there was not a steak of him as was fit for a pig to eat, and it was just a sinful waste of good food as it was a shame to see.

As she went off, escorted by 'the lad,' as she called her almost equally venerable son, 'Here come Hewlett and Co.,' said Malvina to her sister.

'Co. for contemporary,' laughed Estrid. 'Aunt Sophy deals in them.'

'Or they in her,' responded Malvina; 'but here is Hewlett and his Co. in the other sense.'

Mr. Hewlett walked first, churchwarden and head of the firm, hale and hearty as any man near upon seventy could wish to be, though he leaned

upon the cabbage-stalk walking-stick his nephew had brought him from Guernsey. His wife, a fine, tall, handsome woman, with a grandmotherly face, walked beside him in the thick black silk which her family had insisted on her wearing in spite of the heat. The 'George' who was the first member of the Co. was the cousin who had inherited the business, and would never have got beyond village carpentering but for John's returning, with brighter native wits embellished by his apprenticeship. He was as well dressed as John, but looked more the mere rustic. There was a branch builder's shop at Poppleby under another George, and there was also Edmund, a schoolmaster at Downhill; Charles, who worked under grandfather and father; and daughters, daughters-in-law and grandchildren innumerable —one a telegraph clerk, another a schoolmistress, besides pupil teachers, housemaids and smaller fry in the way of scholars, mostly a good deal smarter than the Misses Carbonel, though all in good taste.

There was one great-grandchild, only three weeks old, a case of hurried churching and baptism that she might be able to say in later years

that she had been at Queen Victoria's Jubilee. Miss Carbonel the elder put the red ribbon into the embroidered robe, kissed her, and asked the name. 'Judith Hilda, ma'am,' answered the young mother in an apologetic tone. 'Grandfather would have it so.'

'Ah! we know why, don't we?' said the lady, smiling to the old man.

'Yes indeed, Miss Sophy. These young folks, they are all for their fine names, but I says, only give me such another as my Aunt Judith, who first made me such as I be.'

'And how is your mother, John, the only great-great-grandmother? What a pity she is not here.'

'She knows all about it,' said Hewlett, with a smile. 'She was *that* pleased to see young Ted's baby, and she sits up in her bed to see folks go by.'

For the Molly Hewlett of 1831 still survived, and, thanks to her long emancipation from Daniel, and the better training of her earlier years, had become such a model old woman that the younger clergy and ladies could never have believed what she had been in her married days. Nor did Miss Sophia bring up her antecedents for their information.

So Hewlett and Co. moved on to watch the younger scions of the house striving in turn to climb the soaped pole, for which a pig was the prize, but up, up one after another struggled till the point where, as Estrid Carbonel said, 'The man who hesitates is lost,' as the downward slip began, inevitably among the derisive shouts of the spectators and the previously baffled.

'Here comes Jem Pucklechurch! Hurrah for Jem Pucklechurch! He's been a sailor! He will know how.'

'Only in a collier!' growled some one.

'You should show them, Mr. Whetstone; you who have been to sea,' said Estrid.

'Not quite on the topmast!' he laughed. 'Ha! that fellow will do it! Hurrah for Pucklechurch! No! down he goes!'

'The cheers unsettled him,' said Estrid. 'Try again, Jem, when you have your breath! Charlie Hewlett! Are you going to try?' as the young carpenter set his teeth and took his coat off, looking rather glumly at a young man and woman who had come up among the spectators.

'I'll do it,' he said, and, between his teeth, 'she shall see me.'

But though he struggled long at the top, the soap was too much for him, and just as he touched the hat, down—down he slid—unable to recover himself.

'What, Wilfred, you going to try!' said Estrid, as the newcomer carefully took off his well-made coat with a white rose in the buttonhole. 'I have seen you like a monkey on the telegraph poles.'

'Yes, ma'am, I may as well have a try,' he said, smiling back at the tall girl who had come with him.

'In all his toggery! Well, he makes cock-sure,' said Mr. Whetstone.

And the lithe, neatly-made fellow actually ascended successfully, paused at the top of the pole, and waved the hat amid the cheers of some, but not hearty, for Charlie Hewlett murmured, 'Soap cleaned off. Telegraph poles.'

'Look here!' his voice was heard; 'maybe I have done it too easily! Don't grease it again, but all have another go at it! I'll be content with the hat—and leave the pig for the next.'

So saying, he put on his coat over his gay flannel shirt, while Mr. Whetstone and Estrid shook hands with him and congratulated him, and the

girl looked delighted, but the applause was less ready.

'Wants to come the swell over us!' was the muttered comment.

'Won't you try again, Charlie?' said Miss Estrid.

'Not I! Don't want Will Truman's leavings,' growled the youth, kicking a stone as he went off.

'Affronted at being supposed to do it for the sake of the pig,' said Estrid.

'I fancy he is cut out in another quarter. Well, Truman's a good chap if he is a bit of a prig,' said Mr. Whetstone, looking in the direction in which the hero was pacing off. 'Ha! that's well. Pucklechurch for ever! *He* won't scorn chuggy-pig!'

Mr. Whetstone was the son of a former doctor at Poppleby, and had himself been a naval surgeon, in which capacity he had seen a great part of the world, and, among other things, had been much impressed by the wonderful uses made of paper in Japan. Coming home, and inheriting a slender portion from his father, he resolved to establish such a manufacture in England, where there was only one established factory for *papier*

mâchê, at Birmingham, in existence. Almost all articles of that material are imported from France, whither he repaired and gained all the information that national and professional jealousy allowed him to acquire. Therewith he had originated a small company for the enterprise, obtaining for the purpose the buildings of an old water-mill on the border between Uphill and Downhill, which had fallen a victim to steam works and railway carriage. Estrid Carbonel, being in need of an outlet for her various energies, had become one of the shareholders, and a very enthusiastic one.

CHAPTER II

THE LONELY COT

But in that patience was the seed of scorn.—Lord Houghton.

Miss Carbonel was meanwhile watching other sports—the blind-race with barrows, where another Pucklechurch scattered all before him, and was finally entangled in the ropes of the tent; the sack race, where Charlie Cox lay prone and helpless as a log, and Albert Morris fell over him; and the demure race of girls with spoons carrying hard-boiled eggs, as they crept along, slowly and steadily.

'That's the race for the girls!' said a nice neat woman on the further side of middle age. 'Much better than their running and tearing about with the boys.'

'Ah! they are much quieter and more manageable now than when your mother began breaking them in,' said Miss Carbonel.

For this was Jane, daughter of the former schoolmistress, Mrs. Thorpe. She had married

George Truman, one of the first youths that had felt the Carbonel influence. He had turned out very well, and had been bailiff at Hillside farm when, on old Farmer Goodenough's death, the two farms were united.

He was killed by a fall from a hayrick, and his widow was allowed to live on at a nominal rent in the farmhouse, which it was not worth while to repair so as to suit modern ideas. There was then a large family, whom she contrived to bring up in a somewhat superior way, between the boys' work and her own, as a good laundress and charwoman, with the proceeds also of a large garden and orchard. The elder children had drifted away into the world, the daughters marrying from service, and two sons emigrating. One son had been employed in a firework factory, and his youngest brother Wilfred, having just finished his apprenticeship to the Hewletts, had gone to see whether he preferred to join in the same employment, taking his young sister on a visit to the wife, when there was a terrific explosion, in which the poor young husband and wife were killed, and the sister was sadly injured. Wilfred had been sent out on a message and entirely escaped, and

he had returned home to find employment at first with Mr. Hewlett, then upon the railway, and latterly at the newly-established factory, where his readiness and ingenuity gained wages which were making his mother and sister very comfortable. It was after the sister that Miss Carbonel was enquiring: 'Is not Laura here? I have a medal for her. No? Is she not so well?'

'Thank you, Miss Sophy, she is much as usual, but she could not frame herself to come down among strangers, though Wilfred wanted to have drawn her down in her chair, but she would not hear of it. She is so down-hearted, you see.'

'You must not let that grow on her, poor girl!'

'No, ma'am, and I thought this would be so good for her spirits, but no—she said it would only make it worse to see all the rest running about and dancing, and she could not bear it.'

'It is a mistake, but I am glad you are here at any rate. I hear your son was at the top of his pole. A good omen, I hope.'

'Thank you, ma'am, he is a good lad and deserves it; but I must be going back now. Miss Darling has been sitting with Laura, but I see she is come now, and I can't leave her long.'

'I was going to ask who it was with Wilfred. His young woman, is it?' smiling as Mrs. Truman gave a conscious blush and smile as if she were the party in question.

'Yes, ma'am. It is Lucy Darling, who is nurse-maid at Mrs. Sterling's, over at Poppleby. Her mistress gave her leave to come over, because she missed their feast day, on the 20th, through the little boy being ill and fretty.'

'I did not see her at the dinner.'

'No, ma'am. As she did not belong here she wouldn't presume, so she said she would sit with Laura till after the dinner, and Wilfred has been to fetch her, so I must go home,' finished Mrs. Truman, bustling up as if afraid of being blamed for delay.

'I am sorry you can't stay, Jenny! But Wilfred has good taste! I hope she is all she looks! They make a delightful couple,' said Miss Sophia, walking beside the highly-gratified Mrs. Truman to the border of the common, and receiving a touch of the hat from Wilfred on the way.

They were indeed a pleasant pair to contemplate—Wilfred, a fair, bright-faced, superior-looking young man of three-and-twenty; Lucy, nearly

as tall as he was, and only a little younger. She had a fine countenance, clear and healthy though not highly coloured, regular features of a grave, thoughtful cast, though lighting up with a very sweet smile, dark hair and arched eyebrows over deep blue eyes, and her dress was neatly-fitting grey with just enough rose colour to enliven it, and a spray of honeysuckle at her waist.

'Yes, ma'am, Wilfred is a good lad to his mother, and Lucy, she is just as good.'

'Have you known her long?' asked Miss Carbonel, much interested for Wilfred's sake as well as his mother's.

'Oh yes, ma'am, though they have not been keeping company till this summer. Poor Mrs. Darling's mother, she was my mother's cousin, and always gave her a welcome if we went over to Minsterham. But she is dead now, and so are Darling and his wife. Lucy was always a good girl to them, and was a favourite at her school. The ladies there got her a place seven years ago in Mrs. Sterling's nursery, and there she has been ever since. They live in London, but come down to Popple Court in the summer, and there Wilfred came to know her.'

It was a very satisfactory account, and Miss Carbonel could only congratulate the mother, but would not delay her further, seeing that she was in haste to return to her daughter.

'So there you are at last. I really thought you were never coming home!' So spoke a thin, pale, bent girl, leaning on a crutch as she stood under the honeysuckle at the garden gate of Hillside. One eye was under a green shade, the other large, black, and bright. It was a querulous voice that greeted Mrs. Truman, as she came bustling in, panting and heated with her hurried walk.

'It is not six o'clock yet,' she said, loosening her bonnet, and taking off the mantle which was too hot for the summer day.

'Just on the stroke, and I am famishing for my tea.'

'I thought you would put on the kettle and have it without me, if you felt to want it,' humbly said the mother. 'Or Lucy would have helped you.'

'Oh! well, I didn't want her to be making herself at home here before her time, so I wouldn't put it on till she was gone. And what must Will do when he came home but take her to see all

over the house, all the shut-up rooms, and such a work as they made over the honeysuckle out there, as never was!'

'Poor Willie, he is very happy with her, and what do you think Miss Sophy said?' Then after waiting a moment, the proud mother went on, '"I admire Wilfred's taste!" That was what she said. And to be sure——'

'Well,' broke in the daughter, 'I should have thought old Miss Sophy would have known better than to admire a stuck-up thing as will never make a poor man's wife.'

Mrs. Truman was vexed, but she knew better than to argue the point, and produced the medal with 'See what Miss Carbonel sent you.'

'Oh! I have seen it. Will had one. No more to look at than a shilling; and such a fuss as there was about Miss Lucy pinning it on again! Come, mother, make haste; I am just famished for my tea! I haven't been stuffing beef and pudding like you.'

'If you would but have come, Laura! Miss Sophy and the Vicar and Mr. Elwood and all asked for you, and Mr. Elwood said he had a mind to run down, put you in the chair, and bring

you up willy nilly. Then you would have seen Willie atop of the pole.'

'Atop of the pole? I didn't think he would demean himself so far.'

'Well, none of 'em could do it, and Charlie Hewlett nigh about did, so Wilfred tried and got up as easy as possible, I fancy because Lucy was looking on, but he wouldn't take the pig because they said the soap was cleaned off. He left it to them as needed it more.'

'Well, I don't wonder. There's plenty of envy and jealousy about, but it was a low thing for Lucy to be egging him on to. I'm sure we don't want no pigs gained that way!'

Poor Laura was six years younger than Wilfred. She had been a very handsome child, with the gipsy beauty of splendid dark eyes, rich chestnut curls, and a bright complexion. She knew it very well, though her mother was always telling her not to be vain, and scolding her when she was caught gazing at herself in the glass and twisting her curls round her fingers. But her father had petted her more than for only being the youngest, had called her his gipsy queen, and brought her home hats such as her elder sisters Jane and Susan

would never have been put into; and though she was not five years old when he died, she had never forgotten his name for her. Then the elder ones, especially the brothers, made much of her, and at school, any stranger who came in, even the inspector, was sure to look at her; and there were apt to be whispers that she was the beauty of the school. She was bright-witted, too, and had passed her standards and become a monitor, when in the holidays she went to visit her brother George, and suffered in the explosion. She spent months in the hospital before she was able to return home, a mere wreck. One eye was quite gone, one foot had been so much crushed that it had to be taken off, and, what was worst of all, the spine had been so much injured that there was little hope of her recovering health or activity.

Her mother, very thankful to have her spared, even thus, took her home. Young Mrs. George with her children had gone back to her family, the other son had emigrated to Australia, the daughters had married; and though from time to time letters and presents came to the mother, yet she and Laura depended in great measure on Wilfred's

wages. Laura could do needlework very nicely, but she was not always well enough, and her mother's eyes were not what they had been. Wilfred had been promised a rise at the end of the year, and this made it fairly prudent to be engaged to Lucy Darling, in spite of the burthen—as his mother called herself, but as he could not bear to hear. He was a steady, clever, bookish young man, quite content with the recreations that the two villages afforded under the patronage of the clergy, very different, as his mother often said, from what she remembered, when a riotous Maying or cricket ending in drink were the only diversions, and were avoided by the respectable and religious.

How Poor Laura had loved those parish entertainments before her accident! She had always been a good girl at school, and, in spite of her manner to her mother, she was reckoned by herself and others to be a sorely-afflicted but exemplary girl. She had always been used to notice, and to be sympathised with was almost as good as to be admired. She loved and entered into religious poetry and good books, and could really believe that it was a wise and thankworthy dispensation

that had cut her off from vanity in her good looks. She liked to be talked to by the clergy, who plainly thought a great deal of her, and she did not feel absolutely ungratified when Miss Pearson called her a little angel, or her mother's friends sighed 'Poor dear!' The only person whom latterly she had thought cold, hard and dry, was old Miss Carbonel, who was too fond of telling her what she could do for her mother!

Even Wilfred was not often aware of the way in which she had come to treat her mother as a born slave. She was always in better spirits when he came in, and because she never complained of her great misfortune, she thought she did not repine, and was quite resigned, not seeing that to show temper and fretfulness about her small grievances was the same thing under another form, not so easily detected. She had always been foremost with Wilfred, excepting, of course, his mother, and it was natural that his engagement should be a trial to her, as such a thing often is to a sister.

After he and Lucy had gone on together to the feast, she had stood at the door looking after them, and now and then catching the sounds of the huz-

zas, or of the music, and sighing over them, as she recollected verses about empty gaiety and vanity, and the choice of the better part, and took them to herself with some complacency.

By-and-by she bethought herself that it was late, and no one knew when her mother would come home, 'Mother, with all her troubles, was just as pleased and giddy as a young maid when she got into a crowd of folks!'

Then she hobbled out to feed the poultry, of which they had a good stock, clucking them up in a tone more like a doleful old turkey than her mother's cheerful notes, and telling them she must shut them up early, there were so many idle folk about. The old cock and his hens were obedient enough, but the young cockerels and pullets, who always stayed out later to pick up a meal without his tyranny, objected to being chased into the sheds, and the ducks did not think it bed-time and waddled off to the brook, the drake defiantly wagging his tail where Laura could not think of following, and her 'Dilly, dilly,' did not sound very inviting.

Then she went indoors, and began to read a pretty gilded volume of poetry that Wilfred had

given her as a Christmas present. The poems were very good and excellent, and she chose out of them all that were most pathetic and resigned, and about loss of charm and worldly delights, while the young and joyous saw false delights opening before them. Really she thought she could compose something quite as lovely herself, and she began:

> **Methinks I sat within a lonely cot**
> **While the gay world a trumpet bugle blew,**
> **And careless lovers passed and marked me not:**
> **My aching heart they never knew.**

That last line was not quite right—'spirit' did not come in better. Besides, it was hardly true to say the careless lovers marked her not when Lucy had been sitting with her all this time, and Wilfred had given up so much of his pleasure. But then it was poetry, and one might exaggerate a little, and the first lines were very pretty. And here was mother at last!

Mrs. Truman began preparing the tea, and telling all the delights of the feast, and she listened with little brief comments, perhaps regretting in her heart that she had not ventured, as she certainly would have done if the curate had come for

her, as he had talked of doing, or even if Wilfred had persuaded her with a little more brotherly insistence. But he had not; perhaps he was relieved to be able to walk away with his Lucy, and the suspicion was at the root of the ill-humour, so that it was hard to hear her well-pleased mother return to Miss Carbonel's remark that Wilfred had good taste.

'Oh! that's lady's taste, maybe! I should have said she was nothing to look at! Why, she has got no colour, and regular beetle brows. Depend upon it, she has a temper of her own.'

'Well, she will live on the other side of the house, and you need not have more to do with her than you like.'

'Oh, yes! Willie must please himself.'

'And I am thankful that the poor fellow is like to make enough for us all, without our standing in the way of his happiness, so good a boy as he has always been to us.' And she wiped her eyes at the thought.

'Oh, yes, I'm the last person to grudge dear Will his happiness. There must be changes and some have to look on:

Better 'tis to hearken
Than to bear a part;
Sweeter to look on happiness
Than to carry a light heart,'

Laura repeated, and thought how good and resigned she was in her lonely cot, and her mother dried her eyes again, and said, wistfully, 'And didn't you get on with Lucy?'

'Oh! pretty fair. She couldn't talk of anything but the Isle of Wight, and those children of hers. One would think there never was such a one in the world as that Master Owen! Besides, I heard some one was after her!'

'Charlie Hewlett! Oh! that's nothing. He went to put up a cupboard in the nursery at the Court, and fancied himself smitten. I saw him looking 'glum, poor lad, as she passed with our Wilfred, but she never encouraged him for a moment; she's not that sort.'

'Oh!'

Mrs. Truman was disappointed, and by-and-by the lovers were to be seen coming over the meadow path, the low sun lengthening out their shadows and those of the haycocks on their way.

'So soon come away!' exclaimed the mother.

'I am going to walk home with Lucy,' said Wilfred, 'and that is as good as the feast!'

'Nonsense,' with a playful slap at him, 'but I have to be back in good time, as little Master Owen won't go to sleep as he ought, or he'll wake up and make such a to-do as never was.'

'Ain't that spoiling the child?' said Laura.

'Maybe, but you see he has been very ill, the dear, and the doctor says he must not cry, or he will not be responsible for the consequences.'

'Poor little dear!' said Mrs. Truman, always grieved for any little child in trouble. 'But you must have some flowers to take home, my dear; I'll cut them in a minute.'

In fact, she wondered that Laura had not thought of doing so before, and Laura looked on, vexed to see a branch of moss roses cut with two or three buds upon it. And oh, those pinks! What havoc! She could hardly keep from crying out, and decided to 'give it to mother well' when they were gone. And Lucy took them with a sweet smile and a kiss, and declared they would make her nursery sweet ever so long. Laura could hardly make up an amiable face to receive her parting kiss, and called to her mother not to

stand staring there after them just as the dew was making it chilly.

Mrs. Truman came obediently in a moment. 'Well, it does me good to see them so happy, the dears. It just brings back my old days, when your father was courting me. Such a fine lusty fellow he was, and I little thought——' and there tears came, but were winked back in a minute. 'But there! He is better off now, thank the Lord! And young folk have their day! Have you shut up the fowls?'

'No, I tried to, but they were just like all the rest. They would not come in for me, not they!' said Laura, not quite knowing how that drake's waggle of tail and top-knot had clenched her sense of disregard and desertion.

CHAPTER III

THE HEYDAY OF HOPE

Then, dearest maiden, move along these shades,
In gentleness of heart.—WORDSWORTH.

THE mother's heart might be glad as she looked at the pair crossing the field in the late summer sunshine, rejoicing in the long pleasant walk before them, a very rare treat, for Lucy was much taken up with her charges, and had been away at the seaside for six weeks with the little delicate Owen, who had to be there while recovering from an operation. This was the first time she had seen Wilfred's home or his sister since both had been very small children and they had met at a relation's at Minsterham; though she had seen Mrs. Truman several times at Poppleby.

'And how did you get on with Laura?' asked Wilfred, who was very fond of his sister.

'Poor Laura! She is more changed than I ever could have thought for! I remember everybody

saying what a lovely little child she was, and oh! it is sad!'

'Yes, and she bears it so well, never seems to mind about her looks at all, but is quite resigned. I hope you and she will be great friends.'

'We ought to,' said Lucy.

'How did you get on?' said Wilfred, a little disappointed by Lucy's tone.

'Is she not very shy?' asked Lucy.

'Is she? I shouldn't have thought so, but perhaps she had a shy fit to-day, as she would not go down to the Jubilee.'

'Well, perhaps I was. She is so clever that it made me afraid, and when I am frightened I always get to talk fast. Didn't you say she wrote verses, sweetly pretty?'

'Ay! She did a very nice poem that Miss Pearson thought might quite have gone into the *Minsterham Journal*, but Miss Carbonel said it was too like the "May Queen"—or some such thing—and it ought to be more original.'

'Oh! what a pity. I wish she had shown it to me!'

'She will some time or other, when you get to know one another better. You do know mother

pretty well already, dear. She says, do you know, it is only a pity you can't be Darling still, but I say that you can't help always being.'

'Oh nonsense, Wilfred. But your mother! She is the perfect dear! I do feel that she will be like a mother to me. I could nestle up to her and be safe.'

'That's my darling Lucy. And you like the old house?'

'Like it! I don't wonder Laura writes poetry, living in such a dear old place, just like a story, with old trees and shade, and roses and honeysuckles. And to think of living there, too, close to your mother, under the same roof, yet all to ourselves, only it seems a shame that we should have the best rooms.'

'That can't be helped. Mother would be lost if we put her that side of the house with a knocker to the door, and not able to run out in a moment to the fowls. I'll mow the grass on the old front, and put in a few flowers, and have it all spruce and genteel by the time you come.'

'Ah! that's not just yet, sir! Master Owen must get strong first.'

'You'll make me jealous of your Master Owen.'

'But you ain't foreman yet.'

'No, but Peters is a regular old dunderhead, can't enter into any of the new improvements. He's a good old fellow, but Whetstone is a man with a temper and may give him the sack any day. And then I'm in hopes of his situation.'

'And that would be two guineas a week.'

'More, if the business flourishes as it promises to do. Miss Estrid is determined on one's having a share in the business, and she will be sure to carry out her plans, only Mr. Whetstone, he says we must get a hold on the market first!'

'And it is thirty shillings now. You allow ten to your mother? Or would it be more?'

'Hardly, unless times went badly—illness belike, or not getting needlework, or bad luck with the poultry, but mother is a saving body, and would not come on us if she could help it, and Harry sends home a few pounds sometimes. I expect I shall have a fight to make her take the ten, but she can't allow but that we must pay for our rooms.'

'And what nice rooms they are, and how pretty we will make them. There is a green cretonne at Jenkins's just what would made such charming

curtains, all over periwinkles. I do think I will buy it at once. I have twenty pounds in the savings bank.'

'I shall look out for furniture whenever I have to go to Minsterham.'

So they walked on, planning the building of their nest, as the dew fell and silvered the fields, and after a little mumbling hesitation Wilfred produced something from his pocket, and just as Lucy was declaring that she must get on faster, for Master Owen would never go to sleep without her, or if he did would wake up and cry, Wilfred said, 'Stop one moment, Lucy, I have something for you, if you will accept of it.'

It was wrapped up carefully in tissue paper, and proved to be a very pretty brooch, rather too large, but showing a landscape delicately painted. There was still light enough to see that the scene was a cottage door covered with creepers, beside a water-wheel down which the stream fell in mother-of-pearl colours, both in it and on the pool below, and in the rainbow above.

'O, lovely, lovely!' was Lucy's cry. 'Did you make this yourself, Wilfred?'

'Well, it is a design of Miss Estrid's, but the

finishing it up, I did! And what should I have for it, darling Lucy?'

Lucy looked up and down the field and saw nothing but a pony before she let him take his reward, while her cheeks coloured and she tried to be only looking at her brooch.

'And it is real mother-of-pearl—the water,' she said, 'and the rainbow?'

'No, it isn't. That's the beauty of it! It is made like the real mother-of-pearl by getting a smooth colourless surface, and then indenting it with minute grooves to catch and disperse the light.'

Lucy looked very much puzzled. 'A rainbow is light on falling water, we learnt at school,' she said.

'Light broken up, and so it is here. And so it is in the shell, and the pigeon's neck, and all. Mr. Whetstone explained it to me, all about prismatic colours. You see——'

'Oh! don't, dear Wilfred,' said Lucy, quite frightened at the long word. 'I mustn't stop now; Master Owen will be crying for me, and I can love my dear brooch quite as well without understanding all about it, till there's time for

you to tell me. Oh! there!' For just then a rocket shot up arch-wise into the sky, and burst in a shower of sparks.

Lucy cried out at the beauty, as a second burst into a blue and red shower, but then she asked in a low voice: 'Your sister; will she mind it?'

'Ah! poor Laura! Mother will have put her to bed and drawn the curtain,' said Wilfred. 'Nay, now, Lucy, don't hurry! Stay and look! Your mistress won't mind! Jubilees don't come so often.'

'Ah! but Master Owen will mind. I can't give him a bad night again, the dear, and if he wakes and hears the holloaing, he will be upset and as bad as ever.'

Wilfred muttered a little grumble about making him jealous of Master Owen, and something too about, 'Why could not his mother look after him? What was the good of a mother if she could not mind her own children?'

But Lucy was determined, and made him let her go at the gate of Popple Court, which really was a fine old farmhouse, where the best rooms were let off by the owners to London folk in want of a country home in the summer?

To her great relief, she found little Owen fast asleep in the pretty old attic room that served for his nursery, with a sloping ceiling and a dormer window, out of which she could see the rockets sailing upwards. His elder brother and sister were kept at a safe distance from the house, and their exclamations hushed, and the three-months' baby being also asleep, his nurse was glad to leave the charge to Lucy and hasten out to join the farm people in watching these outskirts of the Downhill entertainment.

The Sterlings were a delicate family, nervous, excitable and hysterical, that is to say, the mother and her children were so. In the winter, little Owen, then nearly three years old, had a bad fall, and so hurt his head that a serious operation was needful, and he required such care and treatment afterwards that the doctor declared that the only chance for his recovery or reason, or for his mother's life, was to send him quite away from her, out of the way of his noisy brother and sister, to the seaside for some months to come.

Lucy, who had throughout been better able to deal with the little patient than anyone else, was therefore to go with him to the house of an old

bachelor relation of Mr. Sterling, at Bonchurch, in the Isle of Wight. She was very fond of her little charge, and greatly enjoyed seeing him revive and grow stronger and more intelligent in the pure fresh air, the sweet silence of the country, and out of reach of the other children's noises and of his mother's almost fretful solicitude. The worst of it was that his nervous temperament had become painful shyness. He could not bear the sight of his old great-uncle or the housekeeper, screamed if a child on the beach approached him, and could only be kept quiet by Lucy's exclusive attention; and though she knew it was spoiling him, the strict warnings of the doctor against letting him cry or be excited made it needful to humour him.

It would have been a very dull life for her, but that her only sister, Mrs. Hart, was a sailor's wife, and lived at Ryde, and while her children were at school she was often able to come and spend an hour or two with Lucy, whom her air, and especially her voice, so much resembled that Owen could endure her presence on the beach with his Lulu.

His seclusion was not good for his manners,

but, as his father said, on running down to see him, and being received with a howl and hidden face, his health must be the first object, and manners need not make man just yet. Thus it was only when the family went to spend the vacation at Popple Court that Lucy brought him to them again, a fair, rosy, flaxen-haired, lovely little being, only still too waxy-looking and of too transparent a complexion for perfect health, much improved in strength and intelligence, and quite able to talk, as well as to amuse himself, but still overwhelmed with shyness and timidity, and quite collapsing at a sharp word.

He regarded the new baby that had arrived in his absence with distant respect, and the nurse with dislike, but was furious if his Lucy attempted to touch the little one, almost getting convulsed, so that she had to give up the attempt to overcome his jealousy, and to silence the much scandalised brother and sister when they were profuse in their exclamations of 'Naughty Owen!' and 'How wicked not to love poor baby!'

Towards his mother his recollection had revived enough to make him accept her affection complacently, and even to begin to return it; and

he could play at times with his sister Hilda; but he had never seen much of his father, a busy professor, and very slowly was beginning to make friends with him, and be more than merely tolerated, when, the day after the Jubilee of Downhill, a most dreadful idea seized upon Mr. Sterling.

He became the possessor of a photographic apparatus, and could not rest without continually exercising its powers. Of course, Herbert and Hilda were only too much delighted to sit—but they could not keep quiet, and instantaneous methods, especially for amateurs, were still in the future. The baby was as good as if she had been a chrysalis, and all the farm establishment sat most willingly and were depicted to perfection. There was an old labourer, perched on his milking-stool, who came out like an absolute work of art; but the great desire was to get a good photograph of little Owen, not only because he was a very beautiful child, but because there were anxious forebodings that this loveliness was a very fragile thing, and that his parents might not long retain the pretty creature among them.

But unfortunately nothing seemed so much to terrify the boy. 'Father wanted to take his like-

ness' sounded to him as if he were to be deprived of something. The dark chamber, so carefully shut up, was a horrible mystery, perhaps enhanced by a careless word of Herbert's, and to see that three-legged box pointed at him filled him with terror and agony such as no one could wish to see perpetuated on his features. Authority and reasoning were powerless, coaxing and promises alike failed, and Herbert's teasing about such folly had to be summarily stopped.

At last one day of beautiful early autumn the ladies at Greenhow had a small children's party to which Mrs. Sterling took her elder children, and Owen and his Lucy had the garden to themselves, except when the baby was walked up and down the central path between the cabbages by his nurse. Mr. Sterling asked Lucy whether it might not be contrived. She thought so, if he would be on the watch, and take care not to show his camera until absolutely necessary.

Finally, after a good deal of running about and playing at filling his little cart with the recently-cut grass, Owen actually stood still by Lucy's knee, in rapt attention, while she mended the broken harness of his wooden horse, crooning

away all the time, in the way he liked, about poor Gee-gee's adventures ever since he was a little colt. Not till there was a slight pause in the tongue and fingers, did Owen turn and see that dreadful box turned on him, and the hood over it. He perceived it with a scream and a rush into her arms, and she was glad he did not think of her treacherously; but when she had soothed him and convinced him that nothing had happened, nor was anything going to happen to him, she found that her master was very well pleased, for there had been time to take two negatives, which promised well.

And when printed off, they were as much a success as an amateur could hope for. To be sure, Lucy's fine face and figure were the most prominent objects, but she could easily be erased, and the sweet childish face, set in long curls, had come out well, one likeness a profile, the other nearly a full face, and only the third attempt had become a blur.

'ONE MOMENT, LUCY, I HAVE SOMETHING FOR YOU.'

CHAPTER IV

UP THE POLE

Gay hope is theirs of fancy bred.—Scott.

It was evening some six months later, and in the drawing-room at Greenhow sat the three Carbonel ladies. The room had a bay window, now opening down to the ground, but on a winter evening concealed by the heavy crimson curtains drawn across the whole bay. The old laburnum paper, brought long ago from Paris, was a thing of the past, and had had two successors before the walls became pale grey, with a deep dado of bulrushes, irises, and other water plants, varied by dragon-flies, reed sparrows, frogs and newts, according to a prevailing fashion, but all minutely and scientifically painted by Estrid Carbonel, the artistic and enterprising young lady of the family, while her sister Malvina contented herself with being her aunt's faithful deputy and 'henchwoman.'

Miss Carbonel was reading aloud, in her sweet

measured voice, 'The Antiquary,' for she had found her nieces to be in great need of being indoctrinated with real literature in addition to the portions they had been set to dissect and analyse down to the marrow of their bones. Mally was busy over a doll which was to be sent out to her little niece in India. 'Which won't be half so pretty as an Indian lady in her native dress,' said Estrid, looking up from her drawing.

'Yes, don't you remember how Lady Dufferin says it went to her heart to give fashionable young lady dolls to the schoolchildren, as if they were models to creatures in free white muslin?'

'Ah! when shall we come to simple white muslin drapery, all in one piece, instead of our multiplicity of coats and petticoats?' sighed Estrid.

'We should not know how to put it on or keep it on,' said Mally.

'Even King Lear had his buttons,' said her aunt.

'I hope Maggie Mucklebackit is not transformed into a fashionable lady,' said Estrid.

'No, I believe the Newhaven fishwomen keep their costume as a sort of uniform that tourists expect,' said Malvina.

'But contrast the Tay bridge with the Diligence, better called the Sloth!' said Estrid.

'And how much do we gain?' said Malvina.

'Something in good humour as well as in time,' said Estrid.

'Do we?' asked her aunt. 'Are there not as many objurgations bestowed on a train supposed to be late as ever Mr. Oldbuck launched on the old woman in her cellar?'

'By forty man and woman power instead of one,' laughed Mally. 'But pray go on, Aunt Sophy. I want to hear of the adventure with the tide, which I faintly remember.'

'Hark! there's a step on the gravel. Will it be Mr. Elwood, or will Mr. Whetstone come into report on his journey?'

Mr. Whetstone it was, a good-looking man of about thirty, with a dark moustache. He was evidently in high spirits, and made some apology for interrupting the ladies in the evening by saying that he thought Miss Estrid would be glad to hear his news.

'Oh yes, thank you!' and she looked up eagerly from her design, which was an imitation of a rich Indian pattern, such as might serve for

a panel. He looked and admired. 'Very good, very excellent, Miss Estrid. Perhaps it should be a little more conventional in the execution.'

'Stiffer, do you mean? It is so hard to make what is graceful without being limp.'

'Exactly so, and what is elegance in your hands becomes in the workman's either hard or else feeble.'

'In Peters's, you may say. He has made a spectacle for gods and men out of that vase that I designed from the Etruscan patterns. "It required to be more Hindian, a touch or two, miss," he said, "the public expects the horiental in our material."'

'Peters is only fit for mechanical work. He does not know what taste is.'

'Doesn't he? Thorough cockney taste, and immense pride in "gauging the public," as he tells me!'

'Exactly; his taste lies in the direction of the Philistine, and he has no notion of directing or raising it.'

'I ask as an ignorant outsider,' said Miss Carbonel, looking up from her knitting, 'is the object to direct public taste or to make your own con-

cern answer? Or is that too base an idea for you?'

'A fico for the world and worldings base,' murmured Mally.

'To succeed through raising the public taste, Miss Carbonel,' said Mr. Whetstone, with an inclination of the head.

'Which will never be done while Peters is at the head of affairs,' said Estrid. 'You will never keep him there. Young Wilfred Truman is worth a dozen of him.'

'And knows it,' murmured Malvina.

'Peters is useful for the practical management and for authority over the hands. I could not set him aside for a young fellow like Truman. But I had thought of importing a manager to be over them both, and raising Truman's wages, giving him the ornamental department.'

'That would be good news,' observed Miss Sophia to her niece; 'it might enable him to marry.'

'And he is so good to his mother and poor Laura,' added Mally. 'It makes one quite excuse a little cockiness.'

'Less to be wondered at,' added Miss Sophia, 'that it seems to me that the gift of Christian

humility is very hard to be won in his station, where self-assertion is so much needed in resisting temptation from evil companions.'

'Which accounts for a good young man being generally a prig.'

And at that moment they caught Mr. Whetstone's voice in the midst of the consultation saying 'If he was not such a prig.'

At which they both laughed, and Miss Carbonel, taking up arms, said, 'That's what you say if a young man is really good for anything.'

'Well, I like a young man to be like a young man, Miss Carbonel,' Mr. Whetstone owned, 'but I know the ladies will be against me.'

All the three ladies broke out in defence of Wilfred Truman's spirit, and explanation of how responsibility for his mother and sister had kept him steady and thoughtful. Estrid added that she thought his refined nature and taste for art were a good deal the means of keeping him straight.

Mr. Whetstone acknowledged it all, but ended by saying, 'Still, I always have my doubts of your extra steady young man; you never know where nature may break out, some time or other.'

'Grace may conquer nature,' whispered Malvina,

but she was not heard. However, it was quite certain that Wilfred Truman was an exemplary young man—a member of the Communicants' Guild, a Sunday School teacher, a volunteer, the noted cricket champion of the parish, and so forth.

It was a few days later than the conversation at Greenhow that Wilfred came home with a gay, joyous step. 'Laura, mother,' he exclaimed as he stood at the door, 'what do you think?'

'More wages?' exclaimed Laura.

'Well, yes, but that's not all.'

'You are foreman! Oh, Willie.'

'Manager, if you please, ma'am!'

'Instead of Mr. Peters! Oh!'

'Yes! Old Peters had a tremendous row with Mr. Whetstone and Miss Estrid about altering her designs, and also about taking a lot of shoddy kind of stuff, mere filthy waste sheets of used-up paper, instead of good durable brown paper. Luckily for me, he took offence and resigned on the spot, and behold! Your humble servant is to be manager, with a salary of 100*l.* per annum!'

'A hundred pounds a year!' cried Laura with rounded eyes, getting up to come and kiss him.

'A hundred pounds a year,' said his mother,

more thoughtfully; 'why, that is not quite ten shillings a week more than you have already.'

'Well, mother, I was offered my choice of two pounds a week or 100*l.* a year, coming to the same thing, but a salary in a round sum sounds so much better. The hands will think the more of it.'

'But will it be so good for you, my son?' asked his mother. 'Four pounds less, you see.'

'In name, but not in reality, counting the weeks that may be missed, holidays, illness and so forth, which are covered by the quarter's salary. Never you fear, mother, I have savings enough not to want an advance. Besides, there will be tips from people that come down to see the works. That is, if I find it suitable to take them round myself, and accept anything from them,' he added with his high and mighty air, which impressed his sister, though his mother smiled a little.

'I trust you, my boy,' she said.

'And now,' he added, 'all is clear before me. I shall have something to offer to Lucy worth accepting! I must see to the painting and papering for her after hours.'

'Poor dear, it will be good news for her,' said his mother.

'A fine rise from being a servant,' added Laura, 'Dear me, how stuck-up she will look!'

'Lucy? Stuck up? No such thing!' exclaimed Wilfred, indignantly; 'you do not know my Lucy!'

'We shall all come to know her better,' said his mother. 'It will be something to cheer her, poor thing, in losing that sister she was so fond of.'

'Yes, she feels it very much,' said Wilfred. 'I will take the first day possible to run up to town and see her. There will be nothing in our way now.'

'Not even the dear Master Owen?' said Laura.

'I believe he has outgrown his shyness and nonsense,' returned Wilfred. 'She was spared to go down to Portsea for a week; indeed, I do not know whether she has returned. I shall hear to-morrow, and then I will run up and settle with her when she is to give warning. Hindrances are over, and nothing but a prosperous career before us.'

'Thank the Lord for it, my son,' said his mother, folding her hands, 'and pray that it may be so!'

CHAPTER V

A BLOW

Judge not what is best
By pleasure, though to nature seeming meet.—MILTON.

THE letter, received on Saturday morning, was written in great haste, telling Wilfred that Lucy was just returning to London, having been much perplexed about the disposal of her sister's 'poor dear children.' She would say more when she had time.

He decided upon this on running up by the mail train the next night, and getting home in time for his work on the Monday. True, he must miss his attendance in the choir and his class in the Sunday School, but it was gratifying to hear Mr. Elwood say, 'Well, well, we will do our best to get on without you. Such things must happen sometimes, and I wish every one would be as careful in giving notice of absence.'

Wilfred had seen enough of London churches to esteem it a treat to be able to go to one, it was

only a choice between them, so he slept in the train, got a wash and breakfast at a small inn near the station, and went to St. Paul's, making his way afterwards in the direction of Mr. Sterling's, and getting a bit of food at an eating-house on the way, glad to have knowledge enough of London not to play the part of the countryman astray, and in due time he found his way to Kensington, and saw a figure in mourning escorting three little children to a church whose bell was ringing. He followed them in, hardly heeding when a sign was made to him to sit far back, nor did he at once discover that he was the only male member of the congregation beyond the age of sailor suits and knickerbockers. But he could see the black flowers upon Lucy's hat, and now and then her profile, and that was enough for him. How much he heard of the catechising is not on record, in fact, he did not consider the service to be meant for him, and only sat there to pass away the time.

Yet one text which the clergyman repeated several times, and made the children say after him till they knew it, kept on ringing as it were in the air:

> **Oh tarry thou the Lord's leisure.**
> **Be strong, and He shall comfort thine heart,**
> **And put thou thy trust in the Lord.**

He had not gathered how it was brought in, and the thought occurred to him that it was an odd text to choose for those little creatures without any troubles of their own, but at any rate Laura would be pleased to hear that he remembered something. There was only a hymn to follow, and then the children were marched out of church. Wilfred contrived to meet Lucy in the porch, but all he could get was a hasty breathless 'I can't, no, I can't. You must not come with me. No, no, but let me get home. I'll ask—I must speak to you! Yes! I'll come. Wait for me by the garden gate.'

She had cut every murmured remonstrance or entreaty short, and Wilfred had sense enough to recollect that a respectable nurse could not well walk her young man home with her charges, but he followed at a distance where he could still keep his eye upon that tuft of black barley ears and grass on her tall head, and it was rather a blow to see a slim figure of a man, in a tweed suit, join the little party, while the children clung about

him. He walked home with them, while Wilfred could only keep at what he supposed was a safe distance, scanning the person with no friendly eyes, and mentally deciding that if this were a gentleman and a relation of the children, still he had no business to talk to Lucy as well as to them, and she—she had no business to look as if she liked it. He supposed she did, women always liked swells, not that this was much of a swell. That was an old hat, and a shabby turn-out, as if the fellow had not been keeping his Sunday. Wilfred looked with angered complacency at his own spotless suit as much more befitting the time and place. He saw the whole party vanish into the house. He thought Lucy turned her head to look for him as she went last, but the page-boy shut the door and he could not be certain.

He waited and waited, gnawing his heart with vexation, and imagining all sorts of things, the worst of which was his fancy that she was helping the children in some romping game with 'that beast.' So far had he arrived at terming the interloper, before Lucy emerged from the area and had come close to him, and said, 'Wilfred!' while he was still gazing defiance at the front door.

'So there you are at last!' he said, in no amiable voice.

'I could not come before. Mrs. Sterling had a visitor, and I could not speak with her.'

'Could no one else give you leave?'

'It is nurse's Sunday out, so that it was not convenient, but my mistress was very kind, and said she would keep the baby for an hour. I must not stay longer, for they go to church in the evening, but Mr. Rupell was there, and he always amuses the children.'

'Oh! That swell who you seemed so pleased should walk home with you!'

'I couldn't help it, Wilfred dear. He is the children's own uncle, and they are very fond of him.'

'O, I daresay!'

'Come, Wilfred, don't let us waste our time over such nonsense. You *must* see I had no right to send him away. We have but a short time, and we need not quarrel. I have been through a great deal lately, and I did so want to see you.'

'Poor Lucy,' said Wilfred, softened by her pleading voice and look. 'But I have good news for you which I came to tell you. What do you say to my being foreman with 100*l.* a year?'

'Oh! Wilfred, I am glad. I congratulate you with all my heart!'

'And now, you see, my darling, there's nothing to hinder us from being one as soon as possible,' he said, squeezing her arm within his, for they had reached a quiet walk in Kensington Gardens.

'Ah! stay a bit, I had—I had to tell you——'

'You have not been making any promises about that pet child.'

'Master Owen! Oh no; he is all right now! It is nearer to me, and my bounden duty. My poor sister's children.'

'Why! They have got a father, haven't they?'

'If they have, poor dears, but there has been no news of him for ever so long, and there was a report of a whole ship's crew being murdered by the savages in the islands. And I do believe it was that news, coming upon Mary just as she was getting over the influenza, that was her death.'

'But surely there are ways of finding out—Lloyd's—isn't that the name?'

'Ah! but the *Sweetheart* is not an English ship. Jem Hart served out his time, and then took up with an American skipper and sailed for the Pacific islands.'

Wilfred whistled in dismay. 'Are you sure of the ship?'

'Not at all. The *Sweetheart's* name was not given, but poor Mary made sure of it; she thought she had a dream, and she made me promise I would look after her poor orphans. It is a whole year since we heard of poor Jem!'

'The scoundrel!'

'No, no, don't say that.'

'Most likely he has got another wife out there.'

'Hush! hush! Wilfred, please! As I told Mary, out in those parts there would be no convenience for sending letters, and most likely we shall hear from him by-and-by, but till he writes and sends some money, I must be responsible for the children.'

'That's'—he hesitated, suppressed a passionate word that would have shocked Lucy, and with a stammer said, 'hard! Is there no one else? Where are the brats now?'

'Tom is with his uncle, Jem's brother, who says he will trust to what Jem sends home, but I fear he and his wife will get all of it even if it comes. And the two little girls, four and two years old, are with my aunt at Minsterham, but she is sixty-

four years of age, and has so little for herself that I must help her with them.'

'Then what do you really mean to say?'

'I meant to say, dear Wilfred, that I cannot think about marrying yet, not till I hear of Jem Hart, so as to fix about the children. I thought you would not mind, as we were any way to wait —but it is all the harder now you have got this rise.'

'Harder! To be sure it is, very hard on me, when that was all I cared about it for! Very hard on me—because a fellow deserts his wife and children.'

'No, no, we don't know that he has. You couldn't wish me to let them go on the parish, Wilfred?'

'But how long are you to be burthened with them? Are there not asylums or orphanages or something? Wasn't he in the navy?'

'Yes, but he lost all that benefit by going over to the Americans, unluckily. And I hope they are not orphans either.'

'But how long is this for?' repeated Wilfred.

'Dear Wilfred, I hope and trust only till Jem comes home, or can settle about the children. I

have written to him, of course, and hope he will get the letter. He may be at home any day, and make some arrangement, and then I should be free.'

'And that's the best you would have me look to!'

'How can I help it, Wilfred?'

'And supposing you don't hear of him. Suppose the cannibals have eaten him——'

'Hush, Wilfred, don't!'

'Or suppose he has gone and married a black nigger woman, and you hear no more of him, what then?'

'Why then—then I suppose I must look after Mary's poor children! Don't, Wilfred; don't you see I can't give up my duty or my promise?'

'Well, and I suppose there's enough for us all. I'm not a brute, Lucy; I could go on doing something for the children, if that will satisfy you.'

'That's very generous, dear, but you have your mother and sister, and just think, this is only ten shillings a week more than you had before, and that was not reckoned enough to marry on. Now you will have to keep up more appearances, you know.'

Wilfred did know, and he liked it.

'And you see, though I can work for the children as I am, getting good wages too, I could not if you were in a situation, as your wife.'

'Certainly not,' he said emphatically. 'I do not marry a wife for her to work. What do you give for the looking after these brats?'

'She can't do it for less than five shillings a week, and that is only because she is a relation and very good, and they are so little.'

'Stripping yourself! I call that a shame! And suppose we took them home to live with us——'

'Oh! Wilfred, that is good and generous, but I don't think that would be fair upon you, who have to support your mother and sister. They would not like it either.'

'Never mind that.'

'But I do mind it; I ought to mind it. I can't put all this on you, and I don't know what besides.'

'Then the long and short of it is,' said Wilfred hotly, 'that you care for these brats more than for me.'

This brought tears and choking assurance, which pacified Wilfred and made him ashamed of his anger. He asked Lucy if she did not know

that he would never let the poor little nieces go to the workhouse, and she sobbed out, 'That was the very thing! How could she let him take more upon him than he knew? He who had a mother and sister dependent?'

He cooled a little, and at last, under the stress of a striking clock, an agreement was come to that at any rate the question must be put off till there had been time to hear from James Hart, who, as Wilfred declared, with wish father to the thought, would carry his children off to America, to which Lucy could only answer, 'Poor little dears!'

They parted at the area gate, and it was only when Wilfred looked up and saw 'that swell,' sitting among the flowers in the balcony, with little Owen on his knee, that it struck him whether such society could be reconciling Lucy to remaining in service. But he was at once ashamed of such a notion, and dismissed it quickly, trying to dwell on hopes amounting to security of his own future promotion, when he should be too prosperous to care whether Hart returned to take care of his children, or became a meal for the cannibals. 'Serve him right,' muttered Wilfred between his teeth, 'for sneaking off to the Yankees.'

CHAPTER VI

AN ENGLISH SQUAW

It's oh to be a slave
Along with the barbarous Turk,
Where woman has never a soul to save,
If this is Christian work.—T. HOOD.

NEWS of Hart the sailor did not come, and Lucy, having more time for reflection, wrote to Wilfred entreating him either to wait patiently, or to release her from her engagement. She could not throw up the responsibility for her sister's children, nor could she marry him while perfectly uncertain whether they might not be wholly dependent upon her for support. She thanked him for the impulse of generosity that made him ready to charge himself with them, but it would be wrong in her to accept it from one already burdened with his mother and helpless sister. Unless the business so prospered that his present salary should be doubled, she saw no possibility of marriage till Hart should be heard of and undertake the charge of his children.

Mrs. Truman said that Lucy was a good girl

and quite right. Laura considered that the letter was very cool, and that it was not what she should have written, and her censure made Wilfred defend it and approve of it much more than in his first disappointment.

Things were going on merrily at the factory, and the notion of having shares in it, as Miss Estrid had proposed, and thus increasing his means, excited Wilfred much. He talked as if he were ready to provide for a dozen children instead of only two, and as if Laura should have a donkey chair, and Lucy keep a servant. His mother laughed and asked why he did not speak of setting up a carriage and pair at once, and he gravely answered 'Perhaps they should in time.'

One cold March day he came in saying, 'Mother, could we not give these two a lodging for a few nights somewhere? They have come to get work at our place, and they say the young woman is a dab at toys. They can't get a lodging nowhere, and Mr. Whetstone asked me if we could not make room for them, and as, worse luck, we don't use those rooms, we might take them in for a bit.'

There they were with a perambulator packed

to overflowing, evidently with all their worldly goods, the proper owner thereof, a tiny baby, fretting in the young woman's arms. And a *very* young woman she looked, quite a girl and pretty, except that she had a thin worn look that did not suit her evident youthfulness. Her husband, with a hat on a little on one side, looked even younger, in spite of a budding moustache; he was fairly well dressed, and there was a swaggering air about him, so that he might more easily be taken for a lad lately broken away from school and classes than for a married man, especially as he had a pipe in his mouth. Mrs. Truman was not delighted with his looks, but the poor young mother seemed so dusty, chilled by east wind, wearied and exhausted that the kind heart could not turn her away from the door, but let her sink down into a chair, asked Laura to take the baby from her, and hastened to give her a cup of the tea that was prepared for Wilfred.

'I say, landlady, this is stunning,' said the young man gazing round, 'but you'll come down no end for it.'

It was in a sort of slang that Mrs. Truman hardly understood, being so different from her

own dialect, but she answered, 'You are kindly welcome to the tea. We'll see about the rest.'

The young woman looked up with a great soft pair of brown eyes, and said 'Thank you, ma'am,' all the more when Mrs. Truman took the empty bottle from the baby (too little in her eyes for such advanced food), washed it out, and filled it again with milk and warm water, asking meantime how old it was. 'Nine weeks,' she was told, to which she could only answer, 'Poor little dear!'

The man was eating hungrily the rashers ready for Wilfred's consumption, and explaining that they had come from Birmingham in search of work. Their name was Greylark. She had been employed in the *papier mâché* factory till 'the kid came and hindered her,' and they would not take her on again, 'she was so long about it'—some evil words accompanying the sentence, only that Wilfred broke in: 'Hush! That's not what my mother and sister are accustomed to.'

'Oh, you're on that religious lay, be you?'

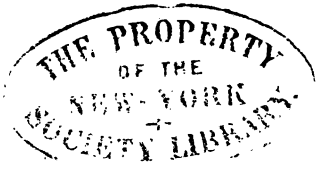
However, whereas Wilfred was what he called his boss, he mitigated his language as he declared himself to have been engaged in the iron and brass works belonging to the business, but laid so

much stress on his wife's cleverness in the toy department that Laura thought it very amiable of him, till she began to perceive that he was trying to put a high price upon her employment.

What he had done himself was not equally clear, though he talked very big about his capabilities. Presently he put his hands in his pockets and lounged out, saying he would look about a little while Eva put things straight.

Poor little Eva seemed to be quite 'done up,' and when Mrs. Truman asked whether the things were being sent from the station, she said 'Oh no, they were all in here,' pointing to the perambulator, which was not only stuffed, but piled up, with a dirty old rug tucked down over all. So stuffy did the whole thing smell and look that Mrs. Truman felt a great dislike to turning it out in her clean rooms which were to receive Wilfred and his bride, and Laura fairly made a face at the notion.

But beyond the back kitchen there was a sort of lean-to, where the apprentice boy had slept in old Mr. Goodenough's time, and where she kept sundry stores of herbs, onions, and the like in their season. It was empty at the moment, and



she decided on there bestowing Mrs. Greylark for the night.

The poor little thing seemed to be too much tired to care about anything. She hardly looked up, but she pulled off the rug, disclosing a strange medley of clothes, clean and otherwise, a tea-kettle, a ragged blanket, and a thin thing that called itself a mattress; and having spread this out, she asked for the baby and prepared to lay herself down with it, without more preparation for herself or him than taking off her boots and outer garments.

'Poor thing! you are quite worn out,' said Mrs. Truman; 'I'll take the baby and wash him if you like.'

'Thank ye kindly, but he will screech. I washed him last Sunday, and my! what a row he made!'

'Poor little man, no wonder!' said Mrs. Truman, carrying him off, and asking no more questions, for the poor young thing was too much tired to answer them.

Laura was fond of babies, and ready to take interest in the newcomer, and the idea of the poor child never having been washed for five days

horrified her. And so of course did the state of his clothes, and the sore tender places in the folds of his skin. Mrs. Truman sent her to the drawer where reposed the little garments which she had been the last to wear, declaring that any way the dear child should have his little self decent for that one night. He was quiet, and probably still under the effect of some drug, and was a rather pretty little thing.

His mother scarcely moved when he was laid by her side, and Mrs. Truman and Laura vied with Wilfred in declaring that, in spite of pity, these were impossible lodgers. The cart-shed could be entered from without, so they did not know when or how the young husband returned, but in the morning, long after all the Trumans were up and about, the wife was seen washing her face with a rag at the bucket by the well in the court, and ruffling up her fringe of hair. She asked if she could hear of a girl with whom to leave the baby while she went to offer herself at the factory, and Laura, being a baby-lover, undertook to take charge of it for the time. Wilfred had long been gone, but when he came home to dinner he threw himself back in his chair and

burst out laughing. 'Well!' he said, 'that's the queerest lot that ever I did hear of! Why, the chap is not nineteen yet, nor his little missus seventeen.'

'But you have taken them on?' asked Laura, who had seen the mother and given back the child.

'Oh yes, she has a dainty hand at working up and painting, been bred to it, you see, and he says he can work at the pressing, where we want a hand, now the young fellows want to be after harvest. But he's a born loafer, I can see!'

'Poor young thing! And how could they go and marry?' asked Mrs. Truman.

'Why, that's the best of it. I asked him when she was gone in to Spelman's to buy something for dinner, and he said, if you'll believe me, "Because he was out of work." I thought I could not have heard him right; but no, it was because he was out of work, and she had good pay; and when I said, "What! marry to make your wife keep you?" he answers, "What else is a woman good for?"'

'Poor thing!' cried Laura, 'treating her just like a Red Indian.'

'Ay, and when she came out he swore at her for not having bought him any baccy, till I told him to shut up; I wouldn't have such carryings on in my presence, nor in my house.'

'Poor creatures!' sighed Mrs. Truman; 'it is sad to think of the wife and child.'

'But we cannot have such wretched goings-on here,' said Laura. 'They must look out for another place.'

'That I left them doing,' said Wilfred, 'but I doubt if they will get one. All the houses in Downhill are full up, and more, with that London builder's men, and there's none at Uphill either. If we let them have the cart-shed, they would not be much in our way, going out through the farm-yard; and may be I could take the young chap in hand, for I can see he is little better than a heathen.'

'I should like to get that poor baby properly looked after,' said Mrs. Truman, 'but I just couldn't have that mattress of hers within my doors. If they stay here, I'll have every rag washed, and show her how to stuff it with hulls. What could her folks have been after to let her marry such a chap as that?'

'Oh, you don't know what the girls are in such places,' said Wilfred.

They knew a little more in the course of the day, after Mrs. Greylark came home, bringing a few more necessaries of life with her, but not much of what Mrs. Truman had learnt to consider as such.

She had bought some soap, and was prepared to wash a few things out, apparently in the single saucepan, if Mrs. Truman had not lent her a tub, and let her have water out of her boiler.

'Bless me, it is like the washhouses!' she said. 'And what a place it is!' she added, 'as swell as a lady's! What do your brother have a week to keep it so? And don't you do nothing?' she added to Laura.

'Yes; I do needlework and embroidery when I can, but that's not to be reckoned on. It pays for my clothes, but with your wage, you might have things as nice.'

'Oh my! But that would be such a trouble! and nobody bothered about such things in our street except Polly Pritt, and she was a regular old maid.'

The young creature chattered on, and Laura

discovered that she had lived at Birmingham ever since she could remember. Her mother had died while she was still a child, and her father had been a harsh, drinking man, often cruel to her and her elder sister, and driving them out to work for him as soon as they could leave the Board school. Then he had married a woman who seemed to have made life worse to them. The sister had run away, but wrote sometimes to Eva, who had thought of joining her, only she was clever at her work, liked it, and was well paid. Alfred Greylark had come in her way, 'and he was such a beau, and it was such fun to be married before any of 'em. Why, Aggy Roper is nearly eighteen, and not wedded yet! And you—but then you've had such a dreadful misfortune.'

Laura wondered whether she had found marriage itself equal 'fun' with the glory of being married.

It appeared that she had had a bad illness, and had been laid up for some time, during which her stepmother had been kind to her; but 'Alf,' as she called him, had fallen out of work at the factory, and the manager had 'gone on at him' and would not take either of them on again when she

had recovered. So they resolved to go elsewhere, and seeing an advertisement for a worker in the Downhill factory, and Alf having just been in luck, they packed up such scanty household goods as they did not sell, in the perambulator, and took their places in the train, making a brief visit of an hour or two to Eva's sister, who was a very handsome girl, and had drifted, somehow, into being an artist's model. She gave them a good meal, and half a sovereign, but she did not at all encourage their staying, since neither of them could hope to pose as a model, and she knew of no employment for either of them.

Alf's luck, it seemed, had been a successful bet, so that they were rather well off at the moment, only they spent the money that Mrs. Truman longed to see laid out in decent furniture in all such delicacies as the general dealer in Downhill could provide, and the household came very short off, but there was a bare sufficiency; and as the baby must be disposed of for the day, Mrs. Truman made an arrangement with one of the cottagers on the way to Downhill, who sometimes helped her in her work, and now undertook the charge of him for eighteenpence a week, skim-

milk and infants' food being provided. And Mrs. Truman and Mrs. Brinks came to an agreement that the poor little thing should be kept clean, though his mother seemed to regard a wash morning and evening as an unheard-of trouble alike to herself and to him.

'Poor young creatures! They are just like children themselves,' said Mrs. Truman.

'Yes, we must endeavour to raise their tone,' said Wilfred, sententiously.

'It will take lots of raising,' said Laura; 'yet I can't help liking the girl. But do you know that poor baby has never been baptized? They call him Percy Algernon, but it is no baptismal name.'

'We must see to that,' said Wilfred. This was at dinner on Sunday, when not a sign of the Greylarks had been seen!

CHAPTER VII

PAPER FABRICS

Visions of glory, spare my aching sight.—GRAY.

THE Greylarks stayed on at Hillside, chiefly because Mrs. Truman had not the heart to turn out the poor young helpless mother and her baby. Wilfred's idea of bringing them to better and higher ways accordant with those of Uphill did not seem to prosper, though earnestly backed by all the three Misses Carbonel.

The young man did not want to quarrel with one who was an authority at the works, and there was no open disturbance, since manifest excess in liquors, at least in such beer as the 'Fox and Hounds' supplied, was not to his taste, but he continually went over to Poppleby, as there was reason to think, for the love of betting, and to study the latest racing intelligence. He was not much of a workman, only able to do the roughest, commonest parts of the business, which the people of Uphill could have done, only that harvest

occupied them all. However, his wife was a skilled hand, and it was worth while to retain him on that account.

But the Trumans could not but be much disturbed by the habits of their tenants. They never showed themselves on Sundays till half the day was over, and Alf absolutely laughed when he found that they had been to church. 'You make it pay down here,' he said to Wilfred.

'It will pay in the next world,' was Wilfred's answer.

'Parsons' rot!' observed Alf. 'So you are only *that* far, in the country here.'

'Country and town, all alike, have another world beyond the grave to look to,' said Wilfred.

'Eh? Is that your best Bible-class manner?' said Alf, sauntering down the yard with his pipe.

Wilfred was astounded. He had never heard the like before, for though he had been in London, it was as a lad of whom his brother had been very careful.

The christening of the baby was another question. The mother was not unwilling if Alf would not mind, only that she had no robe, for she would not have been sorry to astonish the village with

such a magnificent name as Percy Algernon, but Laura undertook to make up a robe of her own into freshness and fashion. Laura would be one godmother; Miss Carbonel, to whom Mrs. Truman had poured out her anxieties about her inmates, was ready to undertake to be another; and Wilfred was willing to be godfather.

But an objection arose. The young father would not hear of it. He said it was all a parson's dodge to put money in their pockets. Wilfred in vain assured him that there was no fee at all for a baptism, but he declared that he had belonged to a club at Birmingham, where all the members had promised to having nothing to say to parsons, and not to let the women persuade them into any of their gammon. Tales about heaven and hell? It was just like his old granny telling them, when they teased her, that a black man was coming down the chimney for them. He told his wife that he would beat her well if he found her carried over to such stuff and nonsense. He could read and write, and cast accounts when he chose, and he had a smattering of a good many more subjects than Wilfred, but that was all. For any knowledge or sense of religion, or even of

duty, he was a perfect heathen. He had never been to a Sunday School, nor listened to anything save street or park declaimers. Sometimes he had followed the Salvation Army, but often he had listened to those who proclaimed such faith as theirs to be 'rot,' as he called it, such as no one could follow but either from delusion or interested motives.

Wilfred tried to talk to him, but he did not seem to have any power, or perhaps will, to think anything out. A serious thought, whether for or against eternity, seemed to be as alien to him as to the May-fly that danced on the river. His entire purpose was to get enjoyment out of life. Mr. Elwood tried to waylay and speak to him, but he dexterously avoided a meeting, and would not join the sports of the place, cricket or football, voting them slow and only fit for country louts, so soon as he saw the rules and found that betting was impossible. Poppleby had opportunities of gambling which were much more to his taste.

Eva had a few more notions. Indeed, a wife and mother could not but have some instincts, even if they did not rise higher than those of the hen in the coop, and, indeed, Eva's maternal feel-

ings were kept quite subordinate to those of ministering to her tyrant.

However, she had attended some kind of Sunday School before the death of her mother; and though she had not listened with more than the idle attention of a child under ten, and afterwards had spent her Sundays in sleep, dawdling, walking, or making excursions, still she knew something of general outlines, and did not disbelieve them, only she thought they were more for dull, religious people, and there was plenty of time before her in which to heed them. Her training, such as it was, did not include the doctrine of baptism, and as no sponsor could have promised to see that poor Percy Algernon should be virtuously brought up, Wilfred and Laura were relieved to decide on waiting for better days, especially as the child had greatly improved since he had been under Mrs. Truman's superintendence. His mother was gratified, and thought Mrs. Truman the very kindest woman she had ever met with, and even endured her scoldings when the baby was insufficiently attended to, or the cleaning and the food were by no means according to the notions of the daughter of a schoolmistress, or the

wife of a good, thrifty man. Eva had not, however, much time in which to improve, and much less money than she ought to have had. For though her own earnings alone might have kept them in as much comfort as the Trumans before Wilfred's advance in salary, Alfred carried off a large amount for his diversions in Poppleby. He generally went off thither, or to the 'Golden Bull' at Downhill, as soon as his day's work was over, and Mrs. Truman's or Miss Malvina's views about keeping him at home by a good supper and cheerful hearth proved an utter failure. He only laughed and said, 'Oh, you are trying that dodge with me.'

Eva, however, liked Laura, and would come and sit with her in the porch in the evening, chattering for the most part, but not unwilling to let Laura throw in a few earnest words, very few, for Eva could not or would not attend to anything grave.

'Oh my! I saw a girl coming down the road that was such a hideous fright in an old black hat with the stump of a red feather!'

'That was Alice Pucklechurch. She came with a message about Miss Pearson's new dress.'

'Oh! have you a dress to make? And what is it like? You'll show it to me.'

'I don't think you would care. It is only black serge.'

'No trimming? A coloured trimming is so tasty. I declare I could not make a thing all dowdy! Oh! and talking of that, there were some ladies come in to look at our work to-day, and one of them was in a little poke black bonnet, just like a Sister.'

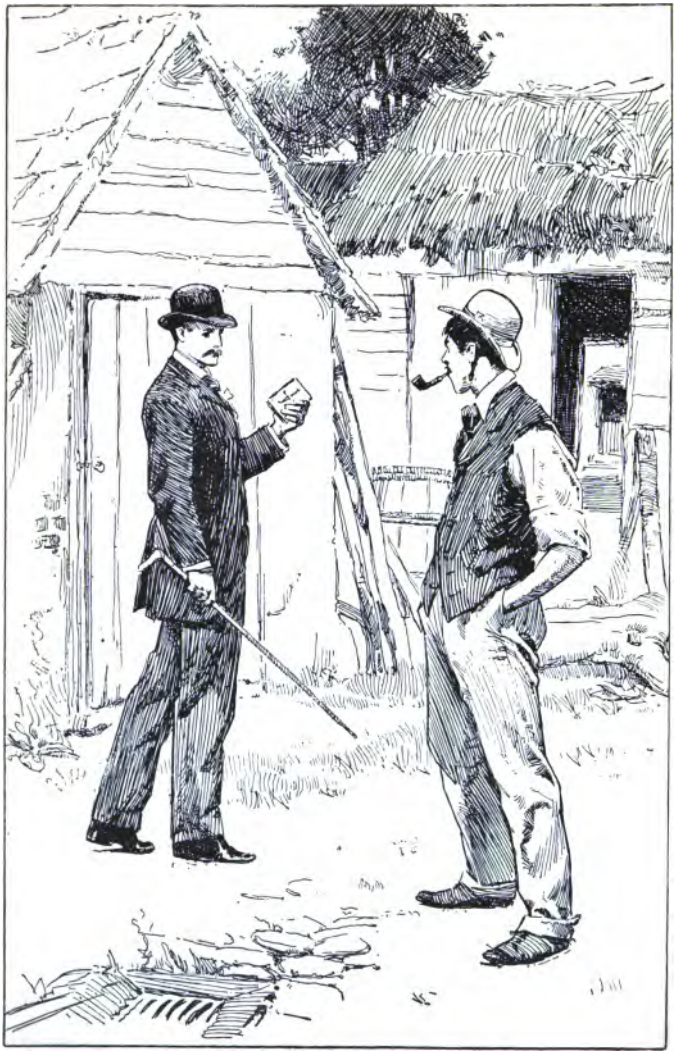
'Sister Henrietta, perhaps; she is a great friend of Miss Malvina's, and lives at Downhill.'

'Well, if I would wear such a bonnet as that!'

'But she is so good! She is sure to be with any one anywhere who wants help. She goes and sits with any one that is ill, and she came to see me, and gave me a dear little poem. I can say it to you—

From darkness here and dreariness.'

'Oh my! don't go on about darkness and dreariness, enough to bother one. It is all very well for you, you poor dear thing, but I have something better to think of. Isn't this ruche a real love?'



A JUST REPROOF.

'But, Eva dear, there might be——'

'Ah! there might, and there might, but it's not coming now. I told you, didn't I, that the vases I decorated are going up to the Exhibition? Miss Estrid wouldn't have anybody else's but mine. They are ever so much more—what do they call it?—chick, than her own.'

'But her design is going up, Wilfred said so!'

'Oh! yes, Mr. Whetstone would have them go too. I say, Laura, I'm sure, whatever you may say, Mr. Whetstone is sweet upon her, or he would not like her vases better than mine.'

Laura was not quite convinced. She had heard enough from Wilfred, and seen the designs for both sets of vases, and perhaps it was only loyalty to the Carbonels that made her think Eva's bowls more gaudy but less elegant than Miss Estrid's. Perhaps it was the same old-fashioned country sentiment that made her think the old Union doctor's son no match for a Carbonel, even if, for the sake, she supposed, of amusement, one of them did concern herself in what was really trade.

All the prospects of the factory were looking bright, and it was expected that the coming Ex-

hibition of Arts at Minsterham would afford a great triumph to the wholly English and genuine article made of the best materials, unadulterated, and finished in superior taste.

What castles were built by those concerned! Wilfred, who looked to give Lucy and the rest of his womenkind the comforts of ladies, did not even shrink from the notion of Lucy's obligations to the three children of her sister; Mr. Whetstone had his visions, but he did not speak them out; and if Estrid Carbonel had any, beyond having well-regulated recreation and refreshment rooms for the hands, and giving them shares in the business, she did not discuss them with Malvina or Aunt Sophy.

If Eva entertained any visions, they were of a real velvet frock for Percy Algernon and an osprey feather for herself; and those of her Alf were that if her wages were increased, he would go to Goodwood and bet on the winning horse.

And, in the meantime, their utter want of thrift and cleanliness was almost as sore to Mrs. Truman as their heathenism. Eva was neat and clean in person, and, indeed, her work required it, but to keep the child as he ought to be kept was, to

her, ultra refinement. However, Mrs. Truman or Laura superintended the nurse girl's daily giving him a bath, or Laura declared she could not have touched him, and she attended to his clothes for her own satisfaction.

The scraps that were thrown into the bucket for Sophy Brinks to take home to her mother's pig were really a shock to Mrs. Brinks, so that she came up herself to speak to Mrs. Truman, and show her half a loin of mutton, very insufficiently roasted, which she had found among the refuse.

'It is a sin and a shame to treat good food in that way,' she said. 'It goes again me, so it do, though I've more than once picked out a good supper for my boy out of what was throwed away, but she be a poor young creature, not better than ourselves, and I couldn't see her waste good meat that fashion. 'Tis her ignorance, no doubt. And you see, if she did want to give us her leavings, they shouldn't be messed up so that a body can scarce get out a bit fit to touch.'

'Poor young thing! I'll speak to her,' said Mrs. Truman, while Mrs. Brinks went on with a too particular description of the condition in which a

'polony' had arrived. 'It is very handsome in you, Mrs. Brinks; you might almost maintain your family out of such leavings.'

'Bless me, yes, Mrs. Truman, only they hain't always fit to pick. So different from Miss Sophia's. They be nicely done up, soup or what not, quite a treat—nothing wasted. That's what I calls respectable and quite tasty, fit for herself and the young ladies; but this be just sp'ilt!'

The spoiling vexed Mrs. Brinks as much as the wanton waste preyed on her honest conscience.

Mrs. Truman undertook to speak to 'the gal,' and took her opportunity when Eva came in with a dish of tripe, asking her to warm it up in time for her husband's supper, her own fire having gone out.

'Fresh tripe! Why, you had more fresh steak than you could eat yesterday.'

'Oh! I threw that away.'

'It would make a beautiful stew with some vegetables.'

'Bless me! We never eat twice-dressed meat! I wouldn't be so mean,' said Mrs. Greylark, with a toss of her head.

'Then you are a good deal finer than the Miss

Carbonels,' said Mrs. Truman. 'They sit down to hashes and stews three days in the week.'

'Oh! everybody knows the poor gentry have their shifts, for all their airs.'

'Economy is not a shift. It is not mean!' said Laura, hotly. 'Why, didn't you learn domestic economy at school?'

'Oh yes, it was a special subject. All about one's pores, and proportions, and the bell rope with the scarlet fever, and the carbonicide getting into a room, how they gilt the little boy in the procession for an angel, and they just killed him outright. But most of it was very dull work, and we just hated it, except the stories.'

That school domestic economy affected her husband's dinners and suppers was quite beyond Eva, and all Mrs. Truman could attain to was that the scraps should not be tumbled headlong into the pig's bucket, but put into a dish for Sophy Brinks to take home.

And though she asked the pair to partake of a Monday's supper, on the remains of the joint, made savoury with vegetables—carrots, turnips, peas—and doughboys and rice, and even Alf owned that it was stunning, it was far too much

trouble to attempt the like, and quite below Eva's dignity to make a cottage pie.

Indeed, as they went home, Alf might have been heard to observe, 'That's the ticket for mean-spirited chaps like the boss, that haven't a notion of life! Stuck-up fellow as he is: skimping at home, and strutting like a peacock abroad.'

And it must be confessed that Wilfred did hold his head very high, not only to the workers under him, but to his old school fellows who had not got on in life like himself.

CHAPTER VIII

A SCENE FROM THE 'SAINT'S TRAGEDY'

I called good evil,
And thought I ignorant knew many things,
And deemed my weight of folly weight of wit.
S. WILLIAMS.

'EDITH,' said Mr. Rupell to his sister, 'I wish you would get that nurse of yours to sit to me. She has just the countenance and pose I want for my St. Elizabeth of Hungary.'

'What, Owen's own Lucy?' said Mrs. Sterling. 'She is very striking-looking at times.'

'Exactly. I saw her sitting on a bench in the gardens doctoring Bertie's finger, and I was just beginning to sketch her, when unluckily the children spied me, and it was all over with me. She really is a splendid creature, quite regal in her simplicity, and her expression is worth anything.'

'I'll ask her, but I doubt whether you will get the same expression without the employment.'

'Oh! one may work in beneficence! St. Eliza-

beth feeding her poor is the point. The dignified look of pity and the turn of the head and shoulders are what I want.'

'Take care you don't destroy the simplicity! I have always been surprised at her freedom from any nonsense or vanity, considering her good looks.'

'Women like that have not got it in them. Besides, this is not the style that 'Arry affects.'

'You must be very careful with her—treat her quite as you would a lady sitter,' said the sister.

'You might trust me,' he returned. 'I have seen a good deal of her with the children, and no lady could have been more properly behaved. Many much less so, in fact,' he added under his breath.

Both Mr. Rupell and his sister had been brought up to artist life, and had seen a good deal of sitters, so that Mrs. Sterling did not think she was asking anything startling of her maid when she told her that Mr. Rupell wanted her to sit for St. Elizabeth feeding her poor, adding a little history of the good princess as she saw Lucy's startled eye.

'Oh ma'am, I don't—I couldn't,' was the an-

swer; then, gathering herself up, 'I am sorry to refuse you, but I cannot.'

'But, Lucy, you need not mind. You are used enough to my brother, and he only wants to paint you just as you often sit with the children. It is quite a compliment. I have sat to him hundreds of times, and I should have done so oftener if my looks had been worthier.'

'Yes, but it is different for you, ma'am,' murmured Lucy, not at all convinced.

'Come, Lucy, I did not think you could have such nonsense in your head. He only wants you just as he does little Hilda and Owen, who no doubt will be in the group. You'll see yourself in the Royal Academy as a saint and a princess.'

'I should not like it, ma'am, and I must beg you to excuse me.'

'Really, I did not think you could be so provoking and disobliging,' said Mrs. Sterling. 'I told my brother he must treat you just like a lady, and he said of course he should! You are not afraid?'

'Oh no, ma'am, he is a real gentleman, but I can't—no, I can't. I ought not—my friend, he would not like it,' and Lucy blushed scarlet.

'Your friend? Eh? Your young man?'

'Ye-es, ma'am! He would not approve.'

'Oh, nonsense! If he has any sense he will be delighted, and think it a great honour. What, you shake your head! Well, write and ask him, if that will satisfy you. If he consents, will you sit?'

'Yes, ma'am, if he consents,' said Lucy, pretty well knowing what the reply would be, and adding: 'I am sorry you should think me disobliging, ma'am, but——'

'Oh, never mind; if he consents it will be all right.'

So Mrs. Sterling went away, and presently came back with Charles Kingsley's 'Saint's Tragedy,' with the scene marked where Elizabeth is standing on the steps with the poor children crowding up to her. Lucy read it that afternoon, with warm interest in the story, where the sweet saintly lady is tyrannised over by the stern monk who treats all her natural affection for husband or children as sinful, and needing to be mortified. She did not like to disoblige her mistress; and she felt some satisfaction, though far from what a vain girl would have felt, in being singled out to represent

a noble, charitable saint. But she knew there was little chance of Wilfred's looking at the matter in the same light, for she had seen him regard Mr. Rupell's walk home with her in a manner that boded ill for his consent to her appearance in the picture.

So while she sat in the nursery keeping guard over the sleeping children, she wrote with much consideration:—

'Mrs. Sterling has given me the "Saint's Tragedy" to read. Does Laura know it? It is by the Rev. Charles Kingsley, the same gentleman as wrote "Westward Ho!" and "Two Years Ago." It is about a good German lady, St. Elizabeth, who was always feeding the poor. Her husband went on the Crusades, and died, and his brother turned her out and took away her children, and the Popish monks were very cruel to her, thinking it would make her a saint. Mrs. Sterling has asked me to sit for the Saint in a picture that Mr. Rupell is doing of her feeding her poor. I do not wish it, and I had rather not, except that I do not like vexing my mistress, who made such a point of it that I could only say at last that I would do it if you did not disapprove, dear Wilfred. I should

be dressed rather like a nun, and Mr. Rupell is quite the gentleman, and would treat me respectfully like his lady sitters, but it all hangs upon you, dear Wilfred. I do not wish it for a moment, except to satisfy my mistress. I am sorry to say there are no tidings of Jem Hart, but Mr. Sterling met a gentleman from San Francisco the other day, and he promised to go and see the shipping agents and find out what they know about the *Sweetheart* and poor Jem.'

Such was the letter that made a great commotion at Hillside. Wilfred did not see it till he came home in the evening to his tea, as the second post only found its way to the solitary farmhouse if called for. His first exclamation, as he stood at the window reading it, was: 'There! I knew that chap was after mischief.'

'What, Hart, her brother-in-law?' cried Laura from her couch.

'Oh no, the scamp! He'll never be heard of more! This is the swell, the artist fellow I saw loafing about and walking home with them.'

'But what—not making up to her?' said his mother.

'No doubt but he is!' said Wilfred, 'though

she doesn't say so. He wants her to sit for her picture!'

'Sit for her picture!' said his mother. 'She is a fine-looking maid, and sure there's no great harm in that!'

'Mother, you know nothing about it, nor what those artist chaps are up to.'

'But I do,' cried Laura. 'There was the Lord of Burleigh that pretended to be a landscape painter. I can say it all through, and Miss Malvina says it is all true, and she has seen the picture of them.

> **In her ear he whispers gaily,**
> **'If thy signs my heart can tell,**
> **Maiden, I have watched thee daily,**
> **And I think thou lov'st me well.'**
> **She replies—'**

'Bother him!' broke in Wilfred. 'It has not come to that yet, or Lucy would know better, but it will, sure as anything.'

'I know,' Laura was ready with some more literature: '"She was a fisher-girl, so beautiful, and he came and painted her and was sweet upon her all the while, only just to make her look pretty and smiling, and not meaning anything by

it, the traitor; and then he went away and she broke her heart and died!"'

'But what does Lucy say?' Mrs. Truman put in; 'I am sure she is not a silly giddy girl.'

Wilfred here read out the letter, though Laura was so excited by hearing of Kingsley and a poem that she could not help interrupting, and when Wilfred came to such parts of the history of St. Elizabeth as Lucy had gathered from the 'Saint's Tragedy,' she broke out again 'Oh, I know! It was in the pictures in the *Illustrated News* that Miss Malvina lent me. There she was, St. Elizabeth kneeling in church, with the cruel monk scourging her, without a rag upon her, so as it was a shame to see.'

'Yes,' said Wilfred, interrupting as Laura was going to explain how she knew that it was not the holy woman of the Gospel, 'that's the way those scamps of artists like to have the women! They strip off their clothes, and then they go and call them Saints, and Madonnas, and Venuses, and Dianas.'

'But, Wilfred, Lucy Darling would never allow such things,' said his mother.

'I don't know! 'Tis the way they begin.'

'Besides,' added Laura, 'only ask Eva Greylark about her sister. She was telling me how that sister of hers gets her living by hiring herself out as a model.'

'More shame for her!' said Wilfred.

'One time she was Herodias' daughter dancing with bells on her ankles. I was glad, for it made poor Eva listen to a chapter in the Gospels to see what it was all about,' said Laura; 'but that wasn't so bad as when she was pinned up to a pasteboard rock, with scarcely a morsel of a garment on her, for a monster to eat. She didn't like it, and it was awfully cold, but they paid her double, and she got used to it.'

'That's the way with those models,' growled Wilfred.

'But,' said Mrs. Truman, 'it is no such thing with ladies when they sit. You may be sure Lucy Darling would do no such thing, nor her mistress think of proposing it,' and Wilfred allowed that he did not suppose she would, but it was all the same thing.

If he had not been in a passion, he would have recollected that he knew better than to connect a portrait with professional models, but Mrs. Tru-

man did not know enough of the outer world not to trust him implicitly; and Laura, who did not like Lucy Darling, was ready to trust his opinion, and enhance it with her recollections of the Lord of Burleigh, and more than one story that she had read of girls deluded by the attentions of artists. This was really what Wilfred's mind apprehended. He was not irrational enough to imagine that she or her mistress would propose her becoming a model, but he was already jealous of Mr. Rupell's admission to the children's quarters, and he even fancied that there was coolness in the acquiescence in the delay of the marriage. No doubt the admiration of a gentleman made service more tolerable to her.

So, after having talked it over and over with Laura, and worked himself up to fever heat, he sat down and wrote the following note. That he, who had always been respectability itself, should have his young woman going in for a model!

'DEAR LUCY,—I consider the proposal an insult, and wonder you listened to it for a moment. If you have any self-respect or regard for me, I should expect that you would leave a situation where you are exposed to such demands.

'Ever faithfully and affectionately,

'WILFRED.'

He folded up the letter, fastened it, and stamped it with a strong, stern, decisive hand, then went to bed, and as he came downstairs, met a hurried note from Mr. Whetstone about some matter in the machinery. As he hurried to the mill, after a hasty breakfast, he bethought him that his letter might be too abrupt, and that he had better soften it. He would look it over at dinner-time. But when he came home at noon, the letter was gone. Mrs. Greylark had taken it to the post as she went to her work at the factory.

CHAPTER IX

A STOLEN LIKENESS

Look here upon this picture and on this.
SHAKESPEARE.

POOR Lucy, it was a trying letter to receive, and there was such a look on her face that Owen came and asked her if her sister had gone and died over again.

Her own feeling was that she was exceedingly sorry that Wilfred should be so angry, and that the question of the picture was settled, however much it might disappoint her mistress; but that, as to leaving her situation, no insult had been intended, and it would be really wanting in self-respect to act as if she had any such idea. So she simply told Mrs. Sterling that Mr. Truman did not approve, and she could not go against his wishes.

'Why, what a foolish young man he must be!' broke out Mrs. Sterling. 'Did you explain it to him?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'What does he expect, or what can you mean, by refusing to oblige me in such a simple thing?' exclaimed the lady, who knew her brother was very much set upon the matter.

'I am sorry to annoy you, ma'am, but I cannot go against Mr. Truman's wishes.'

'Any one would think he was your husband already,' pettishly said Mrs. Sterling. 'Well, I did think you would have been more obliging. Can't you write again, and tell him you can't stand such nonsense?'

But this Lucy could not feel called on to do, and Mrs. Sterling gave it up, and announced hotly, 'that Lucy's foolish country lover refused consent in a ridiculous manner, and she actually thought herself bound by it, or pretended to do so. It was all obstinacy and disobligingness. Modern servants had no notion of obedience!'

At which husband and brother both laughed.

'You might try to talk her over, Charlie,' she said.

'No, thank you, Edith, I won't put myself into competition with her young man. It is tiresome, but I have a sketch or two from memory.'

'And, by-the-by,' said Mrs. Sterling, 'there's that photograph that I took of Owen last summer —more Lucy than Owen, you know. I think it would give you just what you want of her pose and countenance.'

Mrs. Sterling grumbled a little more, but her husband said he respected the girl for her steadiness to her young man, and that he did not think she ought to be molested with any further persuasions.

Mrs. Sterling hunted up the photograph, and her brother decided that it would serve his purpose, but the lady was not well pleased that her will had been crossed, and told Lucy, with some petulance, that since she chose to be so disobliging they should contrive without her sitting.

So Lucy could write to Wilfred that on hearing his objections the plan had been given up, but she was quite sure that no harm had been intended, and that she could not give up her situation for such a reason. She feared that the family did not mean to come to Poppleby this summer, but to go to some place in Scotland, whence she hoped to send Laura a bit of white heather, and to tell her

about all the places mentioned in the 'Lady of the Lake.'

'And of course,' said Wilfred, 'that fellow will go loafing about after them, sketching scenery and all that rot! Nice excuse for flirting.'

'For shame, Wilfred!' said his mother; 'I never saw a girl with less of that sort of thing.'

'You never can tell what is in those quiet lady-like ones,' said Laura. 'Besides, it is that sort that the gentlemen are after.'

'I wouldn't say such ill-natured things of one that will be your sister,' said the mother.

Laura bit her lip, and did not mutter till Wilfred was out of the room, 'Will she ever be my sister?'

Wilfred would have had more time to vex himself about Lucy's absence if he had not been exceedingly busy and much excited about the preparations for the Exhibition. Many ambitious attempts were in hand for it—boxes, writing-cases, paper-cases, bowls, vases, all manner of fancy articles, and toys, which Estrid Carbonel designed or superintended. Mrs. Greylark was capital at toys. Her Board school had taught drawing, and as she had something of a talent for it, she could

be depended upon for finishing up in a creditable manner the designs which Miss Estrid and Mr. Whetstone gave her.

Every one was interested in her, she was such a child in everything, and not at all strong, though her husband seemed quite incapable of any consideration for her, and to view her merely as a mine to supply money for his diversions. He was just the never-thinking, idle, rowdy lad by no means uncommon at his age, and would hardly have been thought of save as a mere rough, if he had not had this poor young wife and child belonging to him. He neglected the work he had to do, quarrelled with his mates, and sauced Wilfred so often that there were consultations as to whether he could be kept on, and he was within an ace of being discharged once a fortnight, but it always ended by some one pleading for him, because he was only a big boy, or more often for the sake of his wife.

And he, foolish fellow, thought all the forbearance was due to value for them both, and when he waxed most impudent he used to threaten to go away and take his wife, and then what would they do without little Eva?

'We shall be able to offer premiums for designers,' said Estrid, when commenting on this piece of impertinence. 'There will be a run upon us when the Exhibition is over.'

'But I should be sorry if you had to part with the little thing,' said Miss Carbonel; 'I think Mrs. Truman will be able to make something of her.'

'And anywhere else she would be just slaved to death,' said Malvina; 'that man is a regular brute.'

'Or rather,' said her aunt, 'that boy is a regular animal.'

'About as civilised as a Red Indian brave towards his squaw,' added Estrid.

'It is realising responsibility that makes a man,' said Miss Carbonel, 'and that he has never done.'

'Will he ever do so?' asked Malvina. 'You have seen him, Essie; has he any brains?'

'I should say not many,' responded Estrid; 'the development is chiefly in cheeks, not red, but puffy and yellow, but Wilfred declares that he does not drink.'

'Perhaps he will have an illness, or break his leg, or something that would give a chance of getting hold of him,' said Malvina.

'As if it were chasing a hare,' laughed her sister. 'By-the-by, has every one done with this illustrated catalogue of the British Artists' Gallery? For I would take it to Laura Truman, first for her own pleasure and then for her scrap books.'

'Yes, do, my dear. Those finished illustrations are a great delight to the poor girl.'

'I think she is the better for the interest she takes in that ménage,' added Malvina. 'She has not nearly so much to say about her own back, as about what hymns she has got Eva, as she calls her, to listen to, and her hopes of teaching her some good.'

'Laura is a very good girl,' responded Miss Carbonel.

CHAPTER X

HEAVY LETTERS

And there followed a mist and driving rain,
And life was never the same again.

G. MACDONALD.

YES, Laura was a very good girl, and yet was it altogether kindness, or was there not a little exultation mixed with the air of condolence with which she laid before Wilfred a figure in the catalogue, with the label below?

ST. ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY.....C. RUPELL.
I am their sister—I must look like one.
I am their queen—I'll prove myself the greatest
By being the minister of all.—*The Saint's Tragedy.*

There, on the steps of a Gothic palace, beneath an archway, with little barefooted, ragged children round her, was unmistakably Lucy Darling's fine graceful figure, bending towards the one who seemed to be holding up a damaged finger for her inspection and cure. The dress appeared to be simple and dark, and over the head was a veil, draped so as to show the straight features, and the lovely smile of helpfulness.

To Wilfred, as he stood by the table, it was no lovely sight. What he uttered was the fiercest exclamation his mother had ever heard pass his lips.

'She promised you, didn't she?' said Laura.

'Over-persuaded,' put in his mother.

'Who would have thought she could be so deceitful?' cried Laura.

'That's always the way with women,' was Wilfred's cry. 'I thought she was another sort! But they are all alike.'

'Oh Wilfred!'

He did not heed, but went on, 'Not one of them but will play fast and loose with a poor fellow, especially when a swell has got them in tow.'

'And she has never sent the white heather. She has forgotten us!' cried Laura.

'She might have written you a letter to explain,' said his mother.

'What was the use? It was plain enough how it would be when she wouldn't quit the place where the fellow was always after her and the children.'

'Of course they would be an excuse,' said Laura. 'But of course a handsome face is a great

temptation, and I am very thankful that I have been spared it.'

Before this reflection of Laura's had been uttered Wilfred had flung himself out of the house on the way to his office.

She and her mother talked it over at intervals all day, Mrs. Truman, in her charity, almost guessing at the true interpretation, but Laura persuading herself that Lucy meant to marry the artist, and would be bitterly disappointed.

'Poor girl, I pities her. Think what she has given up for the sake of a little shallow admiration.'

Meanwhile Wilfred went on his way. He could not well endure to hear the matter talked over, nor listen to his sister's words, and yet they left a sting in his heart.

He did his business of the day, and was so sharp with Alf Greylark for his careless packing that the youth threw down the cord, swore profusely under his breath, and bethought him of beginning a strike, only there was no one to whom to propose it but his wife, who was upstairs in the finishing room, and the old carter, who laughed at him.

Wilfred made up his mind that he was not in a passion, and that he would write very coolly and temperately, and warn Lucy of the sinfulness and danger of vanity and deceit. He waited after hours to compose his letter, and, in spite of all his pain, he could not help admiring it when he had done.

He said he made allowances for her attachment to the family, and for a momentary weakness, but he could not overlook the breaking of her solemn word to him, nor the deceit of concealing from him that she had yielded to the persuasion of one who was only playing on her vanity for his own ends. How could he ever have confidence in her after this? Still, as a sincere friend, he must give her a warning against being led away by men whose profession it was to make a trade of beauty, enhancing it by the flattery of their specious blandishments. He ended with a quotation from a sermon that he had lately heard, directed against some of the dangerous follies of young men and maidens.

He copied it out fairly and kept the rough draft in his desk, but did not show it to Laura. Perhaps it was in his mind that Lucy would be deeply

touched by such a wise, religious remonstrance, and would feel that one who could so appeal to her better feelings ought not to be thrown over for the specious attractions of a mere artist in search of beauty. He was doubtful how to address the letter, for the promised one with the white heather had never come, and he finally directed it to the house at Kensington, and put 'To be forwarded' upon it. And this was the answer that came after some days, packed up with the brooch in a box:—

'DEAR MR. TRUMAN,—If you do not believe my word, and consider that there can be no confidence between us, it is better that our engagement should terminate. I therefore return your ring and the brooch you were so obliging as to present me with, and remain,

'Faithfully yours,
'LUCY DARLING.'

It was a stroke!

Laura fully believed, and almost made Wilfred believe, that the next intelligence would be that Lucy was engaged to Mr. Rupell, or that at any rate it was his attractions that made her faithless to her promises to Wilfred. The shock was a terrible one. It made him giddy at the first moment,

but there was a kind of bewilderment, as if he could not dwell on the entire change and the loss or the blow to his trust and esteem, because he was exceedingly busy in preparation for the coming Exhibition at Ministerham, when the new Guildhall was to be opened, and all the county, ay, and perhaps all England, France and America besides, were to see what Downhill could do. The whole county was preparing. Miss Malvina had a class of village boys carving wood; Miss Estrid worked away at designs; Mr. Whetstone and Wilfred superintended and toiled unceasingly; Eva Greylark worked away with unabated eagerness, in spite of certain unwelcome prospects on which she avoided Mrs. Truman's motherly counsel; even Alf was stimulated into fitful diligence in a cause that was to make all their fortunes; and Laura was embroidering a beautiful cambric handkerchief, and moralising over the effect it would have upon Lucy Darling to hear of Wilfred at the head of a successful firm, and how she would repent of her inconstancy. Such love, she thought, was like to the convolvulus that withered in the noonday sun, and she even began a poem over her needle as she sat in the porch. She liked

it so much that she fetched a pencil and paper to write it down—

Sweet laughs the lovely summer flower,
As fleeting as 'tis fair;
Beware to wreathe it round the bower!
'Tis weak as is the air.

'Come here, come here, good bee,' she said,
'I ope my purple heart,
My secrets all for thee outspread;
Come here, and never part.'

There came a gilded butterfly
Floating on crimson wing,
The faithless flower it did espy,
She thought not of his sting.

Alas! when summer months are o'er,
And purple flowerets fade—

Just so far had Laura gone when the gate clicked and she saw Miss Malvina Carbonel coming towards her.

'Don't get up, please! I was coming to ask your mother about a setting of eggs.'

'Mother is out in the orchard, I think.'

'No hurry. Sit still. How are you getting on with your handkerchief? But eh! have you any verses to show me?'

Laura thought her verses so pretty that she was glad to let Miss Malvina see them. She was

always in trembling hope that some poem of hers would be pronounced so good that it must be sent to a magazine—the parish magazine at any rate, and the young lady had always encouraged her, though the verses usually showed that she had 'Hymns Ancient and Modern' ringing in her ears, because the interest and occupation were very good for her.

'It begins very smoothly and prettily,' was the comment. 'But oh!' (presently), 'did you mean the bee or the butterfly?'

'The butterfly, ma'am.'

'But butterflies don't sting, and bees do.'

'Oh! but it is poetry, Miss Malvina.'

'I don't see why poetry should say what is not true.'

'It is true, ma'am.'

'True that butterflies sting?'

'No, no, ma'am, but about the faithless flower, and my poor brother.'

Malvina opened her eyes. 'What, have things gone wrong with him and his sweetheart? I thought she was such a good girl.'

'Well, ma'am, so did we all. But she was deceiving my poor brother the whole time, and it

was all along of that catalogue of yours that we found it out.'

'All along of my catalogue!'

'Yes, ma'am, in the picture of St. Elizabeth. She was in that picture, Miss Mally, and she had faithfully promised Wilfred that nothing should induce her to sit for a model.'

'Let me see. It was Mr. Rupell's picture, wasn't it? Is not he brother to Mrs. Sterling? Well, I don't quite see why Wilfred should have objected.'

'She had promised, Miss Mally, promised. There had letters passed about it, and he had laid down his opinion, for' (as she saw Miss Malvina still looked surprised) 'he had good reason to think that the gentleman was sweet upon her, having ever so many opportunities, you see, ma'am.'

'Oh! it was jealousy, was it? But I should not have thought it possible that a gentleman like Mr. Rupell—and I know he *is* a gentleman—could think of doing anything unbecoming in his sister's house.'

'But she had promised, ma'am. And you know what those artists are!'

'I know what they are in novels, certainly, but I never knew anything of the kind.'

'It was her having deceived him that hurt Wilfred so,' persisted Laura. 'He wrote to her, and she answered short and offended, and returned all his presents, and a good thing too, if she could be so false with him.'

There was something that Malvina did not like in Laura's tone, and she was just going to say she hoped there was some misunderstanding that might be cleared up, when she saw Mrs. Truman coming in with a basket of junkets, and Percy Algernon on her arm, eating one. They proceeded to business as to Dorkings' eggs and Spaniards', and finally Miss Malvina said, 'I am sorry things have gone amiss with Wilfred's engagement.'

'So am I, ma'am. I thought her a nice good girl, but my son, he is a good deal hurt at her taking offence so easily. And you see they are both full young, and them young folks, they do nibble a good many times before they be hooked in earnest, as my man used to say.'

CHAPTER XI

AN INNOCENT

Consider, Johnny's but half wise.—WORDSWORTH.

KILEDOX was a place on the west coast of Scotland, among wild rocks and crags, and within reach of beautiful and famous scenery. It had belonged to an old Scottish family, but latterly evil habits of dissipation had gradually brought the house to ruin, and the estate had been sold off, bit by bit, till there was scarcely anything left for the last of the line to inherit, a poor little boy, whose father had died a month after his birth, and whom his mother, who had lost several previous children, and was always an invalid, followed to the grave before he was a year old.

The steward, an Englishman, had bought a portion of the land on the seashore, not far from a small fishing village, lately risen into a town by the help of a station. He had there, by means of a company, become the master of a big new hotel; and the guardians of the poor little heir, Sir

Alaster MacEdie, one of whom was a bachelor and the other had a sickly nervous wife, had arranged that the nurse, in whom the late lady had placed much confidence, should have rooms there with her charge.

Mr. Sterling was a distant connection of the family, and for that reason had chosen Kiledox for his summer headquarters, sending the whole party of children beforehand with Miss Darling and the under-nurse. The parents were to follow later, and make excursions in a friend's yacht.

It was a charming place, shut in with tall cliffs of many curious colours, with a delightful sandy beach, and the Atlantic surging and rolling in front, while distant outlines of islands showed out in exquisite blue on clear days, and managed to be entirely hidden on more misty ones.

Lucy had left London too early to have heard anything about the pictures or the catalogue, illustrated or otherwise, and the two elder children regarded their uncle's painting as rather a nuisance than otherwise, always fearing to be captured for a sitting, so that they were far too much excited to think about anything so disagreeable, and thus Wilfred's letter perfectly astounded her.

Capable of deceiving him! Led away by vanity and flattery! The more she thought of it, the hotter she grew. That lecture upon love of admiration and listening to blandishments hurt and offended her more than all, and she wrote off her answer and packed up her ring and brooch in her first anger, posting them that very afternoon, and feeling that it was well to have done with a person who would neither believe nor trust her.

She did expect some apologies and pleadings, but none came, and she had not much time to think about possible relentings with four children more or less on her hands, for Alice, the baby's nurse, was but a young woman, very girlish, and with no authority. Hilda and Bertie needed watching to be kept out of danger from tides when paddling, or falls from the cliffs; their taste for curiosities had to be kept within bounds, their clothes to be looked after; and Owen, who wanted to do whatever they did, without the same amount of strength or discretion, required perpetual vigilance. They were fairly good children, and all were fond of Lucy, but they could not fail to be a handful, and it required all her good temper and

good management to keep up her authority and influence.

Nor was the other nursery establishment any assistance to her. The poor little orphan baronet was a white, puffy, inanimate being nearly two years old, but neither walking nor talking, and much more of a mere baby than the eighteen months old Frida. She was made to attempt to kiss him, but he screamed at the onset, and had to be removed from her sight.

The two younger nurses fraternised, as far as they could understand one another's language, but Mrs. (or Miss) Gillespie, a big, gaunt, handsomely dressed woman, began by petting and coaxing the little Sterlings; though when Lucy would not give them leave to go into the town with her, nor be entertained at tea in her precincts, saying that they must wait to know what their mother wished, she took offence, and was always pitying them for whatever Miss Darling forbade, or censuring what she permitted. Her own conversation, too, about the grandeur and luxury of MacEdie Castle, the confidence of my Lady in herself, and the misdeeds of the late Sir Alaster and all his servants, was not delightful to

Lucy, even if it had not been in broad Scotch. She kept her children and herself out of the way as much as she could; and refused to join a supper party in the town after the children were in bed.

After this, it was decided that she was an English proud peat, and too much stuck up to make friends. Even Alice, the under-nurse, began to be insubordinate, and to murmur if Miss Darling insisted on her coming in in good time, or not taking the baby wherever in the streets poor little Sir Alaster was conveyed, too often to lie in the perambulator, with the sun beating down upon him.

When Mr. and Mrs. Sterling arrived, the whole MacEdie establishment drew itself into the most exemplary order, insomuch that Mrs. Sterling observed to Lucy what a nice thing it was for her to have such a good experienced companion as Mrs. Gillespie. To which Lucy could only answer 'Yes, ma'am.'

But she did take care that it should be known what the children might do, and what they might not do; and one evening when a gnat was singing round Owen's cot and teasing him, he observed, 'Is that a hum-bug?'

'No, my dear; why?'

'Because I heard father say, "That woman is a humbug. Depend upon it, she can bite," and I know he meant Mrs. Gillspy.'

'Never mind, my dear. You know you should not tell what father and mother talk about.'

It was now, however, that Lucy first learnt the grounds of Wilfred's displeasure with her, for Hilda brought up the illustrated catalogue to show her 'Uncle's pictures,' the two children as portraits, and Lucy herself as 'St. Elizabeth.'

'But I never sat to him, Miss Hilda.'

'O, no! Wasn't it clever of him? He did it from father's photo of you with Owen. I wish he would do us all so, and not bother us with sitting.'

That explained it. If only she had known! Should she write and explain? Wilfred had doubted her word once. Why should not he doubt it again? It was for him to seek a reconciliation. If he cared for her, he would write and ask her pardon for doubting her. Then she would relent—oh! how gladly—and explain. But no doubt he was tired of being kept waiting, and was too grand as foreman of the Downhill

works, and thus was glad of an excuse for breaking off. She had not thought it of him, and her heart gave a fierce throb of pain whenever that unlucky picture was mentioned.

And Hilda and Bertie displayed it to all who came in their way, themselves first of all, and then 'our Lucy—Owen's dear darling—she is the good St. Elizabeth. Oh, no, not the one in the Bible, but one that fed the poor people, and all the loaves turned into roses when her husband scolded her.'

It did poor Lucy no good in the Scottish mind to have been depicted as a Popish saint, a certain amount of jealousy of her appearance mingling with condemnation of her for having allowed herself thus to be represented. Still less good did it do her that when Mr. Rupell suddenly arrived and ran down to the beach to find his nephews and nieces, he shook hands with her heartily, saying, in his good-humoured way, 'Good morning, St. Elizabeth; I assure you you are much admired, though you would not sit to me!'

She could not say 'Oh that you had done no such thing!' But she saw the scowl with which Mrs. Gillespie regarded the greeting, and when the party went out boating the next day, and she

had to go to take care of Owen, she could not help Mr. Rupell handing her to her seat like a lady, though she wondered what Wilfred would think of it. If? Alas!

However, the next day Mr. Rupell and Mr. and Mrs. Sterling joined a friend who was going to yacht about the Western Isles, so that perplexity was over for the time, and it was of no use to listen to Alice's repetition of the condemnation Mrs. Gillespie and Janet expressed of her 'making so free with a gentleman, if gentleman he was, a mere painter man.'

Even the landlady, a kindly, sensible Englishwoman, thought it advisable to warn Lucy against the attentions of artists, but was fairly satisfied by her tearful assurances of the very little that they had amounted to, and their absolute want of encouragement.

'It is all spite on the part of that Gillespie woman,' ended Mrs. Rowe. 'I never could abide her, though her poor ladyship thought so much of her.'

Two days later, when Lucy and the elder children were coming in from an evening stroll on the shore, they met Mrs. Gillespie in a magnificent

hat decorated with poppies and cornflowers, evidently going out to a supper party. She stopped Hilda and kissed her, but took no notice of Lucy, and Bertie ran off and escaped, while Hilda rubbed her cheek over with her arm to get rid of the kiss, observing, 'I wish she wouldn't. I don't like her.'

Lucy had just begun undressing Hilda in the full light of the northern summer evening, and the golden sky vividly brought out the island, when a piteous crying was heard on the other side of the passage.

'It is poor little Alaster,' said Hilda; 'and Janet is out too. I saw her with a fisherman by the big rock just before we came in.' The cries rose to screams, and both rushed into the room whence they came. There was the poor little boy with outstretched arms, sitting up in his crib, shrieking out his terror at finding himself alone! Lucy took him in her arms, and, comparative stranger as she was, her gentle touch and voice pacified him in a few seconds. She had just replaced him on his pillows, however, when a stiffness came over him, a blue look on his face, a fixity on his eyeballs.

'It is a fit!' said Lucy, still gently; 'run down,

dear, ask Mrs. Rowe for some hot water—this moment—and to send for the doctor.'

Hilda obeyed with feet winged by terror, but Owen had been subject to these convulsive fits, so that Lucy knew what to do, nor was Mrs. Rowe quite ignorant. The poor child had been bathed and otherwise treated, and was lying limp and exhausted on Lucy's lap, by the time the doctor hurried in, and began to ask questions and prescribe under the impression that Lucy was the nurse in charge.

In the midst Mrs. Gillespie's voice was heard coming scolding up the stairs that 'Yon taupie should daur meddle wi' her bairn, his honour.'

As the sound came nearer 'his honour,' poor little boy, stiffened again into another fit, and the doctor turned round with: 'Keep that madwoman out.'

Lucy could attend to nothing but the little patient, and so she was spared the altercation on the stairs between the furious Mrs. Gillespie and Mrs. Rowe, reinforced by her husband and most of the establishment. Rightly or wrongly, they were convinced that liquor assisted the violence of the woman, who was really attached to the boy,

but more to her own pleasure. It ended in Lucy's sitting up all night with the child, and Dr. Fergusson remaining on guard, while the Rowes took charge of his nurse. He was better in the morning, only weaker and more fretful than usual, and Mr. Rowe telegraphed to the lawyer guardian at Edinburgh as soon as the office was open, as well as to the port where the yacht was to call for letters. The doctor would not hear of Mrs. Gillespie going near the child again, and Lucy had to manage as best she could, but happily her own flock were good and obedient, and somewhat awed by poor little Alaster's illness; and he himself soon returned to his usual quiescent state.

His guardians both arrived in the afternoon, and of course there was a scene. Mrs. Gillespie was on the look-out, weeping and declaring, what perhaps she really believed, that it was all a plot of the English to deprive her of her bonnie wee laddie that my Leddy had left to her with her last breath. Miss Darling, who had always had an ill-will to her, had stolen into the dear bairn's room when she was out for a gliff, and the very fright of seeing a stranger had caused the fit; and she trusted to her country folk to stand by her and

see justice done to a puir forlorn woman against the malice of the English folk.

Mr. MacEdie and Captain Ruthven, the guardians, enquired further, and found the Southron folk all in the same story. Mr. and Mrs. Rowe could only speak to what had happened after the convulsion, but they had a long arrear of accusations, hitherto suppressed out of loyalty to their Lady and to their fellow servant, of neglect and peculation, and Mr. Rowe was quite sure that Mrs. Gillespie had been taking a drop overmuch, and did not quite know what she was about when she returned. Hilda too, with all the impressive truthfulness of her eight years, maintained that the scream had called both her and Lucy into the room, and that Alaster had been soothed before the fit came on. Dr. Fergusson likewise was decided in declaring that Miss Darling had probably saved the child's life, alike by coming to his rescue, by her prompt remedies, and her subsequent care.

Her master and mistress, arriving the next day, confirmed the good impression that Hilda and their nurse had made; and the end of the matter was that Mrs. Gillespie and her Janet were sum-

marily dismissed, in spite of all the hubbub that she made, and her persuasion that all was the work of the treacherous Southrons' cabal. Mrs. Sterling was urgently entreated to resign her treasure of a nurse to the poor little baronet, as her care seemed to be his best chance of life, and he nestled in her arms as he had never done in those of his former nurse. Mrs. Sterling was not unwilling to make the sacrifice, for in truth she had begun to be alarmed at her brother's admiration for the fine countenance of the girl, and did not wish to have any further complications about portraits. Moreover, Owen was outgrowing his nursery dependence, and would be better in fresh hands, breaking off the petting customs.

Lucy herself, when the question was put before her, had come to be very pitiful of poor little orphan Sir Alaster, and would not have liked to think of him in less tender, careful care; indeed, she had already traced dawnings of greater activity and intelligence of body and mind that warmly interested her, and she knew that Owen was growing beyond her, and she should not like the giving him up.

Moreover, she was glad to be out of the reach

of Mr. Rupell's civilities, whether they meant much or little, and the associations of the house at Kensington and all her dreams of happiness had become very painful to her. There was likewise a considerable advance in the salary offered to her, and this, for the sake of the Hart children, was not to be despised.

So she accepted the charge, and it was decided that she should be established in rooms in the outskirts of Edinburgh, where the child could have country air and exercise, and could be constantly inspected by an Edinburgh doctor and visited by his guardians.

THE LANDLADY GIVES LUCY A TIMELY WARNING.

CHAPTER XII

THE EXHIBITION

Bugle bracelet, necklace amber,
Perfume for a lady's chamber.—SHAKESPEARE.

THE exhibition at Minsterham was appointed for early September, as the time when most of the country grandees were at home, and also that the new Guildhall might be open in time for the new mayor.

Mr. Whetstone and Wilfred Truman went perpetually to and fro upon the railway between Downhill and Minsterham during the last weeks, and they built up a magnificent erection—with brooches and card-cases below, nearer the eyes, bowls, pen-trays, inkstands, and boxes above, and portfolios and vases bringing up the rear, mostly black with devices on them, some Etruscan, some Persian, some Louis XIV., some simply natural. Wilfred felt a pang as he unfolded a fac-simile of Lucy's brooch with the cot beside the hill. Toys in the shape of animals were grouped about.

There were a cat and kittens, a dog and puppies, an elephant with a scarlet howdah and splendid tusks, and some delightful squat hippopotami.

Wilfred had hardly eyes for anything else, and when his sister asked him what else was there, and whether there were the pictures from the Duke's of which she had heard, he really could not tell. No, nor whether there were not some beautiful old brocade or some Indian curiosities. He could see nothing but his own productions, and another stand which he looked at with contempt, and yet with misgiving.

What business had a firm outside the county to send up their wares? Not that he feared the competition. They were all made of the flimsy, worn-out material that Downhill despised, and the colouring and designs were simply vulgar and gaudy. They would not stand a comparison with Miss Estrid's artistic devices, or her copies from books of mediæval, classic, or Oriental art. Eva's toys, too, were far more like life.

Poor little Eva! She had struggled on to work to the last minute, and was sure she should be able to go to the show, and she seemed to be more surprised than any one else when she found her-

self in bed with a little daughter of flesh and blood instead of an elephant of mashed paper; but she declared that she should and would be up in time to see the Exhibition, and when the registrar called about the name and date of the birth, she chose to call the child Gloriana Miranda Amanda, in honour, she said, of the glory of her best portfolio cover.

She could not go to the opening of the Exhibition, nor could Laura, though the latter hoped to see it in a quiet way when the novelty that attracted a crowd was over; but Wilfred could not be satisfied without taking his mother on that first day. So she went down by train, in company with the Misses Carbonel, Mr. Whetstone, Alf, and other artisans of Downhill.

The ladies joined some friends at Minsterham who were to sit in the gallery, but Wilfred found a safe peep-hole for his mother behind the grand erection that formed a sort of stall for the display of the 'Downhill Works in Papier Mâché.'

Thence, keeping herself and her black silk bonnet well out of sight, Mrs. Truman beheld the procession come in—the clergy in their gowns, the mayor with his gold chain, the aldermen in red,

the Lord Lieutenant in uniform and with his red ribbon of the Order of the Bath. Then the place was filled up with a multitude of people, and she could not hear much of the speeches before the Exhibition was declared to be open.

Then, when she came out, and Wilfred walked her round, there was more jostling and pushing than the quiet woman, unused to crowds, could enjoy. The ladies thronged round the embroidery, so that she could not get her head in to see how Laura's handkerchief was displayed, and Wilfred hurried her on, for there was nothing he wanted her to look at so much as the *right* side of his own erection, and to compare it, much to its advantage, with the rival one of Hogg and Salter, which he pronounced to be nothing but gammon of bacon, a bit of wit that made Mr. Whetstone laugh and repeat it to Miss Estrid.

Mrs. Truman tried hard to admire the performance of the Whetstone Company most, and she quite knew that their productions were of the most solid and superior materials, but somehow, she was afraid that more people were looking at the rather staring lilies that adorned the other stall than at the rainbow-tinted waterfalls on the

brooches, or the Etruscan vases with a black dance on a red ground upon them.

'Oh, that is all the vulgar, common-place taste,' said Wilfred; 'see what the judges say.'

He drifted away from her while she was admiring some really handsome pottery from Poppleby, and she had to thread her way back through the crowd to find him, at his own wares, which he was discoursing on so vehemently to a Jewish-looking man that she could hardly get in a word that she was going down to Mrs. Darling's, at Little Minster Street, and if he did not come for her there she would meet him at the station.

She was glad to get out of the throng and find her way to the quiet little street and the window where two faded caps and a black hat with a dusty feather proclaimed a milliner in a small way. At her knock, the door was opened by a neat, quiet, worn-looking woman of sixty-five, who held out her hands eagerly with, 'Well, to be sure! It is Jane Truman. I did think I might see you some day about this Exhibition.'

'I looked about for you in the crowd, but I could not see you, so I came down here.'

'Oh no, I couldn't go in such a lot of folks, so I thought I would wait till it was a bit quieter, on a Saturday, and take the children. Come in, Janie, and sit down; I'm right glad to see you. And how is your poor daughter?'

'She is pretty well, thank you, Susan; but she couldn't come up all those steps in such a number of people. She is shy, you see.'

'Ah! poor thing, no wonder, when she is so afflicted.'

'But she has got a real lovely bit of embroidery there, a handkerchief with roses and thistles and shamrocks in the corners. Enough to put out her poor eye, as I tell her. You must go and see that, Susan. And, bless me, to see the things that my son's factory has sent!'

'So I hears. Mrs. Bell was in here, and says she, "I hear they've two stalls of paper machaw."'

'Yes, there's ours at Downhill, and Hogg and Salter's besides. We have some perfect loves of paper cases.'

'I remember, your son gave a brooch to my niece's daughter with mother-of-pearl in it. Just tell me, Janie, is it off between these two? She don't say no more about him, and I am sorry if it

is so, for he is a nice, superior sort of steady young man as ever I see.'

'Well, Susan, and I liked her, and thought her just what I should like for my son, but he was hurt, you see, about her sitting for a model, as they call it, to that artist gentleman when she promised him not, and so he writ sharp to her and she took offence, and returned him his presents and all.'

'Well, Lucy do take things hard, but I did not think they would go off like o' that.'

'Just lads and lasses! Many's the like of it,' said Mrs. Truman, philosophically.

'Only I didn't fancy they were that sort, and they ain't so very young neither. But—sitting for her picture—there was no great harm in that, was there? She is a handsome girl, and many have noticed her.'

'It was the doing of it when she had promised him not, and she knew his mind about it, that vexed him,' said his mother. 'He would never have known it, if Laura had not had the picture in a catalogue Miss Carbonel gave her.'

'My! He is particular,' returned Mrs. Darling. 'One would think he was jealous of the artist man for noticing her.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Truman, firing in defence of her son, 'a young man doesn't like to see a strange gentleman, as them artists call themselves, a gallanting with his sweetheart, special when she is not open with him and regularly did deceive him.'

'So he is that suspicious, is he! Well, it's all the better for me,' said Mrs. Darling, 'for what I should do if Lucy did not help me with those two children, I can't tell.'

The two women had not been far from quarrelling, but they were old friends, and Mrs. Truman was really anxious to hear about Mrs. Darling's difficulties, and the poor children, and they were old enough to think young folks' love affairs fleeting fancies that were often of little consequence. So the question followed, 'Then there is no news of their father?'

'Not a word, poor things, though Mr. Sterling's friend promised he would make out, but they bain't clear what port his ship sailed from, nor who is the agent. I don't believe we shall ever see him again, and there they be—with no one to keep them but poor Lucy and me, and their father's brother, and he ain't much to look to.'

'They are at school now, I suppose?'

'Yes, little Minnie she has got big enough for the infant school, and mighty took up they both be with the kindgarden, as they calls it.'

'Ay, they have it at our place. My mother would have said the children didn't need to be taught just to play.'

'Well, they learn to do things that makes them better to have about out of school. Look, there's the mat little Beatrice made—and the fly catcher —not as it catches any flies. They be good girls, poor dears, but they are almost too much for me. They do terrify me when they gets to their antics, and they are hungry children too, so as I could hardly manage for them if Lucy were not that good to them, never minding herself, though she has got a rise in her wages where she is now.'

'What! Is she not with Mrs. Sterling?'

'Oh no. What, haven't you heard? She was persuaded to be nursery governess to a poor little baroknight in Scotland as she saved the life of.'

And the history of the conflict of Kiledox was related, as far as Mrs. Darling knew it, in such sort that Mrs. Truman might well carry off the impression that Lucy was lost to Wilfred for ever.

She told Laura. She could not quite bring her-

self to open the old sore by telling Wilfred, but Laura had not the same scruple. She thought it much better that he should know how hopeless any thought of the faithless girl was. 'A governess!' she said; 'she will be up to catching any one now.'

'Hold your tongue!' was Wilfred's sharp answer, as if he could not bear the pain she gave him, and he went out to smoke his pipe in the orchard.

CHAPTER XIII

TO BE OR NOT TO BE

No blinder bigot, I maintain it still,
Than he who must have pleasure, come what will.
He laughs, whatever weapon Truth may draw,
And deems her sharp artillery but straw.—COWPER.

WILFRED might be sad in inmost heart, but he was triumphant in the praises given to the Down-hill performances. So were the Carbonel sisters and Mr. Whetstone. Indeed, as they went home upon their bicycles, there were words between Estrid and Mr. Whetstone which certainly meant that they would only wait till the prosperity of the firm was fully established to write to Estrid's brother Edmund to announce their engagement.

Wilfred was crazy for Laura to go and see his achievement, and actually arranged that she should go to the Guildhall in a cab at the quietest time of day. She yielded, for she had grown eager herself, especially to see her own handkerchief marked with 'Sold' upon it, for it actually had been sold for ten guineas to the Duchess! Of

course such a ticket on it would bring out fresh beauties in the eyes of the worker. Only Laura would not hear of going to rest at Mrs. Darling's. It would not be fair towards Wilfred to ask him to take her there—which was true enough; but further, she had decided on 'Miss Darling' having become a nursery governess forsooth, who would look down on them all. Probably she was looking after the artist man, after all.

Eva and her baby Gloriana went too. Laura did not fancy the company of any one so gaudy as little Mrs. Greylark was apt to appear on a gala day, but Mrs. Truman thought they ought to have the lift in a cab; so it was proposed. Eva, however, refused it: she wanted to have a spree, and Alf was going to give it to her first-rate. She had no notion of doing anything so slow as sticking to guys like Laura and that there old goody!

Sophy Brinks, the nurse girl, was so silly as to repeat this, with staring eyes of horror, to Laura, who shut her up at once, with 'You've no business to tell what people say. That's mischief making.'

Yes, it was, and Laura could not forget the ingratitude that called her a guy, and her mother an old goody. Mrs. Truman might laugh and say

no one should take notice of childish nonsense, and Laura might say, of course, she did not, but still it rankled, and she could not be sorry that Eva came back quite worn out at midnight and Gloriana roared incessantly all the next three days. Laura, under her brother's care, enjoyed her day very much, and remembered everything she saw with that intense interest and delight that make an outing doubly and trebly precious to an invalid.

She could describe everything in all the cases almost as completely as the catalogue, and declared that she understood her books better for what she had seen, as well as her embroidery from the ancient specimens exhibited.

Of course, though, her own work was the superlative thing to look at, and next to that the *papier mâché* from Downhill, and she hardly needed Wilfred to point out to her the superiority in taste and in execution to the adjacent erection of Hogg and Co. Wilfred assured her, as he had averred many times at home, that handling each would prove how much firmer and better finished were his own wares than the others. He believed that all the more showy articles were really imported

from France, and he hoped to prove it if the judges awarded prizes to the county manufactures.

There was a good deal of admiration, but not so many orders as had been hoped for, and sales were chiefly of the smaller matters, the brooches and toys. The manager of a large firm in London for fancy goods came down and looked, asking questions about prices and materials, carrying off specimens and making notes so as to raise the spirits of Mr. Whetstone and Miss Estrid. He even came over to Downhill and inspected the manufacture, admiring everything, so that hopes rose high, but his orders were scarcely in proportion.

It was reported afterwards that he had gone over to Hogg and Co.

'He must see our superiority,' said Wilfred.

'I am afraid he will only see how much more cheaply they do it,' said Mr. Whetstone.

'Cheap and nasty,' said Wilfred.

'Buyers of fancy goods hardly look beneath the surface,' said Mr. Whetstone.

'But the taste, sir!' said Wilfred.

'I'm afraid that for one who can appreciate the taste there are fifty who only appreciate the cheapness.'

It was plain enough that Mr. Whetstone was disappointed and anxious, and Wilfred had time in the lull of excitement that followed to realise that life did not look the same to him as before his dispute with Lucy Darling. He had carried a dull heartache with him ever since he had seen that picture, but at first it was stifled by occupation, or only stung like the shooting of a wound, but now, as the future darkened, he began to think how dreary it was to have nothing to look forward to but living on in the old farmhouse and working for ever for his mother and sister. Then Lucy's calm, grave, sweet face rose upon him, filling him with bitter regret. Oh! that she should look like that and so deceive him! It was of no use to trust to any woman, whatever her face or her religious ways might be. It was all emptiness and vexation of spirit. Nothing but shams and deceits got on in the world, and, if they did, what hollow pleasure was to be got out of it all, when a man's heart was broken by a woman's false dealing?

He was in this mood when, on his way to the choir practice, he passed the old orchard, where Alf Greylark was lying on the grass under a tree reading a newspaper.

'I say!' he called out. 'Here's a go! Here's a couple of sweethearts in a train been and shot themselves or each other. Taken out as dead as mutton!'

Wilfred could not help pausing to hear the horrible story as Alfred rose and walked along with him. It was only too true that two young people, engaged without immediate prospects, but without actual opposition from their families, had absolutely agreed to go by a train from Brighton to London and destroy themselves on the way. The landlady where the girl had lodged said she had heard them talking and laughing about making away with themselves if some scheme did not answer, and that one of them had even said, 'What a sell it would be for the people who found them.' But she had had no notion of their meaning anything but a joke, and they had gone off apparently in high spirits.

Wilfred was extremely shocked, and his exclamation and countenance showed it so plainly that young Greylark said, with an interjection, 'What now? Very 'cute of them to have done with this world—rum place as it is—while they were happy.'

'You don't really think so, Greylark.'

'I'll swear I do! Great swells may get some fun out of life and be jolly enough, but for us poor beggars——' and he yawned.

'Yes, if you think of nothing but fun and letting your wife slave for you.'

'And little enough the slut does of that! Always after them kids. If I'd guessed! Wise chap that to make away with her before there were any, and himself too—saved no end of bother.'

'And what do you think the poor wretched creatures would wake up to?'

Alfred shrugged his shoulders. 'Oh! that's your parson's jaw.'

'But just suppose it is true.'

'Well, suppose it if you like. I never asked for life! It is my own; why can't I do what I like with it?'

'Now, as I see it,' began Wilfred, 'life is a great trust to be used for God's glory, and that we must give an account of——'

'Oh, shut up! You are not at your Sunday School class. A pretty sum total you make of it after all, toiling like a nigger for your old goody of a mother and your fright of a sister, never a

notion of a lark, besides all the parsons lay upon you; and what do you get by it, in that rotten old concern that won't stand on its legs another blessed year? As if I'd be you! No, I thank you! I'll enjoy life while I can, anyhow.'

He turned whistling towards the 'Fox and Hounds,' while Wilfred pursued his way towards the church. A year ago he would have answered boldly that he actually had more happiness and enjoyment in life than Greylark, who was always grumbling and swearing at something, always kicking at whatever work was laid upon him, always apparently being disappointed in his bets.

But life did not look so smooth to Wilfred now. There was that sad yearning after Lucy which would have made all the future a dreary blank to him even had the prospects of the factory been more cheerful than he knew they were. The whole world looked dreary and hopeless to him, and the words kept coming back to him, 'Life my own; why can't I do what I like with it?'

His own answer was, as Greylark had inferred, by rote, and though it came readily he now thought it over. Could he feel in his inmost heart that it was a trust that no one had a right to throw up?

Would God be severe with those who did so, in weariness at the outlook before them?

Of course, a man trained and developed as Wilfred had been did not feel a personal impulse to end his despondency by anything so awful, nor was it so acute as to be really a temptation, but he could not help thinking over the question, which had not before occurred to him in the abstract. He had acquiesced in all that had been taught him by the Church, had taught it himself, nay, had lived by it and acted on it; but was it real inmost faith? that life was not something to be spent as purely, honestly and happily as one could, in hopes of some eternal peace and joy when it was over, and that might be ended, if it became miserable, but a great trust to be spent on trial as Christ's member, with the certainty that pain and grief were training for the future crown? He had said so, heard so, sung so hundreds of times. Was it more than words to him, when disappointment in love, and distress in worldly affairs stared him in the face?

He had walked on mechanically towards the church, but at the moment an utter distaste to the entire practice, the jarring notes, the endless rep-

etition, and all the rest, seized on him. He felt it a kind of unreality, and the monotony seemed in his present state unbearable. He looked at the path that led away from the church up into the Priory woods, and was almost on the point of rushing away from it all.

However, a call of 'Holloa, Bill!' from George Pucklechurch arrested him, and he remembered the turmoil and scandal that would be caused by his running away from practice. Mechanically he turned and answered. Mechanically, as if he had been one of the organ pipes, he took his place, and sang in his turn.

He did not seem to be thinking about the matter any more than the boy who was staring after a wasp, but when he parted from the rest of the choir, and went home in the dark, a verse kept ringing in his ears like the echo of the text he had heard at the children's service—

> **Oh tarry thou the Lord's leisure.**
> **Be strong, and He shall comfort thine heart,**
> **And put thou thy trust in the Lord.**

The tumult in his heart was stilled. He felt like himself again, and the whole argument had gone from him into the anxiety whether an ex-

pected order from a fancy shop in London had come.

But the conflict was not ended. Greylark was too shallow and impatient to hold an argument or be convinced. He did not seem to have thought at all, only he would sometimes throw out a little dart that had been dipped in venom. Thus when he came upon Wilfred burying, out of Laura's, and the old cat's, sight, three poor little kittens which had necessarily been drowned, he threw out the remark, 'Ay, that's the way to serve 'em when they gets too many.'

'Well, I'm sorry to take away life; but at any rate these poor things have no souls to grow and be saved.'

'Souls! souls! You are always after that rot! 'Tis all jaw. Make your fun out of life while you have it. Toss up for the rest!'

He strolled off, while Wilfred was preparing his answer of grave warning.

CHAPTER XIV

DOWN THE POLE

Men were deceivers ever.—OLD BALLAD.

LUCY DARLING was again sitting in the little kitchen at her aunt's at Minsterham. She looked paler than usual, and as if she had gone through much fatigue and sorrow, and yet there was a kind of rest and relief on her face such as often comes when kindred in home and blood are reached after long absence among strangers.

It was two years since she had been there, one year since the Sterling family had been at Popple Court, and another year which she had spent in Scotland. She was in plain but handsome mourning, and her fine countenance and the noble, grave expression on her regular features, as also her well-kept hands, made her look like a lady visitor in the cosy kitchen whither she and her aunt had repaired to enjoy the fire on a chilly summer evening, and to have a talk, after the de-

light of the little Hart girls in receiving her was quenched in bed.

'Poor afflicted little innocent,' Mrs. Darling was saying; 'you did your duty by him, and that is a comfort to think of!'

'He was a dear little boy, a very dear little boy,' said Lucy, 'and he was getting on so nicely. No, auntie, I do not believe there was anything really wrong with him. He was backward, but that was more than half from the way he had been managed, sometimes petted and coddled, and sometimes neglected and frightened, the dear.'

'Could you ever expect to get him to be like other boys?'

'Oh yes,' said Lucy, with all the bold assertion of an affectionate, enthusiastic nurse. 'He was not so forward as little Owen, of course, but he could quite talk, and even say his little hymns, and his prayers, so prettily! I taught him a line at a time. Oh if you had but seen him, with his little white hands joined'—and her eyes were full of tears—'"God takes care of Sir Alley," he said; and once, when all the road was full of sheep and lambs, he said, "Sir Alley is the Good Shepherd's little lammie." That—that,' with

heaving chest, 'was the very last time he went out, before he went to the "green pastures."'

'Ah! I am glad you were able to teach him so much,' said Mrs. Darling, not quite able to be struck with his precocity; 'you did your best for him, I am sure, poor dear little lamb.'

'They were all amazed, Mr. MacEdie and Mrs. Ruthven and all, at the way he had got on, and he behaved so nicely that last time. He took off his bonnet, and made a bow, quite like a little gentleman, as he looked in his dear little kilt. Mrs. Ruthven said he must be photographed, but he never was. And I have nothing to keep, but a lock of his bonny light hair.' Lucy took out the locket, showed it, and kissed it as if the boy had been her lover, and indeed his love for her had been his strongest feeling, showing through all his semi-conscious suffering from the hydrocephalus that ended his poor little life, which had been so much brightened by her devotion.

'I am glad his friends showed their sense of it,' said Mrs. Darling. For Lucy, besides her year's handsome wages, had been presented with a hundred pounds as a testimonial to her indefatigable care and exertion through the illness. 'Only

your due, I am sure, for it must have been a mighty dull life you had to lead.'

'To be sure it was not very lively,' said Lucy, smiling, 'but then I should not have had time for much variety. My little laddie took me up pretty closely, and it was so sweet to see him improve. I could get to church, for there is a lovely chapel at Dalkeith, and I meant to have taken him there this summer.'

'I thought the Scotch were all a sort of Dissenters, and you were always against them.'

Lucy laughed. 'They think us the Dissenters,' she said. 'They are most of them Presbyterians. They were at Kiledox, and they have no Bishops and no Prayer Book, and what they call the Kirk is not the Church; but at Dalkeith, the Duke of Buccleuch has a real beautiful church with a real priest and service, and I could go there most Sundays. Then, the doctor told me how to get books, and they were very nice ones—all Sir Walter Scott's novels that I had not half read before, and other books besides, very interesting indeed. Then one time, when Mrs. Ruthven had my laddie to spend the day, I was able to see Edinburgh Castle and Holyrood, and all I had

been reading about. It was so beautiful, and I did enjoy it. I have all the photographs. I would show you, but they are all packed up.'

'My old eyes would not make much of them. I say,' with a rather sly look, 'didn't that doctor meet you and show you about? Had not he something to say to you?'

The colour came up in Lucy's face, so that she was glad of the darkness as she answered, 'Oh! *that* was all nonsense! I stopped *that*. It was not suitable nohow. An old man, too, that might have known better.'

'And you might have been a physician's lady! And you look like it, anyhow.'

'Well, then I should not have been ready to take out these poor children, now that their father has written for them after all.'

'Neglecting them so long! I am surprised now!'

'Don't you understand, aunt? Jem Hart was out in a whaler, nowhere that a post could find him. Poor fellow, it was more than a year before he heard of Mary's death, and then there was no writing for months upon months, till he came back to San Francisco. So what could he do? And

he has sent the money for their passage, like a good father, as he always was.'

'Ay, he'll be after marrying you.'

'He can't. It is against the Prayer Book.'

'Mrs. Harris told me they did not care in America.'

'What is wrong here must be wrong everywhere,' said Lucy. 'No; I would not go if there was any fear of his being so foolish, but didn't you see he told Beatrice that she would find a kind new mother?'

'I hope she will, poor little love! But no fear for you! With your face and your fortune, you'll find plenty to marry you out there!'

'Not me,' said Lucy; 'I mean to see the children settled in with their stepmother, and then come home to you, auntie, and get up the business again. Mayhap, if she does not take to them, I can bring the little girls home again, but any way I shall come back to you, auntie.'

'Ah! you may talk, but I don't never expect to see you. Any way, it is well you are off with that young Truman. Poor Jenny Thorpe, I'm sorry for her, for I hear their fine paper machaw business is all broke up and going to smash.'

'Indeed. I am very sorry to hear it,' said Lucy, leaning forward. 'I thought they were all doing so well, and making such a show at the Exhibition.'

'So they said, and to be sure that young man was strutting about like a peacock over his eggs, and only gave me just an impertinent little nid-nod of his head, as if he had been the Duke himself! And his sister, she with the blind eye, she never came near me. Ever so much too stuck up, I can tell you, but it was all just hollow, like a mere bladder, and now, by what I hear, they are going down as fast as may be, and we shall have them bankrupts before you can look round! So you are well out of it, my dear, and I am glad you were prudent in time.'

Lucy made no answer. She had been longing to hear of Hillside and Downhill all this time, but this was not the way she hoped, and she was relieved when her aunt got up and said it was time to light the lamp, eat a bit of supper, and go to bed.

She felt very restless to hear more. She knew her note had been hasty and harsh, and she had yearned again and again, in that quiet time at

Dalkeith, to be able to unsay those angry words, and ask for an explanation, such as after what had passed she could not be first in soliciting. She had seen more than one possible suitor, for her face and bearing had rather improved in beauty than otherwise, but not one had touched her heart as Wilfred's tender ways had done, and none had given her the impression of solid trustworthy principle that she had felt in him. Even his indignation at her supposed offence struck her in her reflections as showing how much higher and more delicate was his standard than that of most young men. And this she had lost, through hasty passion! Yet what could she do?

The next morning, when walking out in the town, she saw in a fancy stationery window a paper-case in the same style as those of the Downhill factory, and, going in, she recognised behind the counter an old schoolfellow of her childhood. They greeted one another warmly, and Lucy asked to look at some knick-knacks that she wished to send as keepsakes to Scotch friends.

'That!' said her old companion, as she took up one of the brooches, 'that's from Downhill works.

You'd better look at this lot. They are from Hogg and Salter's, quite the superior article.'

'I think I like this better. The water in the landscape is so pretty.'

'Ah! they said it was all done at Downhill, but it wasn't, you know. It was all got from France on the sly. I know a gent who has a berth at Hogg and Salter's, and he told me it was well known that Whetstone got all his best goods smuggled over from France, and then they make believe it is English, and done at Downhill.'

'But I was shown how it was done there; it is pressure.'

'Oh, that's a flam! There was a young fellow over here, showing articles for sale never made there, you may be sure. Such a disreputable lot I never saw, and he said he was in the Downhill works, and had had enough of their mean ways, and wanted to be taken on at Hogg's! I'm sure if they have loafers like that in their works, it shows what sort they must be! But they'll be in the "Gazette" in a week or two, and serve 'em right for such a fraud.'

'But Miss Carbonel was in it!'

'Oh, ladies, specially pious ones, can take you

in as well as anybody else, or be taken in themselves first, and so do it thoroughly. They are all tarred with the same stick, as Mr. Atkins says. He has a share in Hogg and Salter's, you know.'

Lucy bought a brooch, and went away sick at heart. Could she believe Wilfred Truman to be really implicated in fraudulent proceedings, when she thought of his frank open face? He *could* not be the disreputable lot, nor have gone so fast down the slope. Yet she longed for certainty.

Well! she could do nothing. She could not fly to defend or help him. She could only be glad to be going out of the way of all painful reminders over the broad ocean. If Wilfred was concerned in a great deception, she should never feel that any man was to be trusted.

Presently a young man with a saw under his arm and a basket of tools at his back came up and spoke eagerly to her. She did not recognise him at first, but he said, 'Charles Hewlett! Don't you remember me?'

'Oh! yes. How is your grandfather, and all at Uphill?'

'Oh! all very well, thank you.'

'And the *papier mâché* works.'

'Oh! that's just done for. Bankruptcy imminent. Miss Estrid will have to go out as a governess.'

'No?'

'Yes, indeed! And Will Truman looks as sulky as a bear! Taken down a bit!'

Charlie laughed. He thought he had made himself agreeable. But Lucy did not ask him to tea!

CHAPTER XV

A DIM AWAKENING

My knowledge of that life is small,
The eye of faith is dim.—BAXTER.

THINGS did not look well for the Downhill works. They certainly were undersold by Hogg and Salter, and it would have been giving up their very principles, their whole *raison d'être*, to use the inferior materials that they knew their rivals accepted. Still they held on in hopes of a turn, and likewise to fulfil engagements; and though they took on no new hands, they paid their old ones regularly, and even for the sake of Mrs. Greylark's usefulness continued to find for her husband inferior employment which he fulfilled in a very inferior manner. His whole interest seemed to be at Poppleby, where there was a public-house named 'The Winning Horse,' at which it was pretty certain that a good deal of gambling and betting went on, but the police had hitherto failed in any detection.

'He is a regular brute,' said Laura one afternoon, when little Percy toddled in crying and calling for 'Tea, tea.'

'Oh Mrs. Truman,' said his mother, following with Gloriana in her arms, 'if you would spare my poor little ones a drop of milk. There's their father, snatched all my money out of my hand as soon as I had got it, and said he would bring me back the change, but he has never come, and most like he won't till his pockets are empty, and the poor dears are just famishing.'

To see a little child hungry was quite out of Mrs. Truman's power, and both she and Laura were very fond of Percy, so in a few moments the young mother was in a low chair, feeding Gloriana with sop, while Percy was nibbling bread-and-butter at Laura's side.

'I'm sure, if I had only known!' moaned the poor young woman.

'Well, it is too late for that now,' said Mrs. Truman, cheerfully. 'The thing to do now is to say your prayers that God will help you through with it.'

'And you think He will, thoughtless naughty girl as I was?'

'I am sure He will, if you only tell Him all about it.'

'I do, I do, and how you have told me about Jesus Christ. I think He will, though I have been such a bad girl.'

'He will know that you knew no better,' said Mrs. Truman, the tears rising in her eyes.

'And I will take these little ones to be baptized if their father will let me. I *do* want them to belong to God, and to be better than we have been, but then we did not know! But oh, Mrs. Truman, he says he is going to take us all away to Hogg and Salter, off ever so far. And what shall we do? Nobody ever was so good to us as you! And my poor babies! He is so horrid to poor little Percy, if he runs up and meddles with him —downright cruel. He well-nigh broke the dear little fingers the other day because the child touched his pipe!'

'I saw they were bruised,' said Laura, 'and the child said "dada" but I never thought it was true.'

'True enough. I'm fain to get him to bed before his father comes in, for there he is safe. He can't understand yet, you see, to keep out of the way. I must go now, as he will be in.'

She was crying, and that set off both the children into sobs and roaring. Mrs. Truman picked up Percy in her arms, with soothing 'There! there!' and away they all went; leaving Laura to tidy up the tea-table in case Wilfred should come in late, as he often did, as there were business accounts to settle with Mr. Whetstone, who sometimes gave him that meal.

And the step outside was not his, but Miss Malvina's.

Laura explained that her mother had gone with Mrs. Greylark, and might, she thought, stay to help to put the children to bed, for the poor little thing seemed quite tired out and not fit to have any more fatigue, and her husband had gone off with all the money, 'like a brute as he was.'

'Poor foolish little thing,' said Miss Malvina. 'She pays a heavy price for a thoughtless marriage; but I think your mother has done her good.'

'Oh yes, ma'am. She is quite different from what she was when she came. Mother has got her to church once or twice, but she cannot often. Her husband is at home in the morning, and they don't get up till noon, but in the evening, if he is

out, she will sometimes go with mother if I look after the babies.'

'Does she understand?'

'Yes, Miss Mally, she follows with the book. She can read, and all that, quite well, and she asks questions, and says her prayers, as she never did when she came. She even talks of having those poor children baptized if she can get their father's consent, but it is no good asking him. He only says things that make one shudder to hear, and he is so rough and perfectly cruel to the children. Poor little Percy runs and hides when he hears him coming. My brother did say he would be had up by the Society for Cruelty to Children, and he said—he swore, ma'am—the children were his own, and he would do what he liked with them, and just cursed—you'll excuse me, Miss Mally—any one who interfered with him.'

'I wish we could do anything to soften him. It is a sad look-out for the poor thing,' said the young lady; 'I am very sorry for her. I believe that Society for protecting little children has done good by making those boyish selfish fathers think them of importance. I heard a good deal about

it when I was in London. And there was something I meant to tell you, Laura—I went with my friends to call on Mr. Rupell.'

'Oh, is he married, ma'am?'

'Yes, to an old schoolfellow of mine. And they took me to see his studio, where I saw his picture of St. Elizabeth among the poor, the very one in the catalogue. It has been sold, but he had it to touch up. There was Mrs. Sterling's Lucy quite plainly! So I said, "I think I know your St. Elizabeth. Would you mind telling me if she sat to you for that figure?" "Why, no," he said, "there was some absurd scruple of her family, or her young man, and nothing would induce her to sit. But Sterling luckily had taken a photograph of her with his boy which just served my purpose." So you see it was quite true that she never did sit.'

'And why couldn't she have said so?' exclaimed Laura.

'Perhaps she did not know,' returned the young lady.

'I expect she wanted to be off,' said Laura, 'or she would have made some explanation.'

'That one cannot quite tell without knowing

all,' said Malvina. 'At any rate, I felt it due both to your brother and to the young woman that this explanation should be known, and that she did not deceive him. I am afraid the Bee had a sting and not the Butterfly,' she added smiling, but Mrs. Truman came in and Laura began to talk fast about the wickedness of Greylark, the hopefulness of his wife, and the pretty ways of little Percy. She did not want Miss Malvina to talk to her mother about Lucy Darling, and the young lady was aware that she knew too little about the matter to go any further.

But as she went away she could not help wondering within herself whether Laura could have any prejudice or have made any mischief between the lovers.

And Laura remained, wondering within herself what she should do about the discovery that Lucy had not been in fault. Should she tell Wilfred at once? She shrank from the probability that he would be very angry with her, and declare that it was all her fault, and no doubt this was at the bottom of all her reasonings with herself and her conscience.

First, it certainly would not have been a good

time to speak of it, for Wilfred came in quite tired and worn out, hardly able to touch his supper, or to talk. He had been looking through the stock with Mr. Whetstone, and reviewing the accounts, and everything looked as bad as possible.

Laura asked whether his quarter's salary was safe, and got for answer—

'That's all you think about.'

'Come, my sonny,' said his mother cheerfully, 'I'll read prayers to-night, as you are so tired. Go to bed, and you'll be more cheerful to-morrow.'

'I don't see why. To-morrow will only make things worse. Facts are facts.'

However, he went to bed, but Laura could hear cracks and rustlings through the wall, that told her he had little sleep. No; what was the good of vexing him with reviving a love affair with a grand nursery governess who had taken offence and cast him off in his prosperity, and certainly would never look at him when his situation was crumbling away from him, and he might not be even secure of the last quarter of his salary? It would ill become him to apologise for having mistaken her, and to ask her pardon! If he should think it right to do so, she probably would only

misunderstand, and flout any attempt at reconciliation.

It was much better not to vex him about what was gone and over.

Over? Little did Laura know!

She could not believe that to know that he had been unjust to Lucy and so lost her would be anything but a grief, and she was afraid of his anger, though she thought it was his sorrow. Still, being a conscientious person, she made up her mind after a day or two of self-debate to write herself to Lucy Darling and tell her that it had come to light that she had never sat in person for the picture of St. Elizabeth. It was a difficult and disagreeable letter to write, and Laura lingered over the undertaking, considering how to show that she honestly wished to do justice to Miss Darling, and yet not to make it appear too much as if Wilfred wanted to renew the engagement that had been broken off so decidedly by her. It really took the listening to a sermon on 'Agree with thine adversary quickly' to lead her finally to make a transcription of her letter. She had never told her mother of Miss Malvina's discoveries.

Mother was too old-world, too simple and

straightforward, and would want too much of an apology to be made, never thinking of the dignified way of doing the thing; and perhaps the answer would make it easier to tell Wilfred. She remembered that her mother knew nothing of the address but 'Kil—' something, she could not tell what, and therefore directed her letter to 'Miss Lucy Darling, care of Mrs. Darling, Little Minster Street, Minsterham.' She waited and waited for the answer, but none came, and it was natural to conclude that all was at an end. Moreover, the approaching failure of the works was becoming known, and in consequence some of those who had been offended by what they termed 'Bill Truman's airs' now took the opportunity of rudely condoling with him or asking him uncivil questions. Greylark especially threw insulting words at him, and issued commands to 'landlady,' as he called Mrs. Truman, in a very unpleasant manner. He declared that it was a mere take-in to have got them to the paper works, and that he should carry his wife to a better market as soon as she had received her last wages. She need not whine and cry! He should soon flog out of her all the stuff they had put into her.

All these rubs and mortifications did not improve any one's temper or make Laura more willing to utter a confession that would anger her brother.

CHAPTER XVI

'I FORGIVE AS A CHRISTIAN'

'Which means,' said Wamba, 'that she does not forgive him at all.'—SCOTT'S *Ivanhoe*.

'THERE is no help for it. We shall have to go into liquidation,' said Mr. Whetstone at the conclusion of a diligent overhauling of the accounts with Estrid Carbonel.

'You really think so?'

'Not if we are to act honestly, and not go on living on the crust of a volcano, in constant, nay, certain danger ourselves and involving others in our losses.'

'Nothing will give us a turn?'

'No; I waited for the result of this last venture before speaking, but all in vain. If we break up now, we shall retire with honour, pay at least fifteen shillings in the pound, if not more, and have done no great harm to our creditors. My only regret is the having drawn you into it.'

'Oh! that is nothing. Aunt Sophy kept clear,

for which I am most thankful, and Mally only dabbled, not enough to hurt her, having the fear of Edmund before her eyes.'

'Is this all yours? Of course it is, but I had a hope something was reserved by trusteeships.'

'Nothing, and I am glad—I should feel it a dishonesty.'

'Ah! Estrid, you little know what it means. You had better throw in your lot with me. I can easily get a birth again, not in the navy, of course, but in the P. and O.—or at Lloyd's—and there will be my pay till I have found some colonial town to settle in.'

'I can't be a burthen to you. No, Harry, do not press it. I will come to you, or you shall fetch me, as soon as you have found your colonial town, but meantime I can work for myself. I could go and nurse, so as to learn to be useful in your work. Don't be afraid!'

'We could do that together.'

'Yes, but it would lead to nothing, whereas the settling in some town where English doctors were at a premium would be probably the right thing to do.'

'So be it then, though oh, Estrid, the sepa-

ration will be bitter!'—as he looked at her fresh young face, so resolutely cheerful.

'There, it is not come yet, and we won't talk of it,' she said with a tremulous working of her features. 'We have plenty to do and to go through before that! I—who thought the industry would be such a blessing and boon to our people!'

'Luckily for them they did not rise to it.'

'Only poor Wilfred Truman. Well, it is lucky his young woman turned him off, though I believe it was only on account of his own ridiculous preciseness. But what will he do?'

'He is a sharp fellow, prig though he is; he will fall on his legs, fast enough.'

'And those poor Greylarks?'

'Hogg and Salter will snap at the woman! She is the only one worth having, and would be worth her weight in gold if it were not for her encumbrances. Such a lout as the man I never saw!'

'He does not drink, I fancy.'

'Not manifestly, but enough to fuddle his wits, if he has any, and I more than suspect he does worse—gambles! I don't expect they will give him work at Hogg and Salter's.'

'And what will become of that poor thing, and her babies! Mrs. Truman has done her so much good, and is so kind to her.'

'The greatest kindness would be to strangle that fellow she is tied to,' laughed Mr. Whetstone.

'Then you are really going to write letters to give us the *coup de grâce?* Shall I help you?'

So in bravery and resignation the two young people faced what was indeed a heavy trial and disappointment, but, happily for them, coming while they were young enough still to have a reserve of hope and buoyancy.

Yet perhaps buoyancy is more a matter of character than of age, for Wilfred's spirits sank as he realised how the fabric in air had vanished away, and how he would be left in a few weeks to find fresh employment. Unfortunately, too, he had a share in the business, and though very small, the result would be the loss of his savings.

'Well!' said his mother, 'at any rate you have this comfort, that we can do very well for ourselves. You have been very generous and good to us, my boy, but what with the fowls, and the milk, and needlework we can rub on, and take in a lodger besides.'

'I'll help you, never fear. I shall not see you suffer,' said Wilfred, with a sound rather too like a grunt. 'There's no one else to care for.'

'No. One can see now that it was good that that little matter of yours was off,' said his mother. 'You would be in a worse trouble if she had taken you a couple of years ago.'

'Don't, mother. If I had only been patient and not given offence.'

'She would never have had you,' cried Laura, 'she only wanted to be off, or she would have explained. She never did sit. The artist *did it* from her photograph.'

'What do you mean? How do you know?'

'Miss Malvina saw the picture and asked, and the man told her so! I wrote and explained, and she never answered me.'

'You! Why did you meddle? When did you hear? When did you write?' Wilfred inquired in a tone of bitter dismay and resentment.

'I thought it beneath you. I thought she ought to know,' sobbed out Laura, incoherently, 'but I would not have you lowering yourself.'

'You had better mind your own business. When was this?'

'Oh Wilfred, don't—don't be so cross.'

'When was this?' he continued sternly to ask.

'When Miss Mally came home from London.'

'A month ago at least! And you never told me. I believe it was all your spite from the first!' cried Wilfred, standing up with clenched fists.

'Oh Wilfred! Wilfred! You did believe it yourself! Don't, don't! Indeed, I wrote kindly to her, I did!'

'Wilfred, my son, take care! You have no right to speak so to your sister,' said his mother, really frightened by his passionate gestures as Laura cowered away from him.

He drew himself back. 'She has just ruined my happiness for life,' he said with a heavy groan, while Laura hid her face and wept violently with incoherent words, Mrs. Truman standing between them as if she actually thought her daughter in danger. Meanwhile, Wilfred having managed to extract at last that it was a fortnight since the letter had been sent to the care of the aunt, sat with his head on the table buried in his hands.

Then the good mother said, 'Come, my son, you see your sister never meant to do you any harm.' 'Humph,' from Wilfred. 'She waited,

don't you see, till she could tell you it was all right.' 'Humph' again.

'You see it was a mistake! Can't you forgive her?'

'Oh! Wilfred, Wilfred,' sobbed Laura. 'Say you forgive me! I did it all for the best!'

'A fine best you made of it,' he muttered.

'Come, come, children. Talking only makes it worse. Hush, both of you!' said their mother, who was old enough to know what words, even well-intentioned, do in a family quarrel. 'Hush, Laura, you had better go to bed.'

'I can't, till Willie has forgiven me,' and there were more broken words, during which Wilfred never raised his head, but his mother saw the knuckles of the hand under his forehead white with the strained grasp of repression. She longed to make Laura let him alone and leave him to her, but at last, perhaps half from weariness, came out the words: 'There, get along, I suppose I must say I forgive. But——'

Laura had very nearly set out on a fresh score about pardoning in heart, but her mother fairly pushed her out of the room and drove her up the stairs.

Wilfred stood up as his mother returned, and said: 'Well! She has done her best to ruin my life!'

'Willie, my boy! she did not know.'

'She was jealous from the first, or she would not have made me believe that cock-and-bull story,' he answered bitterly. 'There now, mother, I don't want to vex you; but I must be off to Minsterham to-morrow to see whether the old woman there knows anything of her, and has sent this precious letter of Laura's.'

His mother kissed and cosseted him as if he had been a little boy, and he ended by muttering, 'There's nothing like one's mother after all—none of them to trust to——'

He found, however, that it was not possible for him to go to Minsterham. Mr. Whetstone came in very early to fetch him to go over the works with a person who might take the machinery off their hands; and Mrs. Truman only had time to say, 'I'll go instead of you, Willie. It will be the best way. Susan Darling will speak out more to me than to you.'

CHAPTER XVII

THE BLACK MINUTE

The black minute's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend voices that rave,
Shall dwindle!—BROWNING.

'JANIE TRUMAN! Who would have thought it? Well, you are a stranger!' was Mrs. Darling's greeting, as her cousin appeared at her door. 'Come in! I'm glad to see you! Some one told me there was a smash at your son's works!'

'Well, I'm afraid there is, but it is not all settled yet.'

'And whatever will he do, poor young man?'

'He has his resources. He can turn his hand to most things,' said Mrs. Truman, who did not like her son to be pitied.

'Ah! but at his age, you know. Six-and-twenty, ain't he? So! It was a good thing that he and my Maria's Lucy did not hit it off, ain't it?'

'That was just what I came about. Has she had a letter from my Laura?'

'From Laura, was it? There it is, up on the mantel-shelf.'

'And you did not send it on. Why?'

'Bless you, Janie! She is gone to America.'

'To America! When?'

'Last Sunday was a week. Jem Hart, he writ home for the children to come out to him, and she would not send the poor dears alone. Well, they were a care, and terrified me with their noise often enough, but it is terrible dull now there's no one to come in! Little Minnie, she kissed me so pretty. "Aunt Sue," says she, "come out, and you shall have a tame whale."'

'But,' said Mrs. Truman, breaking in on Minnie's anticipations, 'how about the sickly little boy?'

Thereupon she heard of poor little Sir Alaster's death, and how Lucy had proposed to come back to her aunt, and revive the millinery business, but just then had come a letter from her brother-in-law describing shortly his adventures as a whaler, and sending the passage-money for his three children, as he intended to marry a 'right good woman, the widow of one of his shipmates,' and settle out there. 'She declares she will come back to me,' ended Mrs. Darling, 'but there, I know

better than to reckon on it. Bless me. She'll be married out there, not a doubt on it. She looks quite the lady. Young Hewlett, of their firm, came calling to see her, but she held up her head. She knows what is fitting for her now.'

'And you have not sent on Laura's letter?'

'She did not leave her address, not being sure where she should be.'

'It was a pity she was gone before she got the letter. It was to tell her it was all a mistake about her having sat for the picture. My son Wilfred, he is ever so sorry he made such a work about it. To think that only last week he might have seen her and made it up.'

'Well!' returned Lucy's aunt, 'it was no harm that he missed her, then. He had broken it off, and very well for her! His prospects bain't what they was, nor hern neither. Why, that little fortune of hers might all have gone. Creditors is so grabbing.'

Mrs. Truman was thinking what that same little fortune might have done in enabling her son to make a fresh start; but she only said, 'My poor boy's heart is in it. He is very much wrapped up in her.'

'Then he should not have gone and written her such a letter,' retorted Mrs. Darling.

'He *was* hurt when he saw her picture in the catalogue.'

'And she was hurt at his taking her to task.' The two old ladies were again on the verge of a quarrel, and Mrs. Truman carried off Laura's letter, not being at all sure whether it would be sent on. She could not help thinking what that 'little fortune' might have done in setting Wilfred on his feet again. And if Lucy had been willing to pardon him, all her help had been lost by Laura's delay in writing or speaking. That was evidently what Mrs. Darling was thinking of when she rejoiced. The mother thought it better not to tell Wilfred all when Laura was there to receive the first burst of his indignation, so when she left the station at Poppleby she took her way home by the works at Downhill, meeting on the way Mr. Whetstone, who paused to tell her that they had had a trying day: 'That poor little lodger of hers, Mrs. Greylark, had been nervous, let a knife slip, and made a gash in her left hand. We bound it up,' he said, 'and Miss Carbonel has gone home with her, for she was very nervous and shaken,

poor little thing. That husband of hers is gone to try for work at Hogg and Salter's, but she won't be able to do anything just at present.'

'Poor child, I am very sorry for her! Is my son at the works, sir?'

'Just coming away. You'll meet him if you step out.'

She had not much heart to step out, but she did meet him, locking the door of the office where he left so many disappointed hopes and broken schemes of success.

It went to her heart to give an additional and such a heavy pain, to one already looking so weary and dejected, but there was no blinking it. He had to hear that Lucy was gone to the further side of America, and that if only Laura had spoken or written sooner, he might have seen her and made his peace with her, or at any rate have known whether peace was to be made.

She could not wonder at the fierce ejaculations —nay, imprecations—with which he heard her words. 'My boy, my poor boy, God help you!' and he turned roughly away from her soothing hand.

At the field-path to Uphill he broke from her. 'I can't—I can't go home, I can't see that traitor

of a girl to-night! Don't ask me! I should do something to her.'

'You shall not see her! You'll come. She——'

'Stop that, mother—I—I——'

'But you'll come.'

He answered by some inarticulate sound, and flung away from her.

Poor woman! She was trembling and praying all the way home, praying for her son, though her tender, gentle old spirit little guessed the conflict that was raging within him.

All was over with him, he felt, as he turned towards the river, and went up the wooden bridge that spanned it, leaning over the railing looking at the stream flowing on. All had gone from him. He had lost the only woman he could ever love, lost by his sister's evil tongue! No hope of joy was before him, not even a chance of prosperity—all had closed up; nothing was before him but grinding toil and poverty, toil on behalf of that wretched, malicious woman, his sister. It made him sick to think of going back and facing her.

End it all! Escape the toil, disgrace of failure, and tedious poverty! Did not the cool depths of

the river invite him to forget all? Then Laura would know what her spite had done. She would be sorry! God would know how he had been cruely treated. And——

But mother! Could he leave her broken-hearted and desolate?

Nay, he might break her heart even more thoroughly if he lived and rushed into—into—any courses that would make him forget. End it at once! Not be vexed with Laura's triumph in her malice and her pretended repentance, or be bound to work for her all the time!

Out of the way of it all! Of all the grins of Charlie Hewlett and the other louts at his fall. Of all the sting of remembrance of the fair face lost to him for ever by his own preciseness and Laura's treason. He would see and feel nothing when those waters had closed on him.

Would he feel nothing? Ah! what had he been bred up from childhood to believe of the other side? Alf Greylark and others called it folly and delusion, and said there was nothing, only utter forgetfulness. Oh! that he could be sure that he could forget. That quiet flow of the river seemed to draw him. One plunge! And

then? No—forgetfulness it would not be! God would be before him demanding what a man deserved who fled from his work on earth, and left his mother to misery.

'All nonsense. Don't be a coward!' a throb in his brain seemed to say! The next throb said, 'The devil called! He would have you,' and with a movement of terror he let go the railing of the bridge, and started back in sudden terror, with a cry, 'God help me!' Ah! it was not in vain that his good mother's prayers were ascending as she walked. Nor in vain that his preparation for Holy Communion had put into his lips the entreaty, repeated time after time, 'From a sudden and wicked death, good Lord, defend us.'

Yet it came again. The ripple seemed to his throbbing ears to call, 'Come, come! Forget, forget!' Faces of derision, even laughter, at his failure rose up. Laura's silly desire to be pardoned for the unpardonable—Lucy never to be reached—he had almost turned back when again recurred that thought, perhaps the answer to his cry, 'Mother! Poor mother! 'Tis true, 'tis true. There is judgment beyond! Satan, it is you calling! God help me! God help me!'

With trembling knees he turned—out of sight and out of sound of the river, and flung himself down under a tree, as weary and exhausted as if he had been carrying a heavy load all day. And in his ears sounded the echo of the chant—

> **Oh tarry thou the Lord's leisure.**
> **Be strong, and He shall comfort thine heart,**
> **And put thou thy trust in the Lord.**

To that music in his ears, Wilfred fell asleep. He had not slept all the last night, or only with troubled dreams, and had been hardly tasked with distressing, disappointing arrangements all these last few days, and the oblivion which had tempted him was granted him for a time. When he awoke the chant was still in his ears—

> **Be strong, and He shall comfort thine heart.**

He had slept soundly, for how long he knew not, but it was dark when he woke, a bright star was shining, and though he was chilled by the dew, there was a sense of peace and rest.

Laura would be in bed. Moreover he could recollect now that it was he, not she, who had written the letter he would have given worlds to recall.

He walked quickly home to warm himself. He saw a light still in the window, and supper was laid ready for him on the table. As he opened the door his mother came from the back of the house. 'That's right, my dear lad! Are you too tired, when you have just eaten a mouthful, to go for the doctor? That poor young thing is took terrible bad!'

CHAPTER XVIII

FORSAKEN

Despair and die.—SHAKESPEARE.

THE choir was practising. Wilfred was in his place, glad to be away from the restless discomfort at home, and among friends who would not jeer at his misfortunes. Suddenly, the church door was pushed open, and a gasping cry came in. The Psalm stopped short at 'I stick fast in the deep mire,' the organ sank into a long wail, something bumped down from the step of the porch, and Laura appeared, partly leaning on her crutch, partly on the perambulator, pushed by Sophy Brinks. 'Oh! please baptize them, sir,' were the first words audible. 'Willie, go home to mother. He's a wicked man! Oh! poor Eva!'

There was general confusion, added to by a lusty cry from Percy, who was struggling in the perambulator, where lay his little sister apparently unconscious. Both were wrapped in shawls, no other clothing, and both had bruises about the

head and shoulders. Miss Malvina, who had been at the organ, lifted one, Sophia Brinks the other, answering hastily the questions poured on her, while Laura sank on a seat unable to speak.

'He's—Mr. Greylark is a wicked man. He've been and shot poor Mrs. Greylark in her bed—and then himself.' Something of the satisfaction of making a sensation was in the girl's voice, and as awe-struck enquiries and ejaculations came from Mr. Elwood and the men, Laura recovered voice enough to say, 'Wilfred, Wilfred, go to mother!'

'Is she safe?' he only paused to say.

'Oh! yes, yes! He shot himself too.' Then while Wilfred darted off she explained: 'He came home mad, I think. Sophy and I were in our back kitchen, these two dears outside the door. He ups with them, and calls out "Drown the kittens!" and throws them right into the cistern, knocking their heads against the edge. Then off he goes into the inner room, and while Sophy and I were getting the dear children out, we heard two shots one after another! Mother, she was in the outer room, making gruel, but she gives a great cry—'He has killed her—it is both, both.'

'Was nobody near?'

'Only Mrs. Brinks. And mother, when she saw the little ones—Percy lay as if dead too—she said, "Don't come in, Laura. Go to the church after Wilfred. Here, the life is in them still. Take them, and have them baptized!" So we tore off their clothes, and the boy is alive sure enough, but this little one——!'

This was told not so coherently as it stands, and the vicar at once complied. Water was ready by the font, and Percy and Gloriana were at once baptized, no one remembering the rest of their names. The little ten-months' girl was certainly not dead, though she was much more hurt than her brother, who, poor little fellow, roared violently all the time, and could not be pacified till Laura took him, which she was scarcely fit to do. The clergyman brought her some wine from the vestry, and then hurried off after Wilfred, leaving her and the children to the care of Malvina and Estrid, who had attended an ambulance class. They were taken to the nearest cottage, where pitying women gathered round them, and brought garments for the children, while hearing over and over again Sophy Brinks's story.

Laura was anxious to get home to her mother,

and the elder Miss Carbonel had by this time caused her pony carriage to come up, and took her back with the orphaned Percy on her lap asleep and unknowing of all that had befallen him in death and in new birth. Estrid walked by the perambulator, where lay little Gloriana, moaning now and then, but looking deathlike and waxy.

There was no crowd about the garden door, though there was a buzz of voices in the rear of the house, that showed that the old farm court into which the Greylarks' cottage opened was crowded. Mr. Whetstone came out to meet them, and took Percy in his arms, fretting for 'mammy' as he came home.

'Poor little fellow!' he said; 'you had better take them both upstairs.' This was to Laura; then more to Estrid: 'That poor miserable wretch is alive still. Hand was unsteady. He will not live, but Hewlett's brake is just coming up, and the police have him in charge. Smith will go with him to Minsterham.'

'Oh! I am glad he will not stay,' said Estrid, shuddering, as Laura murmured in a choked voice, 'She—Eva?'

'Instantaneous,' he said; 'there could have been no suffering.'

Mrs. Truman here hastened out, pale and broken, but too much hurried and shocked for tears, her one thought to shield her daughter from any terrible sight; and when she had been satisfied that the children were living, and the boy not much the worse, she seconded Mr. Whetstone's advice that Laura should take them to her own room and watch over them. Malvina undertook to stay, and not only attend to the baby girl, but comfort Laura, who had fits of trembling and crying whenever she had a moment free to think.

After all, Percy did more for her than any one else. It was the time of day when he was used to his own cot and his mother, and he wailed to go to her in a way that went to their hearts, before they could settle him into his sleep.

As to the little girl, the doctors said no one could judge of her chances of recovery. The head had been dashed against the metal edge of the cistern, and whether she was stunned or had a concussion of the brain could not yet be told. Nothing could be done but to keep her quiet, and now and then give her nourishment.

Mrs. Truman came backwards and forwards, and it was quite late at night before she was free, and then Wilfred called Malvina gently at the door to ask if she would come to mother. Malvina carefully shut the doors, for Laura and the children were happily asleep, and she found poor Mrs. Truman in a choking hysterical agony, keeping back her sobs lest she should waken Laura, in grievous horror and dismay at the frightful shock, and in pity for the poor young mother, worse pity for the murderer.

Malvina could only hold her and soothe her, while Wilfred knelt before her, stroking her hands and coaxing her in tender ways, feeling all the time, with horror like her own, what it would have been to her, if he had been left to himself in like manner. She was able at last to swallow some of the sal-volatile that Miss Carbonel had sent, and to sit quiet while Malvina murmured comforting Psalms. Laura came down, having awoke, disturbed and anxious, and they were able to let Mrs. Truman go up to bed under care of her son and daughter, just as the early summer daylight was coming in. Malvina, declining all Wilfred's urgent offers of seeing her home, could

not help feeling refreshed to the point of enjoyment in the sights and sounds of the first summer sunrise she had ever witnessed—the infinite beauty of the golden dawn, the silvered meadows, the twitterings and chirpings around, and the glorious song of the lark high above. Oh! that pure stillness and sweetness! That man's savage cruelty, bred of selfish sin, should stain it with associations of misery and horror!

It was not till morning was much further advanced that the sleepers were astir. Wilfred, who had only lain on a couch the latter part of the night, was trying to get the fire lighted, very awkwardly, when, to his great relief, Mrs. Brinks came up with Sophy, both strongly attracted to the spot, and took the preparation out of his hands. Every one moved about in an awe-struck silence during those few hours while the house was left to itself. Percy alone was full of life, and all unconsciousness save of hunger and desire to play, though his little sister lay still and would not respond. They sent him into the fields with Sophy Brinks, and then Laura was allowed to see poor Eva for the last time. She lay, with her gentle thin face quite calm, showing no trace of

the wound, and with a tiny twin babe on either side of her. The tiny creatures had been hardly alive when they had come too hastily into the world they were so soon to leave, and were scarcely breathing, if at all, when the curate in uncertainty had baptized them. Laura and her mother wept many quiet tears over the piteous sight. They had loved the poor young victim of her husband's mad selfishness, and it was a great comfort to think that, ignorant and untrained as she was, she had been drawing nearer, and embracing the truer, higher hope, so that there was hope even in her death, dreadful as it was. The inquest was held on that day, not in the house, of course, except that the jury went thither for a sight of the body, but at the 'Fox and Hounds,' whither Laura and her mother were taken for the first time in their lives. They left the two orphans under the charge of Miss Malvina, whom Percy knew enough to accept her care when awake; while little Glory, as she was called, was reviving enough to be always fretting unless she was in some one's lap.

All that could be known of the history came out then. Alfred Greylark had gone to Hogg and

Salter's, at Denmead, taking with him most of his wife's last wages, as well as some specimens of her work, to make a fresh engagement for her and himself. This had not been very favourably received—no doubt his looks had been against him—and doubts had been thrown on the specimens he brought, as to whether they could be her genuine handiwork. He had sworn he would bring her over to show what she could do, and had spent the evening at the 'Winning Horse' at Poppleby, where, under stringent enquiries, it came out that he had won from a young man all he possessed, including, unfortunately, the revolver. He slept there, and going leisurely home had met at Downhill certain acquaintance who had told him, rudely chaffing him, of his wife's accident at the works, and of the premature birth of the twins. To their minds it was only a good joke to put him in a fury of despair over the gin-and-water to which they treated him; and, though the landlord declared him to have been fairly sober, he was what one awe-stricken youth termed 'a little elevated.' This young man owned that they had teased and chaffed him till he was 'well-

nigh beside himself,' and that they had won most of his former gains.

The rest of the fatal story was soon told. Mrs. Truman had been in the outer room, and had spoken to him in vain when he tore past her, and immediately she heard the fatal shot, and, before she could put down the saucepan she was holding, the second. Mrs. Brinks had rushed in, and they found him on the floor, insensible.

There was no doubt of the verdict of Wilful Murder against Alfred Greylark, little occasion to have examined Laura on the attempt on the children, nor Wilfred on the signs of the poor man's state of mind. There was no probability of his living to be tried at the assizes, when his sanity would be the question. The Coroner had heard at Minsterham that his wound was mortal, and that he would hardly survive the next day.

The Coroner asked if there were any relatives, and what would become of the children. Mrs. Truman only knew that there was a sister in London, but did not know her address, nor did she believe that there had been any news of her for some time. As to the children, 'we will see to them, at least for the present,' was the general

voice; and some of the spectators of a higher class handed Wilfred some money to meet funeral expenses, as the only way they could show their feeling for the poor young mother, not yet twenty years old.

CHAPTER XIX

WHAT NEXT?

Is there no prophet soul the while,
To dare sublimity meek,
Within the shroud of blackest cloud
The Deity to seek?—CLOUGH.

THE funeral was to take place in the evening of the next day, and in the morning Wilfred received a telegram from the chaplain of the gaol saying that Greylark wished to see him. Of course he could only comply, and in due time he stood by the screened-off bed in the prison infirmary where the unhappy man lay, raised on pillows, with the greyness of death on his face. The wound was in the breast, so there was no disfigurement of face visible, but there were laboured gasping breaths, each of which to Wilfred seemed ready to be the last.

Was he sensible? The eyes—black beady eyes —turned as if recognizing the newcomer, and as Winfred bent over, the words came in a gasping whisper, 'Kids come round?'

'Yes, the boy quite well, the baby better.'

'Your doing. You must look after them.'

'We will, we will,' hastily said Wilfred.

'Boss, you were right about ——' and a look of terror passed over the face, ending in such an awful spasm that it seemed as if it would end then and there, but as it passed he held out his hand and said, 'Won't do to think, know it fast enough.' His face worked again, as Wilfred, kneeling, pressed his hand, and choked with feeling, as well as conscious of other eyes on him, just uttered, 'God in His mercy! Remember Jesus Christ—Oh! I'll pray.' There was a withdrawal of the hand, a look of misery incapable of the effort of thought, and the elderly nurse, who had been borrowed from the hospital, touched Wilfred's shoulder, and said, 'He can't bear more—you must go.'

Outside, Wilfred met the chaplain, who, seeing his shocked, agitated face, took him to his own room, and told him, 'Yes, that is the way. He is suffering too much for definite thought, I fear, for repentance. Tell me, is there anything to work on? You have known him.'

Wilfred was so much overcome that he could not speak, but only shook his head, and it was

not at first that in reply to some kind words and questions he explained that he knew nothing of the poor fellow's previous life except that he had education enough to read and write, but apparently no knowledge of religion or principle, and the only ideas he had picked up were from the denunciations of street orators. Like a heathen, his whole notion of life for man was selfish enjoyment, not that he had reflection enough to put this into so many words, and he had avowedly married that his wife might work for him. And thus, when he found her disabled from work, and surrounded with infants to be maintained, his rage and disappointment had carried him to these dreadful extremities.

'If he could but live long enough to repent!' sighed Wilfred.

'I fear there is no chance of that,' said the clergyman. 'All we can do is to commit him to God's infinite mercy, and hope that there may be change of heart beyond our power to trace. But——!'

That 'but' was as if he could not feel much hope. However, he asked his visitor to come into the chapel and join in prayer, and Wilfred was very glad to do so, and felt a certain soothing,

through all his humiliation at the recollection of the temptation that had assailed him, in spite of not being in pagan ignorance like the poor prisoner.

He went home, full of awe, silent prayer, and yet of thankfulness, at the preservation which he felt to have been real. Life might have become dreary and hard, but he was glad that he had not cut short his trial; and, besides his mother and sister, he perceived that his hasty promise of consolation would, to his own conscience at least, bind him to the care of the two orphans, unless any nearer friends appeared. He believed his mother would feel the same.

He came back to find the house in the turmoil of the funeral preparations. Laura, of course, remained in charge of the two poor babies. Mrs. Brinks wanted to carry the boy in the procession, but Mrs. Truman would not hear of it, and she and Wilfred walked together as very sincere mourners, for they had really loved the gentle, hard-tasked Eva, who, in spite all her disadvantages, had a truly womanly soul, slave to her tyrant indeed, but devoted to her babies, and yielding to all good impressions. Surely, though it was a

dreadful mode of death, it opened to her the door of peace and the rest she had never known in this life.

Mr. Whetstone and the sisters Carbonel joined them, as did the other workers at Downhill, and the church was full of people, villagers and gazers —people who wanted to say they had seen the funeral of the poor young wife. Indeed, that was nothing to the next day, when absolute crowds beset the farmyard, and three policemen had to be on guard, for there were numbers from Poppleby and even from Minsterham in what may well be called vulgar curiosity and love of sensation.

Expecting something of the kind, Miss Carbonel asked all the Trumans, with the two babies, to spend the day at Greenhow, locking up their house, and putting it under charge of the policemen and Mrs. Brinks, who would feed the cow and poultry. She was only too glad to act as show-woman and repeat all the details she knew.

She was very different from the Truman family, who only shrank from speaking of what they had undergone. The tidings of the wretched Alfred Greylark's death had come that morning. He had

never shown himself more sensible than when Wilfred was with him, and he could only be thought of as gone before his Judge.

The vicar came over from Downhill, and preached a sermon which many remembered as remarkable. It was on 'He departed and hanged himself.' And it spoke of the three suicides mentioned in Scripture, each occasioned by remorse and despair, and in one case, that of Saul, there had been recorded a forsaking by God, and a like statement is made of Judas before his culminating sin. None could study the subject without believing that Satan gained power over the wills and minds of those who had given themselves up to his temptations, found his allurements and promises fail them, and were impelled by him to despair and cut short their hopes. Unbelief, questionable pursuit of riches, baffled passion of love, fear of humiliation, disgrace, and poverty were all known to lead to the want of submission and violent endeavour to escape from the known trial to the unknown, whereto the great Enemy blinded their eyes. Juries, in mercy, often called that insanity which could scarcely be other than possession.

Wilfred could hardly repress the shudder under

his surplice with which he recollected his conflict on the bridge.

'Often Satan's argument was, Life is my own unsought, am I not free to dispose of it? No! A thousand times, no. I am God's creature, set in this world on trial which I have no right to cut short. The miseries that I dread are the chastening I need, the blows of the tool to shape the stone for its place in the building. It is sheer cowardice to try to escape from them, and leave friends and relations to be doubly miserable—contemptible cowardice in many cases, even to our eyes. True, good and exemplary people, even men of prayer, have been left to themselves to fall in this manner, so as to be an occasion of falling to their brethren. Who knows whether the "temporary insanity"—generally the verdict passed on them—may not be the old inheritance in their blood from evil ancestors, giving the devil a hold over body and spirit, though by God's mercy it may be trusted not on the soul redeemed? "To their own master they stand or fall," and so, indeed, do those poor shallow, passionate beings who know not what they do, or those whose overwrought brain has lost its balance

and who revenge disappointment on themselves. And what can we do to ensure the not being left by God's grace to the impulses of the evil spirits who would drag us to their hopeless gulf? For be it remembered that no crime is so utterly hopeless and without remission as this, and therefore Satan snatches at his advantage. Good Lord deliver us therefrom! What can we do, but keep up constantly our continual prayer to be delivered from evil, and all that it means, not only temptation and danger, but our "Ghostly enemy and everlasting death." Those daily and constantly recurring collects, asking for trust and dependence on God, are our safeguards! So is, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me," with all the like cries in the Psalms, the constant habit of Communion, and the perpetual realisation of the Divine Presence.' He ended slowly and deliberately with the Burial Service anthem, 'Man that is born of a woman,' and finished it with, 'Suffer us not for any pains of death (or dread of life) to fall from Thee.'

CHAPTER XX

KIN AND KIND

This little orphan boy
For he hath no misgiving.—WORDSWORTH.

THERE were consultations afterwards as to what was to be done. The vicar, Mr. Oakley, came in to talk to Mrs. Truman and ask whether there were any relations, and what she thought could be done with the orphans.

'I never heard of no relations of his,' she said. '*She* had a sister who was an artist's model up in London, but she had not heard of her for more than a year.'

'If there are any, they will be sure to see this terrible story in some of the papers, and come forward if they can help.'

'Yes, sir, and no doubt they would have the right, but my son, he made a sort of promise to the poor young man to look after them. I think he was glad they were safe.'

'I see—you don't want to part with them?

'Well, sir, we have somehow got took up with

them, especially my daughter, and we should be sorry to let them go till the little girl is quite well at least.'

'Very kind and good in you, Mrs. Truman, but you must not undertake too much, now your son is thrown out of employment.'

'Oh! sir, poor little unfortunate dears, I could not let them go!' and the tears were in her eyes and began to flow. 'If I can only be a mother to them, they will share and share with us.'

'I am sure you will be a mother to them,' said Mr. Oakley, 'and remember that I shall be glad to do anything for them. We shall always feel that they have a claim upon us. Your daughter acted nobly in bringing them to baptism.'

'Yes, sir; I was glad to send her out of the way of the worst of it, and their poor mother had promised me to have them christened when she could. Oh! sir, she was a good girl, as good as she knew how to be, and that's my comfort.'

'I am sure she owes much to you, Mrs. Truman; her own self, perhaps.'

'And to my daughter, sir. She took to Laura from the first, and Laura has been ever so much more cheerful, and thought less about her own

troubles, poor dear, since she had the boy to mind.'

Laura was at that moment sitting with little Glory on her lap, while Miss Estrid and Mr. Whetstone (who was a surgeon) were trying to discover what was still amiss with her. She was a pretty little creature with brown eyes and chestnut wavy hair, and had been rather forward, almost walking alone, knowing what was said to her, and clutching eagerly at anything bright and pretty, but now she cried at any attempt to put her down, and held to a hand in evident terror, nor did she take the least notice of the watch that Mr. Whetstone held before her eyes, though she smiled and turned her head on one side when he put it to her ear, even making a little sound of delight when he whistled to her.

'Has she always been like this?' he asked, 'not noticing what you show her.'

'Oh no, sir; she was as merry as could be last week over a red-and-white ball. She cooed to it, and I don't know what all! Nor she didn't mind being on the floor as long as she could see one. Oh! sir, you don't think she has not her sight, the darling?'

'I am much afraid it is so! Can you show me where the bruises were?'

Estrid, who had done the most for her, pointed out where the chief blow had been, and, indeed, there was no need to ask, for the poor little maid screamed when her hair was touched near the spot, and clung to Laura. Indeed, it was not the external bruise that Mr. Whetstone thought a subject of anxiety, but he was afraid of the effect of the shock of the blow upon the brain and the nerves of the eye. Still, he hoped it might be the temporary effect of concussion, and might pass off with it, though it was plain that he feared more than he hoped, and he promised to see the little patient again when he came back from London, whither he was going the next day to try to obtain a berth in one of the steamers.

Just as Mr. Whetstone was imparting this additional misfortune to Mrs. Truman, while Laura gave way to her tears over it, a message came up by one of the Brinks children:

'Please, Mrs. Truman, there's a lady and gentleman come down from London as says she is poor Mrs. Greylark's sister, and they wants to see Mrs. Truman, and Mr. Truman and the children

and all. And mother is telling them all about it, only she hasn't got the key. And, ma'am,' looking up with eyes of dismay at Miss Sophia, 'he is drawing the house of a Sunday, ma'am.'

Of course the children must be taken to the new-comers, but there was no reason that Laura should confront the strangers, especially when she could hardly restrain her tears. Only she sobbed out an entreaty that she might be fetched if these people were really going to carry away the dear, dear children.

Percy was found sitting upon the dresser in the kitchen with all the maids paying court to him, admiring himself in the bright lid of a saucepan, and grasping tight the cook's favourite china poodle, which he finally carried off with him, when pushed away in the perambulator by Sophy Brinks. Mrs. Truman carried Gloriana, tearfully caressing her as she fell asleep. 'Oh! my sweet, will they be good to you?'

'Nobody could help it,' said Wilfred, as he walked by her side. 'It will be a lot of trouble off your hands, mother.'

'I sha'n't think of that if only I could be sure they would use her well, pretty dear.'

The 'lady and gentleman' met them. She was an imposing figure, tall and striking, with a great drooping feather in her hat and a big pocket-handkerchief in her hand. She was a larger person than poor Eva, and well set up and preserved, and she had the same pretty features and complexion, not worn into premature haggardness like her sister's.

'Ah! here come the poor darlings,' she cried, throwing herself upon Glory, who, suddenly wakened by a strange voice and caress, began to shriek, and was only pacified by Mrs. Truman's soothing voice. Percy, too, though not in general shy, was frightened at the great black hat and mantle swooping down on him, and he kicked and called out, 'Go—go—uggy woman! Mammy, mammy!' the cry he had not yet forgotten. The man, who was small, rather elderly and wizen-looking, was introducing himself in the meantime to Wilfred as Mr. Smearing, artist to the 'Weekly Pepper Castor,' which Wilfred had seen at a low shop and news-agency in Poppleby.

'A melancholy catastrophe, this,' he began to say. 'Probably you had not my better half's address, or you might have wired us in time for this week's issue.'

'Certainly, I do not think Mrs. Greylark was aware that her sister was married.'

'Very possibly. The miserable and misguided brute Greylark was not a connection to accept. In fact, I never heard of the sister till my wife fell into hysterics on seeing the tragedy announced. Was she a person of the same amount of attraction as Mrs. Smearing, may I ask? It would be an interesting trait to add to the description.'

'I don't know,' said Wilfred, infinitely disgusted. 'She used to look tidy enough, but just fagged out. Had Greylark any relations, do you know?'

'I tell you, I never heard of the wretched being. I believed my wife alone in the world when I yielded to her charms. Could you show me where the church lies, with her grave? A sketch would be interesting!'

The man could hardly be blamed for looking on the 'horrific tragedy' as so much grist to his mill, but to Wilfred, with nerves still all ajar at what he had seen and felt, the tone was unbearably disgusting, especially when the visitor began to impress on him that beyond endeavouring to excite sympathy for the orphans in the paper, noth-

ing could be expected for the brute Greylark's brats.

His wife, though at first more sentimental, was all in the same mind. Mrs. Truman felt bound to regale them with tea, as they could not go home till the mail train stopped at Poppleby, and neither showed any loss of appetite, though they demanded all the sad details which they had already heard from many tongues. Mrs. Smearing squeezed out a few tears, and made a display of pocket-handkerchief, but she said, 'Poor Eva had always been a wilful girl, who didn't know what was good for her.'

The father, it appeared, was dead, and she did not know what was become of the stepmother; and when her husband was gone to take his sketch of the church, her interest seemed to be in relating to Mrs. Truman how many admirers she had had, apparently every artist for whom she had posed, and how at last she could not resist Mr. Smearing. 'There was more dependence on him; young men are so fickle, you see.'

He had been married before, and had three children, nearly grown up, and his lady impressed upon Mrs. Truman that it was impossible for her

to have anything to do with the little Greylarks. 'Best send them to the Union,' she said. 'Only too good for the children of a such a horrid brute of a ruffian!'

'I don't think they will go there just yet,' said Mrs. Truman.

'Oh! if you are so good as to burthen yourself with them, that is another thing! But they have no claim on us—Greylark's children upon Mr. Smearing! No, indeed.'

Mr. Smearing coming in just when Gloriana was sitting up in a basket that served for a cradle, with flushed cheeks, open eyes, and intently listening to the sounds, could not help remarking that she was a pretty child, who might serve as a model for domestic—even sacred—pieces. But when she began to cry and he heard that those beautiful eyes were probably blind, all he could say was, 'Asylum case, no doubt. Parish will see to that.'

'Mrs. Truman talks of keeping them,' said his wife.

'Oh! very well! No objection, I'm sure. If you are philanthropic enough to afford it, it is all very well, and by-the-by, well worked, the unfortunate orphans might be a little fortune to you. I

would have no objection to put in an appeal in the "Pepper Castor" and might get it copied. Such melancholy incidents bring in cash.'

'Thank you,' said Wilfred in his most dignified manner, 'we do not mean to make them a plea for begging.'

'Oh, very well, no offence,' said Smearing, casting his eyes round the comfortable farm kitchen and the Sunday clothes of the mother and son, which had a well-to-do aspect. 'I only wished to suggest some slight assistance, though there is no claim on us, none at all.'

That was what both were most eager to impress on these unlooked-for friends of the poor children. Percy was not a particularly pretty child, and was besides at a troublesome age. He was fretting and whining for supper and bed, nor had his aunt forgiven his uncomplimentary speech, so that there was no chance of his winning her heart, though she did kiss the rosy cheek of poor little Gloriana before going forth to mingle with the more congenial crowd on the way back to Poppleby, to the great relief of Mrs. Truman and Wilfred.

Next week there arrived a number of the 'Weekly Pepper Castor,' with a gable-ended many-

chimneyed farmhouse, and a square-towered, deep-roofed church, also a still more fancy portrait of a little boy and a girl, no doubt from blocks already in the store of the 'Pepper Castor,' with an article beginning, 'The rustic locality we here present was the scene of the parental atrocity.'

And that was the last that was ever seen or heard at Uphill of Mr. and Mrs. Smearing.

CHAPTER XXI

AT THE BASE

> Souls by nature pitched too high,
> By suffering plunged too low.
>
> 'CHRISTIAN YEAR.'

THE break-up of the Downhill works had really come. Either there was not capital enough to enable the first storm of difficulty to be weathered, or materials such as were employed were too expensive for a selling price, or foreign articles took the public taste, or Hogg and Salter were able to undersell the more conscientious manufacture—at any rate, the business had to be dissolved while it could be done honestly and honourably.

The sufferers were few, and bore it cheerfully. Malvina had happily not run the risk of the speculation; and as it was plain that her Aunt Sophia, though still youthful and active, could not be left in old age, she was still to continue at Greenhow as before. Gladly would they have kept Estrid there, but she was absolutely deter-

mined on being independent, and decided on becoming a bonâ fide hospital nurse, beginning as a probationer, and acquiring skill and experience that would be helpful when Mr. Whetstone should have found his practice and she would join him.

Mr. Whetsone had secured a surgeon's birth in a steamer going to New Zealand, and he proposed to Wilfred to go with him, obtaining a passage as steward's assistant.

Wilfred was sorely tempted. His nerves had been more shaken by the horrors and miseries of the catastrophe than those of his mother and sister, perhaps because he had experienced something of the temptation, and he longed for change of scene and to shake off the associations. His mother even thought that it would be better to let him go, he looked so ill and had such sleepless nights; but Laura cried out, as she thought was her duty, that he could not leave her mother to struggle on with no help save hers, and those two babies on her hands. Wages? they were to be had at home. Yes, that was true, but the cow, pig and garden needed a man's hand, and John Brinks would have to be paid if he helped. It would be sheer wickedness and undutifulness to

go off and leave mother to shift for herself in her old age.

Wilfred knew it would, and yielded to the argument. His mother could not help crying for joy when he told her that he had finally refused; and though Mr. Whetstone and Estrid said it was a mistake, they could not say it was wrong. Moreover, Mr. Whetstone lent him his beloved turning-lathe, to be used freely, though with care.

This same lathe was Wilfred's great help through the hard winter that followed. For it was very hard to obtain employment. He offered himself to the Hewletts, and old Mr. Hewlett was sorry for him, and more sorry for his mother, but there could be no turning off of old hands to make way for him, and there could only be hope of employment in case an extra job turned up. The management was a good deal in the hands of the younger generation, and they did not like Wilfred Truman. He was a deserter from their firm and a Jack-of-all-trades, who had held his head too high. 'A jackanapes,' Charlie Hewlett said, 'who had played fast and loose with the handsome Miss Darling.' And once, when some rough carpentry turned up, the young men

laughed among themselves and said they would not ask the gentleman to spoil his hands.

Indeed, Wilfred had for that very reason not solicited employment (and could hardly have got it) in hedging and ditching when harvest was over. He tramped backwards and forwards to Poppleby and Minsterham in search of employment as clerk or shopman, but none fell in his way. Perhaps there was a feeling that he was an unlucky man to be avoided, and some of the intangible idea, that those concerned in a failure or a tragedy must be to blame, hung about him in spite of Mr. Whetstone's excellent recommendations.

At any rate, all he could effect was to get some of his woodwork with his lathe sold on commission in one of the shops, and he was scarcely paid enough (and that uncertainly) to get materials. So that he was reduced to living upon his mother, and trying to obtain sleep by his work in the garden, and long walks, which sometimes ended with the jeering question from old comrades, who recollected past airs, 'Found anything good enough yet, Bill?'

Mrs. Truman had been able to increase her

clients for laundry work, and Miss Carbonel had put Laura in connection with a baby-linen warehouse. They had two lodgers also, an old labourer who was very contented, and gave them no trouble, and a very cross old woman, as short-tempered as she was tidy, who was always grumbling at the children and declaring that the workhouse was too good for them, and never was pleased except at a little bit of attention from Wilfred.

There was not actual distress. Mrs. Truman had once lived more poorly; but the Sunday joint was given up, and other little luxuries, and the butter, eggs, and other matters had to be sold instead of eaten. Week after week was anxious work, though there was never a word of complaint, nor of asking aid for the two orphans. Little gifts to them were, however, welcomed from the Greenhow ladies, who, with Mr. Whetstone and the Trumans, had become their sponsors, when they were admitted into the Church after their strange baptism. Little Percy cried so violently at sight of the font that it was thought he remembered the terrors of the day; but he was in general a bright, intelligent child, gentle and

good to his sister, whom he began to lead about, and she grew quite happy and confident when she held his hand, and did not seem to miss her sight, though she listened eagerly and loved nothing so well as Wilfred's whistling, or to be sung to by Laura over her work. She would sit quietly on the floor, amusing herself with a few baby playthings, as long as she was within touch of Mrs. Truman or Laura, and could hear their voices.

One thing Mrs. Truman averred, namely, that these poor children were worth anything for the good they had done to Laura. She had no time for her ailments, nor for writing verses, and was infinitely better in health and temper than she had been since her accident. The sense of having done a great injury to Wilfred, and the longing to be freely forgiven, had no doubt humbled her and rendered her more gentle and less self-opinionated. As to Wilfred, the shock they had undergone and the need of exerting themselves and feeling together had brought back the usual terms between them.

'Indeed, Jane,' said Miss Sophia, talking it over with her, 'I think the way you have borne this and your goodness to the orphans have

brought a blessing on you all. I have been much struck with Wilfred's whole manner. It is no small merit to go on as he is doing under his disappointment.'

'I only wish his spirits were better, ma'am. I sometimes think I ought to have persuaded him to sail with Mr. Whetstone. It is so trying for him to be hanging about here with nothing to do worth speaking of. Little Glory, she seems the only one that can cheer him up with her pretty ways, when she climbs up, and pats his cheek, and he makes her laugh.'

'Good will come in time, depend on it, Janie. As long as he holds firmly to his duty to you and looks up to his God, there can be no doubt that the trial will end happily for him, and for you all.'

The long hard winter, or rather the early spring, did go painfully and heavily with them. The old woman, Mrs. Miller, had bronchitis, and wanted nursing when Mrs. Truman had a cold and ought to have been laid up. Laura was full of aches, which she bravely suppressed, though she found work difficult, and the children were cross and troublesome from being shut up in the house. It was a new thing to Laura to be afraid

of wasting coal, and to hear that no more could be had in, till the last washing was paid for!

Wilfred would once have scorned the idea of carrying a great basket down between himself and Sophy Brinks, but he meekly did it now, to put it and the eggs and butter in charge of old Barton, the carrier of goods from Uphill and Downhill to the Poppleby station. But behold Master Barton was in bed, very ill with the rheumatism.

'I'll tell ye what, young man,' said his daughter, 'you'd best take the horse and cart and go his rounds for him!'

'I shall be very glad if he will trust me,' said Wilfred.

'Old Jack knows where to stop as well as his master does,' said Loo Barton; 'but you'd best come in and hear.'

Master Barton snarled a good deal about young chaps playing their antics, though Wilfred wondered which was most likely to play antics, himself or poor broken-kneed, thick-pasterned Jack. To recollect all the calls in due order was a more doubtful matter, and Barton sneered with a contemptuous laugh when he brought out the notebook for commissions hitherto unfailingly en-

trusted to the old man's memory, independent of the base expedient of writing. However, all were safely performed, and when he returned he found that the doctor had pronounced that the carrier was in danger of rheumatic fever, and must not hope to be out till far on in the summer.

The arrangement was made that Wilfred should continue to drive the cart, receiving for his trouble a fair proportion out of every shilling he brought home. He was glad to be really earning something, and obviating the difficulty to his mother, and he deafened his ears to, 'Halloa, Bill Truman driving old Jack? I say, have you got a new racer?'

He found before long that people at Downhill and Poppleby were more willing to entrust him with their messages and orders than Master Barton, who, though perfectly honest, had of late been getting puzzle-headed, and at the best could not read writing. Warmer weather only showed that the poor old man must give up, and go to live with his son, and the horse and cart were offered to Wilfred for the not very alarming sum of fifteen pounds.

Should he give himself to the business, if the

money could be raised, or paid off gradually? It was a fall from the days of scheming on the summit of his paper fabric; and he had seen people look amazed at any one so well turned out, as his mother kept even his working clothes, driving rough old Jack and the open country cart. But he had already seen how he could make the work more profitable if it were his own, and he was carpenter enough to improve the cart. Only the advance would touch on the remnant of his mother's savings, and leave nothing for 'a rainy day.'

However, just then a letter arrived from the brother Harry in Australia, who had newly heard of the disaster of the works, and actually sent thirty pounds to make a fresh start with, or to bring the whole party, little Greylarks and all, out to Brisbane. Laura would not have been sorry to go, but Mrs. Truman said she was too old, and she could not leave the graves of her husband and poor George, besides old Miss Sophy and her church.

So half the thirty pounds went to secure old Jack, who had plenty of work in him still, and Wilfred really felt better pleased at painting his

own name on the cart than when he had taken his first cheque as foreman. Before long, he hoped to give Jack a stouter companion, to make the cart a van, and go on market-days as far as Minsterham, for there were many country places on the way uncomfortably far from a station.

He had gone to Minsterham to endeavour to ascertain what prospects there were of success, when he was startled at seeing a humble funeral coming out of Little Minster Street. He asked one of the neighbours who were standing at their doors, and was told it was indeed Mrs. Darling's, who had died of influenza a few days previously.

He knew that his mother would wish him to join the scanty attendance at the funeral, and he hoped to learn something about Lucy, so he followed with the few old friends to the cemetery, and afterwards joined the neighbour who had nursed her, and had a little to tell of her patience and resignation, which he knew his mother would like to hear.

A telegram had gone to the niece in America. Mrs. Darling had her direction there, and knew that she was staying with the widow to whom Jem Hart was engaged till he should return from a

voyage. Lucy reported her to be a good motherly kind of woman, the widow of one of his shipmates and quite likely to make the children happy. Lucy meant to wait till Jem's return, and then to come back to her aunt.

'But,' said the neighbour, 'this will make all the difference. She had promised to come home, but she will marry out there, not a doubt of it. Poor Mrs. Darling said I *must* send it, or she might be coming home.'

So the hope of hearing of Lucy was cut off. However, he had braced himself to his work, and a quiet gravity grew up in him, cheerful and ready, though subdued.

CHAPTER XXII

A RESOLUTE WOMAN

From moon to moon
I can endure in weary faithfulness.—MYERS.

THAT telegram found Lucy Darling staying in a comfortable little house in that strange new growth of a city, San Francisco, peopled as it were by all nations. She was with Mrs. Kloots, Jem Hart's *fiancée*, who had come to meet her and the children on their arrival from the long railway journey, lasting nights and days. Jem Hart had gone on another coasting voyage, which he did not expect to last long, and had deferred his marriage till his return.

Lucy, after all she had gone through, and the anxieties and discomforts of the voyage and journey, arrived quite ill for the first time in her life, so ill that Mrs. Kloots would not let her get up, and called in the doctor, who kept her in bed for a fortnight with a feverish attack, during which time Mrs. Kloots and her growing daughter gained

WILFRED TAKES LITTLE GLORY TO THE BLIND SCHOOL.

the affections of Tom, Beatrice and Minnie, so that by the time Lucy was about again she was convinced that they would have a happy home.

Mrs. Kloots was older than Jem, fat and comfortable, and with a house of beautiful neatness and order. Her husband had been boatswain of the *Sweetheart*, and she had always been kindly and hospitable to all the crew, so that when Jem returned with the tidings of his death by a fall overboard, and knew himself to be a widower with three children, he thought he could not do better than secure her. She, being one of those women who have a natural turn for having some one to take care of, had accepted him, all the more willingly for the sake of his children; and as she had already an inclination to the Church, she was ready to assure Lucy that the little ones should go to the Church Sunday School, as well as to a day school in the city, where they were likely to receive a good education.

In due time Jem returned, browner and less English than when Lucy had last seen him four years previously. The children, even the elder ones, hardly knew him, but he soon won their hearts by his sailor's good nature and the presents

he bought for them when they went out in the street with him. They were unanimous that this was a much pleasanter life than with Aunt Sue.

'I say, Lucy,' said Jem one day, when they had gone out for a walk, that he might show her his former ship in the docks, 'I thought you had hooked a young fellow somewhere near your aunt's. Didn't that come off?'

'No, it couldn't.'

'Minsterham, wasn't it, and some paper works? Well, it was good luck for you, for I did see that the paper works were done for, an eternal smash, and that the young fellow as ran them had shot himself through the head, and his wife and children into the same boiling. Hullo, Lucy, one would think I'd shot you. Come into this chemist's store and have a drop of something.'

'No! No, thank you,' said Lucy, recovering herself, though obliged to hold by his arm; 'it can't—it can't be true. Where did you see it?'

'It was in a paper out from home. Will Day had it in Vancouver. His people send it out from England.'

'Oh! and there is no chance of getting me a sight of it!'

'None at all! I should think it had lighted his pipe long ago!'

'Can't you recollect any more about it?' said Lucy, trying to control her agitation. 'Did it say his wife?'

'Yes. So, sure enough, he must have found some one. Lucky for you, Lucy.'

'Oh! don't, don't; I don't believe it. Where was it?'

'Let me see. It wasn't in one of the big London guns, it was in a picture paper, and had a farmhouse, and over it "The Hillside Tragedy."'

'No name?'

'I'm the worst hand in the world for remembering names! Come, cheer up, old girl! You've had an escape, any way.'

Lucy could not cheer up, though she contrived to walk quietly home. Putting all things together, she could not believe that this horror could apply to the grave, religious-minded Wilfred Truman, with the good mother and sister. There certainly had been time, since their quarrel, for him to marry and have a child, but he must have changed his whole character very quickly to have come to such a terrible pass. Perhaps some vain,

flighty woman had caught him and broken his heart! If so, whose fault was it, save hers, for her hasty, passionate rupture with him, leaving him exposed to temptation such as seemed to have led to this ruin of body and soul alike?

Without exactly believing the account there was uncertainty enough about it to haunt her and make her miserable. Would not Aunt Sue have told her if it were true? Nay, Aunt Sue was not a good correspondent, and might have kept back what would only grieve her niece. All she could do was to write urgently to her aunt to entreat to be told what had really happened, and she counted the days till she could expect to hear.

Alas! Before the days were over came the telegram announcing Mrs. Darling's death. It was a terrible blow. Aunt Sue had been almost a mother to her, and all her plans were overthrown. She was absolutely without a home.

And there was one distress more to come upon her. 'I say, Lucy,' said Jem, one Sunday, as they walked home from church. 'You are just the moral of poor Mary. Why shouldn't you take her place, since your young man has done for himself?'

'Hush, Jem! It is impossible! Why, you are engaged.'

'Oh! Mother Kloots would see the sense of it. Children would be best with you! and you are a stunning girl! She couldn't set up to equal you.'

'I couldn't dream of using her in such a treacherous way, after all her kindness! And if I could, it is against the law.'

'Only in England. We are not so straitlaced out here.'

'Anywhere you are my brother, and it is a thing *not* to be done,' said Lucy.

'Gammon! No one thinks so out here. For the sake of the children, Lucy, your pets.'

'Do not tempt me. Even for the children, I cannot do what is wrong.'

She managed to break away from him in the crowded streets, and to gain her room at Mrs. Kloots's. Her heart yearned over the children, but even for their sakes she would not transgress; and at the time when a petition had been signed at Minsterham against revoking the law, she had read the arguments in a pamphlet, and understood that the husband and wife being one flesh, their kindred were relations one to another, and that on

this the Church founded her prohibitions. Besides, the treachery to kind Mrs. Kloots weighed not a little with her.

There was only one thing to be done—to flee from the temptation before it beset her any more strongly.

Jem, she knew, was to go to Los Angeles for the next day. She told Mrs. Kloots, with tears of gratitude, how thankful she was for the hospitality she had enjoyed, but that she was obliged to return to England. Perhaps good Mrs. Kloots was sensible that the comparison between her homely Dutch face and Lucy's stately form and handsome countenance was not in her favour, for she helped in every way to facilitate her departure; and after what really was a heart-breaking farewell to the children, Lucy found herself in the train, rushing in mid-air over the deep ravines and cañons of the mountains, and almost wishing that her career might end in one of them, rather than encounter the homelessness and desolation before her in England! And the doubt about Wilfred haunted her with a sense of remorse, as she revolved, with only too clear a recollection, her own hasty letter, and pictured to herself his disappoint-

ment in all womanhood, his own deterioration, his foolish fresh venture, his loss of all cheer and comfort, even of faith, despair and perhaps frenzy conducting to the most hopeless of all crimes. It was morbid fancy, of course, that assumed the certainty and declared it to be all her own fault, but she did not suffer the less in consequence, either then or on the voyage, when she kept as much apart as possible and discouraged all attempts at intimacy or attentions that were prompted by her appearance.

She could not bear the suspense any longer, and decided, on that account, as well as in order to obtain a recommendation, to begin by calling at Mrs. Sterling's.

To her great joy, it was an old fellow-servant who opened the door, and gladly welcomed her. Indeed, it was not a year since she had been in the house before, on her way from Scotland, though the time to her seemed long in proportion to the space she had traversed and the emotions she had undergone.

'Lucy Darling! Well, to be sure! If I didn't think you were in America!'

'I only went to take out the children. And how are the mistress, and Master Owen, and all?'

said Lucy, feeling that now she was near the truth she could not bear to face the question, and she heard how they had all had measles and were recovered, and were rampaging all over the house. And at that moment Owen actually burst into the sitting-room, and with a whoop of ecstasy flew into his own dear Lucy's arms.

Then there was a general rush to the drawing-room with the joyful news, and a message brought down that as soon as Lucy had drunk tea she should come up and see Mrs. Sterling. It was as much like a home-coming as anything she could hope to have, and while she was preparing for tea she had her mind at rest, venturing the question to Annie, the maid with her, 'Had the family been at Popple Court? Had there not been a most dreadful affair near there?'

'Ah! yes. At Uphill. We went over there one Sunday evening, Carry and I, to see the place, Hillside Farm it was——'

'And who——' her lips and tongue could get out no more.

'A lodger, a young man of the name of Greylark. A heathen butcher, I call him.'

Lucy could have almost fainted with the relief.

She stood with her back to the maid washing her face, but Annie detected the shudder of her form, and said, 'Ay, it was there that that young man of yours came from. Oh! yes, we saw him—not near—'Twas a schoolgirl who showed us round. He was marching about the garden as grave as a judge, with a little girl on his shoulder. They say he and his mother have adopted the two poor children that the monster of a brute nearly killed, and he did strike the poor little girl blind.'

Lucy's heart leapt up through all the chatter, which she hardly heard in the throbs of relief it gave! Annie had preserved the number of the 'Pepper Castor,' and she was to read all there.

She was asked by Mrs. Sterling to sleep at the house while seeking a situation. Now that Mr. Rupell was married, she was a welcome visitor, and the Sterlings only wished they could take her back into their service, for the nursery had never been so comfortable as in her time.

'I feel,' said Mrs. Sterling, in talking it over, 'as if it were incumbent on us to do something for her, for I am afraid that stolen likeness of her in Charlie's picture of St. Elizabeth brought trouble upon her.'

'I know it did,' said Mrs. Rupell; 'Malvina Carbonel told me so. It made a break-off between her and her young man. By-the-by, you say she is a superior person, quite above a common nurse-maid. Lady Alice asked me the other day if I could recommend a matron for the blind school.'

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SECOND JUBILEE

Our souls must climb from hope to hope,
And realise our longing.—LOWELL.

YEARS went on. Mr. Whetstone, having secured a practice in New Zealand, came to fetch his Estrid, and there was a happy, quiet wedding in Uphill Church.

First, however, he went to see the children at Uphill. Little Glory had arrived at trotting to the infant school with Percy, more by her own wish than Laura's, for she was the very joy of Hillside. She was a beautiful child, something of her aunt's good looks having descended to her, and her dainty little fingers had much of her mother's deftness while from the very cause that wisdom was by one entrance quite shut out, there was a concentration of acuteness of the other faculties that rendered her very intelligent. Laura had already taught her a good deal, and she went fearlessly about all over Hillside, and soon out-

stripped all the children, who could see, in the little arts of the kindergarten.

It was quite a blow to the kind Trumans to be strongly advised to let her have a few years' training in a blind school. They thought she was learning everything needful by the help of ears and fingers, and had already done wonders, but they could not help attending to the representation that to be taught by those experienced in the capabilities of the blind would probably not only open to her fresh sources of intelligence and enjoyment, but enable her to maintain herself, either by music or by handiwork. So it was agreed that she should be sent in her seventh or eighth year, or as soon after as there was a vacancy for her, to the asylum of which Lady Alice Bentworth was the founder and manager.

All looked forward with dread to the time, for the little girl was the delight of all. Percy was a bright, lively boy, going on well at school, handy and useful at home, and never so much pleased as when, on a holiday, he was promoted to an expedition with Uncle Will. For Wilfred had stuck to his carrying trade, and gradually had come to be the master of three horses, two vans, and a

pony carriage, with Ted Brinks under him as an assistant, and there was as much prosperity at Hillside as before the collapse of the *papier mâché* works. Mrs. Truman could allow herself to grow old, and only to superintend the laundry work to which she had trained a succession of Brinkses; and though Laura still worked, it was chiefly to clothe herself and the children, and to have something to give, rather than because earnings were a matter of dire necessity.

They had all settled down into a quiet state of everyday cheerfulness and occupation, such as some of Wilfred's van-passengers thought extremely dull, and time had gone so fast that Mrs. Truman was quite startled when Miss Malvina came to tell her that Mrs. Rupell had obtained a nomination from Lady Alice for Gloriana Greylark to her blind asylum.

Tears were shed over the outfit, and the little girl herself was divided between pleasure at the idea of companions like herself, of learning the piano, and of being able to read, and the pain of parting from Granny, Aunt Lolo, Percy, and the rest, above all Uncle Will. But then she was to show them all she could do in the holidays, and,

to begin with, there was a journey all alone with Uncle Will.

She sat on his knee all the way in the train, and he told her all he saw from the window, amused that their fellow-travellers never guessed at the blindness of those fine dark eyes.

They arrived. A little blind maid, with a shade over her eyes, opened the door, and showed them into a parlour, where Wilfred waited, with Glory clinging fast to his hand, and whispering, 'Oh, uncle, don't leave me if she is cross.'

But as the door opened, it was so sweet a voice that was heard speaking to some one outside that a smile broke out on Glory's face, and she gave a little nod. Wilfred did not see it. He stood up as so noble a figure entered that he thought at first it must be Lady Alice, but she held out her hand with 'Good morning!'

The voice, the touch, the look into one another's eyes were in one moment 'Lucy!' 'Wilfred!' The next, she had bent down to kiss and embrace the new scholar. 'My dear, my dear, I hope we shall make you happy'—but the words were broken by his cry, 'Lucy, Lucy, can you forgive me?'

The fair sweet face looked up to him. 'It is I who need the pardon for my foolish resentment.'

'It was all a mistake,' he said.

'If I had had patience, we should have known it long ago,' returned Lucy.

'And you can overlook? You can let it be as it was before?'

'Oh! yes, yes!' she said the more hastily for sounds of Lady Alice arriving. 'We must see to this little dear. Can you stay? I will come back. Come, my little sweet.'

'Oh, what is it, Uncle Will? Why are you glad?'

Oh! why? And why tell any more?

> **I do not 'speak' to that dull elf**
> **Who cannot figure for herself**

that Lady Alice was amazed at the light on her grave matron's face till she heard that the 'person' who had brought little Gloriana was an 'old friend' whom Miss Darling had not seen for eight years; how, when Lucy was released, the little waiting-room was the scene of mutual outpourings of two chastened and humble hearts, ending in a prayer of intense thankfulness; how Glory

was admitted to drink tea with them, chatter about new playfellows, who thought her name the prettiest they had ever heard; and how she was comforted when finally taken out of Uncle Will's arms by hearing that the sweet full tones that had won her heart belonged to her whom she might call 'Mother Darling' now, but would by-and-by be her own Aunt Lucy!

Yes, so she would be as soon as Lady Alice could supply the place of her invaluable matron, and Wilfred went home to show good reason for arriving so much later than he was expected, to fill his mother with calm thankfulness, and make Laura weep with gladness that the harm her tongue had helped in was repaired; and that Wilfred's face was more blithesome than ever she had seen it since the coming of that catalogue, yes, even in the short-lived exultation at the Exhibition.

She actually wrote a copy of verses about the good work of meeting and reconciliation that the unconscious blind child had brought about—true Gloriana, or Fairy Queen. Miss Malvina said they were the best she had ever composed.

Repair was wanted at the old farmhouse, and

Lucy's place at the Blind School could not readily be filled. So it was not till the Diamond Year, 1897, that the wedding could take place. The Sterling family had taken the rooms at Popple Court from Easter for their children, and came down there, that Lucy might be married from thence. Lady Alice was present. Mr. Sterling gave the bride away; Hilda and Frida, leading Gloriana between them, were the bridesmaids; Owen and Percy thought themselves best men. And among the presents stood a beautiful silver teapot and coffee-pot, with little Sir Alaster MacEdie's initials. The only ornament the bride wore on Lady Alice's gift of a pretty pigeon-neck glacé silk was a *papier mâché* brooch, with the cottage and the rainbow on it. Ten years had made it go out of fashion, but after the storms the rainbow, produced by strong pressure, was an appropriate emblem of the brightness that shone upon them. So Lucy put it on lovingly, in preference to all the wonderful Rocky Mountain crystals that came with affectionate messages from San Francisco, though these made her very happy and grateful likewise.

Mrs. Truman and Laura—yes, and Miss Car-

bonel and Malvina—knew why, by special request, the choir, before the early Celebration, chanted:

Oh tarry thou the Lord's leisure.
Be strong, and He shall comfort thine heart,
And put thou thy trust in the Lord.

FINIS.