

The Doctor's Daughter

"Vera"

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THE DOCTOR'S DAUGHTER.

BY "VERA."

AUTHOR OF "HONOR EDGEWORTH"

"_O Tempora! O Mores!_"

PREFACE.

Charles Dickens observes with much truth, that "though seldom read, prefaces are continually written." It may be asked and even wondered, why? I cannot say that I know the exact reason, but it seems to me that they may carry the same weight, in the literary world, that certain *sotto voce* explanations, which oftentimes accompany the introduction of one person to another, do in the social world.

If it is permitted, in bringing some quaint, old-fashioned little body, before a gathering of your more fastidious friends, at once to reconcile them to his or her strange, ungainly mien, and to justify yourself for acknowledging an intimacy with so eccentric a creature, by following up the prosy and unsuggestive: "Mr. B----, ladies and gentlemen," or "Miss M----, ladies and gentlemen," with such a refreshing paraphrase as, "brother-in-law of the celebrated Lord Marmaduke Pulsifer," or, "confidential companion, to the wife of the late distinguished Christopher Quill the American Poet"--why should not a like privilege be extended the labour-worn author, when he ushers the crude and unattractive offspring of his own undaunted energy into the arena of literary life?

Mr. B----, without the whispered guarantee of his relative importance, would never be noticed unless to be riled or ridiculed; and so with many a meek and modest volume, whose key-note has never been sounded, or if sounded has never been heard.

We would all be perfect in our attributes if we could! Who would write vapid, savourless pages, if it were in his power to set them aglow with rare erudition, and dazzling conceptions of ethical and other abstract subjects? If I had been born a Dickens, *_lector benevole_*, I would have willingly, eagerly, proudly, favoured you with a "Tale of Two Cities" or a "David Copperfield;" of that you may be morally certain, however, it is no mock self-disparagement (!) that moves me to humbly acknowledge (!) my inferiority to this immortal mind. I have availed myself of the only alternative left, when I recognized the impossibility of rivalling this protagonist among the *_dramatis personae_* of the great Drama of English Fiction, and have done something of which he speaks very tenderly and delicately somewhere in his prolific writings, one's "best." He says, "one man's best is as good as another man's," not in its results, (I know by experience), but in the abstract relationship which exists between the nature of the two efforts, and I am grateful to him for having thus provided against the possible discouragement of "small authorship."

In the subjoining pages, I offer to the world, a pretenseless record of the impressions, opinions, and convictions which have been, I may say, thrust upon me by a contact, which is yet necessarily limited, with the phases of every-day life.

That some of these reflections and conclusions should not meet with universal sympathy or approval, is not at all to be wondered at, when we consider how much more different, than alike, are any two human lives and lots. I do not ask my readers to subscribe to those tenets and opinions which may seem unreal and exaggerated to them, because of their different experience; I can only justify them in myself, by declaring them to be the outgrowth of my own personal speculations in the market of commonplace existence.

It has been my pleasure to probe under the surface of sorrow and song that makes the swelling, restless tide of human passions a strange and tempting mystery, even to itself; and though my pen may have failed to carry out the deep-rooted ambition of my soul, there is some comfort in the thought that I have made an effort; I have tried my young wings, with the hope of soaring upward: if they are yet too feeble to bear me, I am no more than the young eagle, and must rise again from my fall, to await a gathering confidence and strength that may, or may not, be in store for me.

A little mouse presumed to be the deliverer of a mighty lion, when this noble beast lay ensnared and entangled in a net; it was slow and tiresome work for the tiny benefactor to nibble now here, now there, wherever its small teeth could find a vulnerable or yielding spot: but a determination and decision of purpose, coupled with an undaunted and fearless perseverance, have given issue time and again to achievements even greater, though still less promising, than the undertaking of the little mouse in the fable, but for those who can yet take heart, in the face of possible failure, I think half the battle is won.

In introducing a second effort to the public, I feel called upon to avail myself of the opportunity it affords me, of thanking many readers for the kindness and consideration extended to my first. It was kind of them to have dwelt at length upon its few redeeming traits, and to have touched lightly and gently upon the cruder and more faulty ones; it was kind of them to have taken into account every circumstance which had any bearing upon the nature of the work: to have alluded to the youth and inexperience of the writer. It was kind, even of those who took it upon themselves to aver, not in the hearing of the authoress herself, but elsewhere, that the composition was far from being original. This latter verdict would have been the highest tribute of all to the talent and erudition of the authoress, had they who uttered it been capable or responsible judges of literary merit. Being of that class, instead, who feel it urgent upon them to say something, however garrulous or silly, when a local topic agitates their immediate sphere, the authoress has not much reason for hoping that their intention was really to flatter her maiden effort, by purposely mistaking it for the work of an older, and abler hero of the quill; however, if it might have been worthy of a maturer mind and more powerful pen, in their eyes, a high compliment is necessarily insinuated, even there, for the humble writer.

If the present story can lighten the burden of an idle hour of sickness or sorrow; if it may shorten the time of waiting, or distract the monotony of travel; if it may strike a key-note of common sympathy between its author and its reader, where the shallow side of nature is regretfully touched upon; if it may attract the potent attention of even one of those whose words and actions regulate the tone and tenor of our social life, to the urgency of encouraging, promoting and

favouring the principles of an active Christian morality, whose beauty lies, not in the depths or vastness of its abstract conceptions, but in its earnest, humble, and tireless labours for the advancement of men's spiritual and temporal welfare--if it may do any one of these things, it shall have more than realized the fond and fervent wish of the author's heart: it shall have reaped her a golden harvest for the tiresome task she has just accomplished, and shall have stimulated anew her every energy, to associate itself more strongly and ardently than ever, with the cause which struggles for men's freedom from the fetters of a sordid and tyrant worldliness.

CHAPTER I.

Five-and-thirty years ago, before many of my fair young readers were inflicted with the burdens of life, there came into this great world, under the most ordinary and unpretending circumstances, a helpless little baby girl: a dear, chubby, little thing, who at that moment, if never afterwards in the long and intricate course of her mortal career, looked every jot as interesting and as promising of a possible extraordinary destiny as did the little being who, some years before that, opened her eyes for the first time upon the elegant surroundings of a chamber in Kensington Palace; and neither the Princess Louise of Sachsen-Koburg, nor Edward the Duke of Kent, were any more elated or gratified over the grand event which came into their lives on the twenty-fourth of May, in the year of Our Lord 1819, than Amey and Alfred Hampden were on the eighth of December, 185-, at the advent of this little stranger into their humble home. Buried in baby finery, this unsuspecting new-comer slumbered contentedly in a dainty cot. The room was silent and darkened, the bright morning sunshine being shut out by the heavy curtains which were carefully drawn across the window: there was a ring of rare contentment in the crackle and purr of the wood-stove, that filled a remote corner of the room with its comfortable presence: and the sustaining spirit of wedded love, was as pronouncedly omnipresent as befitted the interesting occasion.

Thus, so far as the eye of those who prognosticate from existing circumstances could see, there was every prospect of comfort and happiness in the dawning future, for this passive little bundle of humanity lying in state in her neatly furnished basket-cradle; whether it pleased his reverence Father Time, or not, to subscribe thus obligingly to the wishes of a concerned few, is a secret which my pen can best tell.

So strangely do the destinies of men and women resolve themselves out of every day circumstances, that philosophers and moralists, with their choicest erudition, are oftentimes puzzled over the solution of a mysteriously chequered life, which they will not allow was guided by the most natural and common-place accidents of existence.

That there are certain premises, from which the tenor of a yet un-lived life can be more or less accurately anticipated, no one will deny. There are certain surroundings, certain particular circumstances, that, from time immemorial have never failed to produce certain

infallible results; but, these abnormal pauses, and unforeseen interruptions, that, time and again, have made of human lives the very thing against which appearances were guarding them, are, it may be providentially, held outside of the range of man's moral vision, and screen themselves in ambush along either side of the seemingly smooth vista, that spans the interval for certain individual human lives, between time and eternity.

Such a high-sounding title as predestination, seems to lose much of its potent charm when we take an interesting existence into our hands, to dissect it, and analyse it, and reduce it to a rational origin. Like decades of heterogeneous pearls, a human career with all its varied details, glides through the fingers of the moral anatomist, each fraction standing out by itself, suggesting its own real or relative importance, yet associating itself ever with the rest, making of the whole a more or less intricate, and, at best, a very uneven chain.

When we consider that all the bewildering throng around and about us have evolved into their present conditions of misery or joy from a passive and innocent babyhood, we are mystified and awe-stricken; there is so much inequality among the lots and portions of the children of men, that it comes strangely home to us in our reverie, to realize that the starting-point is, for one and all, the great and the lowly, one and the same.

In its cradle, or on its mother's breast, the human creature knows no special individuality, but when the rails of the cradle have been climbed over, and the first foot-print stamped unaided upon the "sands of time," a distinct personality has been established, which is the embodiment of possible, probable, or uncertain influences--a personality which grows and thrives upon internal stimulants administered by an expanding mind and heart, and which leans almost entirely for support upon the external accidents of fate or fortune that may come in its way.

Were we as thoroughly penetrated with this conviction as we should be, how different would be the issues of many human careers? Could we accustom ourselves to meditate upon this truth as seriously as we would upon a religious one, to examine our conscience from it as from a reliable standpoint every day of our lives, what a flood of sympathy and Christian charity would be let loose upon the social world from converted hearts?

When men and women will thoroughly understand the strange and intimate frame-work of human society, the wail of the pessimist will be soothed and hushed forever: for then will they realize how dependent we poor mortals are upon each other for sorrows or joys: then will it be plain to them that no human life, however obscure, however trifling, is an unfeeling thing, apart from every other, outside the daily contact of every other.

Ah! we think, that God's creation, in all its grandeur and unrivalled beauty, would be little worth, to a creature born to live and enjoy it alone: and the infinite Wisdom decreed otherwise, when it gave unto man a friend and companion in the first moments of his existence; but is the world less desolate, less empty to a million hearts, because a million others inhabit it as well? Has God's original intention concerning the mutual love and companionship of His creatures,

survived unto the present day? I think the record of each reader's large or small experience will answer this question for him eagerly enough.

That these preliminary reflections should be the outgrowth of such an ordinary event as the coming of a new baby into the already crowded world may seem extravagant in more ways than one: but my object, as the reader will see, is only to remind the forgetful majority, that there are necessarily many reasons why men and women who have had a common starting-point in life, should find themselves ere long at such different goals.

I would suggest to them to consider the essential impressionability of the human heart, especially in its period of early development, to examine the nature of every external influence that weighs upon it, and if the innocence of childhood has been recklessly forfeited with time, to reserve their judgment until every aspect of the circumstances has been impartially viewed.

I do not deny that the cradle in which I passed the first hours of comfort and ease I have ever known, was rocked by a hand as loving as that which rested caressingly upon the royal brow of the baby Victoria. From the very first I was a peculiarly situated child, surrounded by many comforts of which the majority of well-born children are deprived, and deprived of many comforts by which lowly-born children are surrounded. I was happiest when I was too young to distinguish between pleasure and pain, and, as it were to provide for the emptiness of much of my after life, destiny willed that my memory should be the strongest and most comforting faculty of my soul.

My mother died when I was but a few days old, and thus it is that I have never known the real love or care of a true parent. Before I had celebrated my third birthday there was another Mrs. Hampden presiding over our household, but she was not my mother. This I never learned as a direct fact, in simple words, until I had grown older; but there is another channel through which truths of this sorrowful nature oftentimes find their way: strange suspicions were creeping by degrees into my heart, which with time gained great headway, and resolved themselves into a questioning doubt, whether there had not been a day when another, and a kinder face bent over my little cot, and smiled upon me with a sweetness that did not chill and estrange me from it.

I had never been told in simple words, that my own mother lay under one of those tall silent tombstones in the graveyard, where old Hannah, our tried and trustworthy servant, was wont to go at times and pray. No one had whispered to me that my father's second wife was, by right, a stranger to the most sacred affections of my young soul, but I learned the truth by myself.

When my growing heart began to seek and ask for the tender, patient solicitude, which is to the child what the light and heat of the summer sun are to the frailest tendril, no answer came to my mute appeal. My little weaknesses and childish errors were never met with that enduring forbearance which is the distinctive outgrowth of a loving maternity. My trifling joys were rarely smiled upon, my petty sorrows never shared nor soothed by that unsympathetic guardian of my youth, and so I grew up by myself in a strange sort of isolation, alienated in heart and spirit from those with whom of necessity I came

in daily contact.

And yet in many ways, my fathers' wife bestowed both care and consideration upon me. My physical necessities were ever becomingly attended to. I was allowed to sit at the table with her, which privilege suggested no lack of substantial and dainty provisions, and my governess was an accomplished and very discreet lady, whom my step-mother secured after much trouble and worry; but here the limit was drawn to her self-imposed duties; having done this much she rested satisfied that she had so far outstepped the obligations of her neutral position.

When I look back upon this period from the observatory of to-day, I can afford to be more impartial in my judgments than I was in my youth and immaturity. I know now, that my father's second wife was naturally one of those selfish, narrow-hearted women, who never go outside of their personal lot to taste or give pleasure. She had not the faintest conception of what the cravings or desires of a truly sensitive nature may be, and therefore knew nothing of the possible consequences of the cold and unfeeling neglect with which my young life was blighted.

And even, had anyone told her, that her every word and action were calculated to make a deep-rooted impression upon me, she would have shrugged her shoulders pettishly, I doubt not, and declared that it was "not her fault," that "some people were enough to provoke a saint."

This was the woman whom the learned Doctor Hampden brought home to conduct his household. He had found her under the gas-light at a fashionable gathering, and was taken with her, he hardly knew why. She was not very handsome, nor very winning, and certainly, not very clever, but her family was a rare and tender off-shoot from an unquestionably ancient and time-honored aristocracy, and, in consequence, she carried her head high enough above the ordinary social level, to have attracted a still more potent attention than Dr. Hampden's.

I have heard that many a brow was arched in questioning surprise, when the engagement was formally announced, and that nothing but the ripening years of the prospective bride could have reconciled her more sympathetic friends who belonged to that class of curious meddlers that infest every society from pole to pole.

My father was undoubtedly a gentleman, and this was most condescendingly admitted by his wife's fastidious coterie. A gentleman by birth, by instinct, in dress, manners, taste, profession, and general bearing. Moreover, he was a gentleman of social and political influence, whose name had crept into journals and newspapers of popular fame: in other words, he was one of "the men" of his day, with a voice upon all public matters that agitated his immediate sphere. Wherever he went, he was a gentleman of consequence, and carried no mean individuality with him: he was that sort of a man one expects to find married and settled in life, though here conjecture about him must begin and end.

There are not a few men of his stamp in the world, and the reader I doubt not has met them as frequently as I have myself. Sometimes they are pillars of the state, leaders of political parties, with their heads full of abstract calculations and wonderful statistics. Again

they are scientists, of a more or less exalted standing, artists, antiquarians, agnostics, and undertakers, and they are all harmless, respectable Benedicts, you know it without being told. You conclude it from instinctively suggested premises, and yet in resting at such an important conclusion nothing could have persuaded you to halt at the every day, half-way house of courtship.

These men impress their fellow-men with the strange belief that matrimony was for them a pre-ordained, forechosen vocation, a thing to be done systematically according to reasons and rules, and the trivial mind that would fain dwell upon a time in such methodical lives, when heart predominated over head must apologize to the world of sentiment and pass on to some less sensitive point of consideration.

My father, as I have said, was quite a consequential individual, his very white, and very stiff, and very shining shirt-front insinuated as much; his satiny black broadcloth confirmed it, and even the little silk guard, that rested consciously upon his immaculate linen, sustained the presumption. But for those and a few other reasons, he was looked upon as a man of rigid method and severe discipline, a man outside the grasp of ordinary human susceptibility, or, in more familiar terms, a man "without a heart."

I remember, on one particular occasion, when the oft-ruffled serenity of my step-mother's temperament was wonderfully agitated, that she reproached him most touchingly for the utter absence of this tender, palpitating organ; and turning towards her with a smile of the blindest amusement, he explained to her, in a tone of remonstrative sarcasm, laying two rigid fingers of one hand argumentatively in the open palm of the other, "that no man could live without a heart," that it was an essential element of existence, that its professional name was derived from the Latin *_cor_* or *_cordis_*, that it was "the great central organ of circulation, with its base directed backward towards the spine, and its point, forward and downward, towards the left side, and that at each contraction it would be felt striking between the fifth and sixth ribs about four inches from the medium line." "So you see, my dear," he concluded calmly and coldly, "that you talk nonsense, when you say I have no heart." That was my father's disposition; to suspect that any one, or anything else could hope for the privilege of making his heart beat, except this natural physical contraction, were a vain and empty surmise indeed. And yet he had been twice married; the question may suggest itself, had he ever loved? I dare say he had analysed his amative propensity thoroughly, and knew to what extent it existed within him, but when a man can reconcile himself to the belief that on the "middle line of the skull, at the back part of his head, there is a long projection, below which, and between two similar protuberances, is his Organ of amateness," or that by which he learns "the lesson of life, the sad, sad lesson of loving," methinks he is not outraged by a public opinion which casts him down in disgust from the pedestal of respectable humanity, and this option I will leave to the reader, even though the subject in this instance be my own parent.

Whether his second wife, and the only Mrs. Hampden with whom we shall have to deal, was disappointed in her expectations of her husband, or not, is a something which I could only suspect, or at most, arrive at from the indications of appearances, as I am entirely ignorant of what the nature of such expectations may have been.

The domestic atmosphere of our home was apparently healthy, and untroubled by foreign or unpleasant elements; our surroundings were apparently comfortable, and the family apparently satisfied. What more could be desired? Critics complain of the indiscreet writer, who raises the thick impenetrable veil, which is supposed to screen a domestic, political or social grievance from the common eye of all three conditions. Even he who makes a little rend, with his own pen, for his own ambition's sake, is not pardoned, and so if every picture which the world holds up to view, presents a fair and brilliant surface, whose business may it be to ask in an insinuating tone, whether the other side is just as enchanting or not?

If the world insists upon calling an apparently happy home, happy in reality, then ours was indisputably so, but the world and I have long since ceased to agree upon matters of such a nature.

My father was married for some time to his second wife before any material change came into their lives. I took advantage of the interval and grew considerably, having proved a most opportune victim on many an occasion for my disappointed step-mother's ill-humour. This latter personage had contracted several real or imaginary disorders and absorbed her own soul, with all its most tender attributes, in her constant demand and need for a sympathy and solicitude which were nowhere to be found. Her husband had retired by degrees into the exclusive refuge of his scientific and literary pursuits, and lived as effectually apart from the woman he had married, as far as friendly intercourse and mutual confidence were concerned, as though they were strangers.

And yet, whenever Mrs. Hampden found herself well enough to go out, my father accompanied her with the most amiable urbanity; thus, from time to time, they appeared among the gay coterie to which they always belonged in name, looking as happy and contented as most husbands and wives do, who, for half a dozen years or so, have been trying one another's patience with more or less success.

Thus by a strange unfitness of things, will one unheeded uncared-for little life drift out by itself into an open sea of dangers and difficulties, with nothing more wholesome to distract it during the long lonely hours of many successive days, as they come and go, than its own morbid tendencies.

Necessarily, this abnormal growth of an impressionable young soul, began to speak for itself, in accents which would have caught the ready, willing ear of an attentive parent, had mine been such. In my twelfth year I was as much a woman as I am to-day, matured and hardened by an experience that would have blighted a more yielding and less obdurate spirit.

Convinced, that in point of fact, I was alone in the world, dependent upon my own resources for whatever little truant ray of sunshine I might get from the golden flood that illuminated the world outside me, and forced by rigid, arbitrary circumstances to train my growing convictions into many a hazardous channel, left to myself to grope among the dawning mysteries of life, that are a burden to age and experience even when lightened by the helping hand of a common sympathy, I ceased before long to struggle against these abstract foes that made a mockery of my childish strength and resistance.

For the first few years of my life, therefore, I had been my own care, my own and only friend, and oftentimes my own--but not only--enemy. Occasionally my father chatted with me, but that was mostly when I was in good humour, and would not let him get an insight into the secret workings of my busy little heart. But, even supposing I had, with a child's instinctive confidence in its parent, gone to him in my lonely hours, and thrown my hands convulsively about his neck, to tell my tale of trifling woes, what difference would it have made? Very little. He would have given me a silver coin or two, and told me to run away and amuse myself, that he was busy and could not spare his time for idle amusement. No one knew this better than I did; the memory of one such experiment tried in my very early youth will never leave my mind: it seemed to me that no future, however laden with compensating joys, could efface the dreary outlines which this childish experience had stamped upon my heart.

That day, when full of a pent-up sorrow I had boldly decided to seek comfort on my father's knee, is, and ever will be, a living, breathing present to me. In stifled sobs, I tried to tell my little tale of grief, and was about to bury my tear-stained face upon his shoulder, when he raised his eyes impatiently, and brushed away, with a peevish gesture, one of my salt tears that lay appealingly upon the smooth broadcloth covering of his arm: he chided me for crying so very immoderately, saying, he hated "little girls that cried," and drawing a silver piece from his pocket, he slipped it into my little trembling hand, and banished me from the room.

I never forgot this, from my dignified, gentlemanly father, although in my outward conduct there was nothing which insinuated the slightest reproach for the pain he had given me on that occasion.

When I left his cheerless presence, I remember going back to my play-room and throwing myself wearily into my little rocking-chair, where, with my face turned to the wall, I cried as if my baby-heart would break.

Here I rehearsed each feature of my bitter disappointment, and as my young spirit rose in proud and angry revolt against a fate that could wound me so undeservedly, I flung the wretched coin, with which my thoughtless parent sought to buy his ease and comfort from me, violently upon the floor.

Through my blinding tears I watched it roll quietly over the carpet and stop suddenly against the prostrate figure of a doll that lay at a little distance from where I sat. This incident changed the whole tenor of my rebellious thought; in the earlier part of the day I had dressed this doll in very fine clothes, intending to carry it to the house of a poor neighbor, who lived in the rear of my father's premises, and whose baby-girl was confined, through some hopeless deformity, to the narrow limits of an invalid chair.

Something prevented me from carrying out this generous design at the time, but the discarded coin unexpectedly revived my abandoned project, and turned my thoughts into a pleasant channel. I rose up and dried my eyes, and putting on my little sun-bonnet, gathered up the fashionable wax lady and the piece of despised money, and stealing down a quiet back-stairway, I went out on my mission of charity.

When I reached the home of my little invalid friend, I peered

noiselessly in at the window, as was my custom, lest, perhaps, I should awaken her from one of her quiet slumbers, but this time she was not sleeping; she sat upright in her chair with pillows at her back, and her thin hair fell from her bowed head over the worn and dog-eared pages of her mother's prayer-book. It was her only other companion, besides her mother and me, and through many long, lonely hours she was wont to turn the leaves backward and forward, dwelling with the instinctive reverence of unsullied childhood, upon the homely and inartistic representations it contained of the beautiful Drama of the Redemption.

Such things, though seemingly trifling to relate, at this remote period, when the sinful and foolish vanities of the world have crowded themselves in between me and my cherished memories of that holy epoch, I now regard as the true and unmistakeable key-note of my after life.

For, was it not to little Ella Wray I first assumed the attitude of the worldling: subscribing to the laws and exigencies of conventionality before I had suspected the existence of such an influence? When she praised me, and thanked me, and urged me to be grateful to the kind Father who had willed my surroundings to be those of comfort and prosperity, what did I do? Good reader! I smiled half consciously, and thus sanctioned her belief in my domestic happiness. I veiled the sorrow that dwelt in my young heart with the shadows of a borrowed playfulness, and I sullied the baby innocence of my unsuspecting soul with a smiling lie.

But even in its infancy, human nature is prone to every passing weakness that assails it. To know that other eyes looked out from a narrower sphere upon my individual portion, and found it rich in advantages over many others: to feel that in spite of all my harassing little cares, my life could assume an exterior aspect of smoothness and happiness, was a short-lived, though powerful stimulant, even to my childish heart; and I could not forfeit the small pleasure I took in the consciousness, that at least my sufferings were hidden, though my pleasures were widely known, by laying bare the actual condition of my affairs.

Naturally enough, this feeling has but strengthened and matured with time and experience, and to-day, scattered broadcast over the world, are friends of my childhood, my girlhood, and my womanhood, who look upon my life as a tolerably beautiful thing, set apart by a lenient destiny for a perpetual sunshine to brighten.

Ah well! Who knows, in this strange world whether there are many happier than I? May it not be that other faces wear the mask of smiles with which I myself have played a double part? I think I know enough of human nature now, to suspect with Reason, that this livery of contentment and joy which dazzles our eyes at intervals, as we review the multitudes of the laughing and the gay, is a thing to be put on and off at will, like any other garment; and hence is it that the earthly happiness of men and women is susceptible of a relative definition only. I do not wish to argue that such a thing as happiness itself has become as obsolete in our day as hoop-skirts and side-combs, for, from the earliest reflections I have ever indulged in, I have concluded that it is quite easy to attain to a tolerable degree of happiness, if external influences be not too desperately at variance with our efforts to arrive at its tempting goal: and even now, when I have made my way through some of the densest and darkest

fogs of experience, I know I should be happy yet, if, some day, I may see the masses in revolt against the unjust tenets of nineteenth century _convenances_, and advocating in its stead the beautiful doctrine of "soul to soul as hand to hand."

Possibly, all these regretful conclusions are a sequel to the early disappointments and sorrows of my younger days, for, I admit, that though I thrived after a fashion under their depressing influence, they had, most necessarily, a peculiar effect upon my temperament.

The one thing that wearied me above and more than all others, was the changeless monotony of my existence; every day a tiresome repetition of another, which forced me to attribute little or no value to time.

I was not old enough to be sent to school, although I had entered upon what is called the years of discretion, but my father's wife had a high-bred fear, lest in sending me to an educational establishment I should indulge my uncouth tendencies by cultivating unfashionable acquaintances, that in after years, might possibly, in some remote, indefinite way, reflect upon her own unimpeachable dignity.

There came a day, however, when exacting circumstances obliged her to look upon the prospect of placing me at school with a more impartial eye. A change was creeping, slowly, but surely, into our lives: hardly for the better in one way, and yet, in the end, I must acknowledge, that to it I owe much of the happiness I have ever known.

Whether or not my obdurate step-mother was in reality as susceptible as a woman should be, I am not free to say; but when, after a few years of wedded life, the prospect of maternity began to grow less shadowy and more reliable, her heart did seem to swell at rare intervals with a real, or assumed pity for the little woman who had been left to wander about motherless and friendless, spending her young life, unheeded, among the cheerless apartments of her own father's house.

While this new phase of existence was unfolding itself before her eyes, like the lava from a long-slumbering volcano, a kind word or deed was born now and then of the momentary influence. She would stroke my head with a gesture of repenting, amending tenderness, give me a bunch of gay ribbons for my last new doll, or even read me a thrilling tale from my Christmas book of nursery fictions; but that impulse was necessarily short-lived, and once it became spent, the crater of her heart closed up again, and all was as cold and quiet as before.

To my untutored mind, this relaxation, limited though it was, became a perplexing mystery. I was conscious of no improvement in my attitude towards my step-mother, I had not even wished, or determined to show her any more marked affection or respect than I had ever done, and this, to tell the truth, was precious little.

I did not know then, that this generous impulse of hers was independent of her own desire or will, that it filled her heart without her sanction or command, just as her life-blood did; that it permeated her very being, when she neither sought nor expected it, and that as it was self-creative, so would it of itself find a satisfactory outlet in expressions and actions of tender womanly solicitude.

As soon as my half-brother made his entrance into the world, however, things took another turn. I was no longer the free, unfettered creature I had been for the first part of my life. I could no longer dispose of my days and hours as I liked best, but was on the contrary forced to devote many of them to occupations of a most distasteful nature.

The coming of this insignificant stranger into our home seemed a disturbing and restless evil in my eyes. Naturally my stepmother was beside herself with ecstasy, but why should she have expected the rest of the household to be as absurdly enthusiastic?

When baby slept, the silence and stillness of death were sacredly and solemnly imposed upon all. When baby was awake, the clatter provoked for its infancy's pleasure was noisome and deafening to all.

With the advent of this undesirable relative into our home is associated, for me, the remembrance of all such impatient entreaties as, "Amey, bring your toys here to baby--Amey, come and sing to baby--Amey, come and rock baby to sleep"--and I, though striving to encourage a good intention and a hopeful outlook, finally succumbed to the very human perversity of my soul, and when every atom of ordinary endurance had given out, I realized that I had ended by loathing the very name, or sight, or idea of the unwelcome baby.

Then, came a fresh burden of domestic worries to my unfortunate step-mother. She could not trust her darling to the care of servants; each one that she tried seemed determined to kill the little idol; they handled it as roughly and carelessly as if it were an ordinary baby; shook it when it screamed and refused to rock it while it slept. In the end, with the undaunted heroism of unselfish maternity, she resigned herself wholly and entirely to the exclusive care of her beloved offspring, ministering to its ever increasing and multiplying wants, with an admirable forbearance and kindness. Poor woman! she found more than ample field for her patience and perseverance.

Blest with the healthiest of lungs, my new step-brother had no scruples about asserting himself loudly and peevishly at all hours of the day and night; rending the air with prolonged and impatient screams that wounded the sensitive mother's heart deeply, and irritated the rest of the household beyond endurance.

By degrees its much tried parent was made to realize that this noisy acquisition to her home was considered unquestionably and irreclaimably, her own. No one envied it to her, and as no one sought to share any of the possible benefits that might follow in its wake, neither did they seek to bear any of the burden of its existence in the smallest detail.

The overjoyed, yet afflicted mother, was welcome to whatever comfort or happiness her prophetic soul foresaw as a recompense to all this endless worry and trouble. Even my father grew unsympathetic, and actually arose one night when baby's plaintive minor key was resounding through the house, and closed his bed-room door most emphatically, to keep out the disturbing echoes that had broken in upon his comfortable repose.

None of this passed unnoticed by my fretted stepmother, whose open

soul absorbed every passing instance of this nature, and stowed away its keen impressions to be acted upon later, when time had modified her responsibilities, and granted her a little respite from the troubles of to-day.

In the agitated meanwhile I had begun to try my young wings. I felt myself growing inwardly and outwardly; something was stirring my heart with unusual palpitations. I was beginning to realize that life after all did not mean what daily passed within the narrow arena of my home; something whispered to me that outside those paltry limits, far away over all the spires and chimney-tops, where the sky was so bright and blue, life, real life, unfolded itself under many a varied aspect, and with this suspicion, sprung up a lingering dissatisfaction, a longing for something which no words of mine could define.

How clearly does this epoch of my life stand forth from the dreary background of experience as I look at it from the watch-tower of to-day? How I know now that this was the farewell passage of my childhood, which was winging its flight, and leaving me to struggle with the naked realities of life, which had hitherto been hidden and undreamt of mysteries to me.

Ah! that passage of childhood, what a void it makes in the growing heart; and how quietly its place is filled by unworthier influences. Does all the abstract wealth, which there might be in the growth and development of those who learn the alphabet of life upon our knee, take one pang from the natural and pardonable sorrow with which we watch the heavy footprint of an inevitable experience, crushing out the last frail remnant of childhood from the hearts of those who such a little while before were our "little ones?"

There is something far more appealing to the parent's heart in the half worn stocking of the child who toddled from its cradle to its grave, than in the mighty quill of her grey-haired poet son, rusted though it be in the service of his art. In the broken stem of an unfinished life, a mother mourns a host of possibilities that can never now be realized; if we may credit the prophecies of such sorrowing mothers who, bending over the cradle from which some baby-spirit has just passed into the kingdom of the little ones, tell in broken accents of sorrow and regret of all the promises of goodness and greatness which have been sacrificed with that life, we must truly admit that the world in all its wealth of heroes, bold and brave, its bards, its poets, its grand masters of the quill, the chisel and the brush, has not on record such another career as has been blighted in its bloom each time the stern death-angel stood beside an infant's cot.

And, if there are evils in our day which no human power can baffle or subdue, with which reason and morals are struggling in vain, we must not forget, as we dwell upon them, what the possible, nay even probable mission was, of each little pair of dimpled hands that he crossed on each still unheaving bosom, wherein might have been buried secrets and mysteries which the world will now never know.

Yet, methinks, this transit from the cradle to the coffin is not so sad in all its bearings as that other death of childhood, which introduces us, not into a safe and definite eternity, but only into another phase of temporal life; when the toys and the picture books are stowed away, when the mind and heart are awakening in their

beautiful, untarnished susceptibility to the impressions of a world of perils and of sorrows.

Not unlike our final passage is it either, for we go through it once, and once only, and from its threshold our footsteps are directed towards good or evil, for after-life. Let us remember this always, when we are tempted to pass our rigid judgments upon our fellow-creatures. Let us not lose sight of these occult impediments of fate, that may have caused our fallen brother to halt and stagger in the way of righteousness almost in spite of his watchfulness and eager intentions to do what is good.

Without wearying the reader with a detailed account of that period of my life immediately associated with the advent of my interesting half-brother, I can permit myself to mention a few things which were only a very natural outgrowth of this altered condition of our domestic affairs.

First and foremost be it understood that I looked upon this new-comer as a contribution sent by nature to fill up the gap that existed between my step-mother's affections and mine, and naturally enough, according as this child grew he drifted our two lives farther and farther asunder. He absorbed all the latent sympathy and love from the maternal heart, and as such ardent sentiments had long been aliens from my breast, he had nothing to draw from the second source but a placid and harmless indifference.

My father held a reception occasionally in his sanctum, whither baby was carried with great pomp and ceremony to be smiled upon approvingly until his good humour gave way, as soon as the little features wrinkled ominously my father waved his hand towards the door, escorting mother, and child, and nurse with the most eager courtesy out of the room.

I need not tell my readers that the machinery of our domestic life was sadly awry; neither in separate parts, nor as a whole, did it work properly or satisfactorily, the metal was harsh and the little wheels could never be got to run briskly or smoothly. How could they? I think of all the hopeless conditions on earth, that which aspires to be able to blend human lives together, which have no more leaning towards one another than virtue to vice, is the maddest and vainest of all.

An absence of common sympathies between two human hearts, will drift them apart in spite of the hugest efforts that can be made to attract them to a point of mutual interest; they who hope either by subterfuge or unselfish zeal, to reconcile phases of human character that have not originally sprung from a common root of harmonious unison or contrast, are as sure to see their ambition as ingloriously defeated as if they had revived the search for the philosopher's stone.

And yet how much estrangement there is among men and women who, if they had never been bound together by the sacred and solemn pledges of wedded love, are supposed still to live according to a precept of universal charity? How indifferent they become to one another's fortune or fate? How repulsive to them the very suggestion of entering generously into one another's lives to share each other's pleasures and pains?

The world is full of this occult antagonism; every day Christians, as

I have known them, look upon the happiness or sorrow of their brother toilers as so much subtracted from their own glad or miserable experience. Hence do they begrudge the smiles of fortune that cheer another life outside their own, and are so easily satisfied to see furrows on other brows than their own. I know that the human heart is instinctively covetous of earthly happiness, and, in nine cases out of ten argues that its end justifies the means, whatever they may be, of insuring it. But I also know, that those fitful flashes of sunlight that cross the path of struggling mortals in the course of an ordinary human life, are too visionary and short-lived to begin to repay us for the unworthy barter of our better selves, which is the price of such transient joys.

What is real happiness but a memory or an anticipation? Do we realize that it presides over our daily lives? Not until it has become a thing of the past; and as for the happiness of anticipation, it is not worth much when we take into account the vague uncertainty of the issues of time, and the instability of unborn to-morrows.

In a word then, our pleasure is nothing but a negative sensation while it lasts; we are conscious that, for the time being, the burdensome fetters of sorrow are loosened, and our souls expand in a glorious freedom, the power of fate is temporarily suspended, the pressure is removed from our spirit which soars about in its native element, like a captive bird set free, flapping its poor paralysed wings that from long imprisonment have almost forgotten their use--but pain!

Ah! surely no one questions whether pain is a positive sensation or not; no one at least whose head has been bowed by adversity until his lips have touched the bitter waters, and tasted perhaps largely of their unpleasantness! Pain is vastly more to the human heart than the absence of pleasure; pain is not merely an emptiness, or void, created by the flight of more cheerful influences; it has a more definite and distinct acceptation than this would allow; it has as many dark and melancholy meanings as there are suffering souls in existence; it has its phases of youth and maturity, now hopeful, now despairing, either our enemy or our friend.

It professes to dwell among the children of men with the very strictest impartiality, for pain is an aristocrat and a pauper; pain rides in fine carriages, and clothes itself in fine linen; it smiles and sings as often as it mourns and weeps; pain is learned, and it is ignorant; it underlies the deepest, tenderest love, and it instigates the darkest, bitterest hatred; in a word it is a weed which infests the very choicest parterres of our minds and hearts, it thrives among the buds and blossoms of men's intellects, and abounds above all among the flowers and fruits of his affections; it is indigenous to both soils, and no toiler, however industrious or persevering, has ever yet succeeded in subduing its ravages.

It is no wonder then that we sometimes go on a wild-goose chase after pleasure; it is not surprising that the wisest of us make foolish attempts to grasp the will-o'-the-wisp that has been coaxing and deceiving men for centuries. It is surprising that our persistent self-confidence persuades our better sense that where countless generations of pleasure-seekers have failed we can hope to succeed.

This parenthetical deviation is the fruit of my deep reflections concerning this early period of my development; it is the web which

the deft fingers of my memory have woven around many a quiet reverie; the substance of many a fire side cogitation, the phantoms of many a twilight's dreaming.

I doubt not, that in that world of speculative opinions and questionings, I have met the kindred spirits of many of my fellow beings, clad in the ideal personality with which my thought invests people, at the cross of those four great roads towards which, from all corners of the earth, the spirits of mankind come trooping. We have only to close our lids upon our external surroundings and swift as thought itself is our passage into that fairy land of our reverie.

As early as my tenth year I had begun to build castles in the open fire and to people the gloaming with whispering shadows; somehow the habit has grown with me through all these years, with this difference, however: in the reveries of my womanhood the heroes and heroines come to me, from a long vanished past, clothed in a misty reality, and associated with every joy and sorrow of my life.

In my childhood these were typical visions, the anticipation of a restless impatience which yearned for the touchstone of sober experience, to-day they are the re-creation of memory, and a rehearsal of all those circumstances that have made sober experience a comprehensive word for me.

Not that my life has made a heroine of me either in the world's eyes or my own. I dare say, to the passive observer, it is plain and ordinary enough. It is when we take away the flesh and blood reality, which is the temple of the moral man, that the common-place aspects of life become strange and attractive.

Subtract one of those every-day lives from the busy, moving mass of humankind and place it under the microscope; bring up to the visible surface all that has lain hidden for years from the casual glance of the general observer; lay bare the secret tenor of its every thought and motive and impulse. Is it any longer the thing it seemed to be when jostled about in the busy throng?

Pluck one of the dusty blades of grass that grow unheeded by the roadside; there are hundreds of them at your feet so much alike that the one you chose had no identity, whatever, until you had, by chance or design, separated it from the rest. Bear it away to your home and place it under a powerful lens; is it still the same uninteresting blade it was a moment ago out in the noisy and crowded thoroughfare? Why does your gaze become riveted upon what is revealed? Ah! you discern that such homely things are not at all what you have been wont to think them. You are astonished to find how each individual trifle is in itself a wonderful creation, swarming with a hidden and undreamt of life, feeding a multitude of appetites, satisfying countless cravings, struggling with a most powerful vitality, and challenging powers, whose unseen tyranny is unsuspected by more than half the world.

No wonder, then, that a singled-out human life excites our astonishment; no wonder that we look upon an isolated fellow-creature as if he were not one of us, but removed by adventitious circumstances far above or below the common level of men and women.

It is not always the exaggerating pen of the author that creates

heroes and heroines out of our prosy humanity, and it is an undeniable and stable fact that truth is far stranger than fiction. It is because we men and women will conceal the realities of our lives from one another, and under the banner of an all-enduring pride, struggle for the privilege of living under a surface of smooth, unruffled evenness, that humanity has become susceptible of so many false and misleading interpretations.

CHAPTER II.

As every human life has its crises and turning-points for better or worse, it will not surprise the reader to learn that there came a day when Destiny, having nothing else to do, probably, turned her good-humoured attention towards mine.

The commemoration of the coming into the world of my step-mother's illustrious darling had been celebrated with due and undue festivities and enthusiasm from the rising to the setting of a golden June sun. Whether from an excess of spasmodic affectionate hugging, which, by the way, was the chief feature of these joyful monthly, and quarterly, and half-yearly solemnities, or not, the little being in question was most unmanageably peevish and ill-humoured for three or four days following these occasions of ecstatic thanksgiving.

One would imagine that by this time I had had sense enough to train myself into a placid resignation over such circumstances of my life, as seemed to me to be presided over by some inevitable ill-luck, but, on the contrary, a growing perversity began to stimulate me at this epoch more eagerly than ever to rebel against decrees so openly unfair to me, and unable or unwilling, to cope with this moral enemy that had taken so firm a hold of me, I yielded myself up, a sort of helpless and reckless victim to its wiles, at the sacrifice, I must admit, of my personal peace and comfort.

Usually, at this period I surprised and annoyed myself, when, in passing accidentally before some tell-tale mirror, I saw the reflection of a distressed and impatient scowl: usually, too, I was conscious of my step being quick and angry, I was not aware, however, that it was a growing deformity of my moral nature, oozing out thus in every look and tone and gesture.

I had no apprehension of a dawning crisis that would call upon me to declare war against my worse or better self, for, of course, they could not both be mistress of the field. How could I, all untaught, suspect that upon the issue of such a victory would depend the happiness or misery of my after life?

Fortunately for me, some kind unseen hand was stretching forth in the hour of my need, somebody's deft fingers snatched the tangled web that had gone so far astray in the weaving, and in the nick of time made a hazardous effort to smoothen the silken threads for the busy loom that waits not for the slow or the erring.

I was standing on the gravel path beside a bed of flowers that was the object of my fondest care, one fair summer morning, immediately after a festive celebration in baby's honour. My cherished, but homely, wall flowers were dripping in the morning sunlight, and every leaf on my blossomless geraniums was carefully saturated.

I stood, with my faded water-pot carelessly dangling from three fingers of one hand, looking so absorbedly down the avenue after the vanishing outlines of a glittering carriage that had just rolled splendidly by, that the dregs of my water-can trickled all unheeded by me, down the side of my new sateen frock, accomplishing what, in the eyes of my step-mother, would seem nothing less than an absolute ruin and wreck.

My attention was riveted upon the liveried driver and shining gilded trimmings of this handsome conveyance, and a flood of serious reflections suddenly burst upon me. I had begun to imagine myself the lucky centre of a thousand and one happy possibilities. I was grown up, and out in the world, the wife of a very rich man, with costly plumes in my bonnet, and rich lace on my showy parasol, like the lady who had just driven by: I was quite my own mistress, with servants and other people to obey me. I had a dashing barouche of my own, and was rolling in conscious grandeur past my step-mother's window, with the back of my expensive bonnet turned towards the half-closed shutter, through which she was sure to be peering enviously--when the laths of the very shutter in question were shaken impatiently, and a hasty, authoritative voice cried out, "If you've nothing else to do but spoil your new pink frock out there, Amelia Hampden, I wish you would come in and play with your baby-brother for awhile;" and then, as the blind and voice were lowered, I heard the usual "enough to provoke a saint," which was the finishing touch to every reprimand I either did, or did not, deserve.

History repeats itself; nothing is surer. Here was I hand in hand with a well-known hero of the Arabian Nights, weeping in open-mouthed sorrow and astonishment over my basket of shattered glassware. I had broken the salutary precept which exhorts us sanguine mortals not to count our chickens before they are hatched, and now mourned the prescribed result, an ice-cold shower bath in a Canadian December could hardly be a more undesirable and unlooked for intrusion than was this unappreciated and pressing invitation of Mrs. Hampden's in my ears at this particular moment.

The rude awakening which her words caused me made me look quite absurd in my own eyes, and with the sudden consciousness that I had been making a fool of myself, pondering over such shadowy improbabilities, as they seemed to me now, I turned sharply and impatiently from the spot where I had been standing, and passing through a rustic gateway at the end of the walk, I flung my innocent water-pot, with a gesture of desperate anger, in among the cedar-bushes that skirted the causeway leading into the lawn, and passed into the house.

It has been written, that "nothing like the heavy step betrays the heavy heart," and if this be true, the matter of weight regarding the seat of my affections, on this particular morning, was not a trivial one. With an inflamed and spiteful wilfulness, I stamped my feet with a louder and heavier tread on each step, as I ascended to answer my unwelcome summons.

When I reached my step-mother's bed-chamber, the heavy curtain of padded repp, which was suspended for the prevention of such draughts as might be smuggled in through key-holes, or other minute openings caused by an ill-fitting door, was drawn quite across the entrance, and in my hasty and unforeseeing impatience I pushed it rudely aside with rough hands and admitted myself within the sacred precincts, just in time to see myself branded by my own actions, an intolerable little imp, who, on this occasion, if never before, was "enough to provoke a saint."

In drawing the curtain so hastily from the entrance, I had pushed the panels of the door rudely in, which unexpected treatment caused that oft-abused fixture to swing unusually far back on its hinges, and knock with a heart-rending violence against the edge of baby's frail little cot, over which the fretted mother was now bending breathlessly.

In a moment the terrible nature of my misdeed burst upon me; my step-mother's horrified countenance and the baby's frightened screams were a simultaneous and forcible indication of what awful results may spring from a trifling source. I became angry with myself, for once, and with a very contrite countenance, I went towards my step-mother and held my arms out repentantly, offering to soothe the refractory darling, all by myself.

But, by this time her indignation had found a voice, and interrupted my eager solicitude for reparation with a volley of well-merited reproaches. Stamping her slipper emphatically upon the ground, and declaring that "I would pay for this," she turned to the screaming little mortal who was struggling nervously among lace and finery, with no small show of an ill-temper of its own, and resumed the patient and would be soothing lullaby, whose efficacy in the first instance had been so ruthlessly spoiled by my impetuous conduct.

Not daring to leave the room again until summarily dismissed by the ruling power, I stood guiltily by the doorway with a look of sullen helplessness on my face, toying half indifferently with the ends of a pink ribbon that was fastened artistically to my frock. Suddenly, the unforgiving baby sent forth a fresh volley of screams, and the irate mother turned towards me with a new and awful scowl and bade me--"Begone" that "my very presence terrified the child."

Nothing loth to leave this scene of confusion of which I myself was the direct cause, I turned abruptly and quitted the apartment in an impertinent silence. My step, so long as I thought my step-mother could hear it, was quick and haughty.

I passed along the corridor above, and down the broad front stairway, rattling the heels of my garden shoes on the tiles of the hall below with rather unnecessary emphasis. A loud slamming of the library door--which shook the pendants of the gasaliers and caused a momentary quaking of the whole house--announced my exit into the side garden, where I threaded my way among trees and flowerbeds to a vine-covered summer-house that stood at the end of the lawn. Arrived here, I flung myself upon one of the rustic benches that lined the walls, and throwing my arms at full length across the small table that stood beside me, I laid my face down upon them and burst into tears. After all, I was only a child, though so obstinate and impulsive: only a child, and yet I was very miserable. Reader, have you ever been

persuaded to a popular, though strange belief, that our happiest are our youngest days? Are you able to look regretfully back upon your long-vanished yesterdays and wish that destiny might, for one short moment of time, let you hold them in your hands, to live them all over again? If so, indeed your youth must have been an exceptionally happy one: for whether I speak from a personal experience or from observation, I cannot agree that the paths of childhood are flooded with Life's sunshine, or overgrown with Fortune's flowers. If we look back upon our earliest sorrows (and who are they that have none to look upon?), and take into consideration the narrow limits of our capacity for either pleasure or pain when we are young, we must admit that a broken doll or a lost penny are, after all, as fruitful of genuine and hopeless misery in their way, as are, in after-life, a broken heart or a lost friend.

I do believe that on that June morning, when full of an untold sorrow, I stole away to the most secret and secluded spot I could find, I was not less miserable than I have been many a June morning since, though the best of life's hard lessons have been learned in the meantime. It seemed to me that all my hopes, and wishes, and endeavors would always be vain and fruitless; I could not see a bright side anywhere I looked. I was always doing and saying the wrong things; I was in everybody's way: no one wanted me, no one cared for me--why was I ever born? I had no companions. My stepmother looked down upon the dangerous habit of allowing children to cultivate juvenile friendships indiscriminately, and I was not sufficient unto myself for distractions that would keep me quietly out of the way. What good was I? I was always ill-humored, vexing my step-mother and making baby cry. It was plain to see that I was one too many in the world, and whatever I did with myself I would be surely trespassing upon somebody's privilege, outraging somebody's patience, and making myself a nuisance generally. If there was a better place, thought I, I wonder would I go there when all this discord of my present life had killed me? Besides, old Hannah had told me that I had another mother in that vague "better place." Every night at Hannah's knee I recited a little prayer for her, and asked her to watch over me, to guard me from evil and make me worthy of joining her some day in her happy home. If my "other mother" was so sweet and kind and good, as Hannah told me in confiding whispers she was, why did she not come to me when I was in tears and tell me how to be good like her? She was too far away, I supposed, up among the blue sunlit clouds, where all was bright and cheerful: an angel-mother with beautiful white wings like the picture in Hannah's prayer-book, and a sweet smiling face that always looked down on me, watching my words and actions. And while I thought thus, I saw many such white-winged angels floating noiselessly about in an exquisite confusion, and distant strains of music, as Hannah said they sang, filled my listening ears. I felt myself being lifted gently by tender, unseen hands, and I wondered whether they would bear me far up above spire and tower, away from all the worries of this desolate world, into that happy sphere beyond where all is peace, and joy, and contentment.

On a sudden, I opened my eyelids and looked up. A cry of "Mr. Dalton!" escaped my lips before I had met his answering glance. I had understood the situation and buried my face upon his shoulder, to hide the fast gathering tears that swelled into an after-flood and threatened to deluge my already tell-tale cheeks. I was no longer thrown recklessly upon the wooden summer-house bench. The gentle hands that raised me in my dream and bore me heavenward, were not those of a

far-off angel, as I understood the term, they were the strong brawny palms of a man of four-and-thirty years, not so strong that their touch could not be as gentle as a mother's own, not so brawny that they could not dry the tearful lids of a sleeping child without disturbing its repose.

He had taken me in his arms and pillowed my drooping head upon his manly breast. When I opened my eyes he was looking dreamily, half sadly, half smilingly, into my face. He was not what you, reader, would call a handsome man, for you never knew him. To you, and to all the world perhaps but me, he would be no more than a man in a crowd. But I need not here bring forward the wonderful power of association which is the underlying beauty reflected from many a homely surface to eyes that prize and cherish them. What though a thing possess not in reality those charms with which it is identical in our minds and hearts? That which we believe to be, is, as effectually for us as if its existence were sanctioned and sustained by all mankind, and so far as personal conviction goes there is no standard outside the individual one. My idea of the beautiful is the only beautiful I can ever really acknowledge or enjoy, and yet how far astray may it not be from the concurrent idea of the majority, which is supposed to be the only true standard.

With a quick though earnest purpose, Mr. Dalton laid his strong warm hand upon my head and turned my tearful face towards him. There was a hovering smile around the pale, calm countenance that met my shy and half averted look.

"Who is this?" he asked, peering into my misty eyes. "Is this Amey Hampden, I wonder, or have I made some dreadful mistake?"

I saw immediately that he suspected me of having been a naughty girl, and my sensitive pride was breaking into revolt. I tried to force myself from his steady hold, but his knitted fingers were as iron fetters about me. I had nothing left to do but give way to an outburst of rising ill-humor, or through my gathering tears, to make an humble confession of all that had passed that morning. While I debated with myself I was conscious of his steady gaze being fixed upon me. I saw the half-mischievous smile vanish from the corners of his eyes and mouth; my lips were trembling with a suppressed sorrow. He saw it, and bending over me asked in a tender, solicitous voice:

"What is the matter, little Amey? Are you ill? Come, tell me" he urged, with a gentle firmness turning me around and taking both my hands in his own large ones.

"No, no, Mr. Dalton, Amey is not ill" I answered, sighing and looking away. "I wish she was though" I continued after a pause, "ill enough to die."

And this was all I could say, for my lips trembled ominously, though there were now no unshed tears in my eyes.

The expression on my companion's face changed suddenly. He had worn a half amused, half sympathetic look all along, as if my little troubles were something he could afford to smile upon, and persuade even myself to laugh at, but I fancy my voice must have been unusually sorrowful, as I am sure my face was unusually tear-stained and disfigured, for he drew me to him a little closer and toying ever so affectionately and

kindly with my flowing hair, his tone was gently remonstrative as he said:

"Amey, do you know that you use very wicked words when you talk like this? You are a very comfortable and fortunate little girl in many ways, and because something disagreeable happens now and then you must not be so impatient and want to die. If you did die now" he continued slowly and emphatically--then paused and added, "maybe you would be sorry."

"I don't care" came from me in a half defiant retort, "I couldn't be sorrier than I am now. I am not comfortable and I am not fortunate, and disagreeable things are always happening, and if I can't die soon," I went on waxing quite tragic, "I'll run away."

I stopped short after this, thinking I had put a splendid finishing-touch to my out-spoken determination. I do not know whether I expected Mr. Dalton to faint with fright and surprise on hearing such a daring declaration from me. If I did, I must have been sadly disappointed when I detected a shadow of that hovering smile flitting back across his features, and heard him ask in a provoking tone.

"Away! Where, Amey?"

The incisive ridicule implied in these words urged me to a still more reckless defiance, and affecting a very cutting sneer I answered--

"Perhaps you think I am not in earnest, Mr. Dalton, but _you'll see!_ Remember I have told you that I am wretched, and it's all _her_ fault. When I am gone you can tell papa that 'twas all her doing, that she hated me and I hated her, and I thought 'twas better to go away--and I _will_ go away Mr. Dalton"--I emphasized--"away into the bush, and if no one comes to take me I'll do like the babes in the woods, and the little birds will cover me with nice green leaves when I'm dead."

There were no tears now, I had worked myself into a dry rage and could look my monitor full in the face; my little arms were crossed with a determination worthy of maturer years, and I was grand with the conviction of having frightened this big man into a belief of my rambling threats. I was a little disconcerted, however, when he looked at me seriously and said in a slow measured tone:

"Then _this_ is not the Amey Hampden that I have known all along. She would never have said such ugly things as those I have just heard; she was not a selfish little girl, and would fear to displease her friends or those who loved her."

He was winning me over, but before I yielded I must aim another arrow.

"I guess you're right after all Mr. Dalton" I answered swinging one kid shoe in an aimless indifferent manner, and looking purposely away at the leg of the rustic table, "cause _this_ Amey Hampden hasn't got any friends, or any one to love her, either."

"Are you telling the truth now, Amey? Look at me and repeat that," he interrupted quickly.

I wished to be very brave, and turned my eyes full upon him; he took my chin in his large, warm palm and looked steadily into my face for a

moment. I was conquered, and he saw it; he stooped and kissed me, and we both laughed as I said

"Well; you never _said_ you were my friend."

He arose, and taking me by the hand, we strolled over the lawn and passed into the library together.

Ernest Dalton was nearly twenty-five years my senior!

CHAPTER III.

It is now an old and respected adage that "coming events cast their shadows before," and had I only been at all alive to the growing changes in the routine of our daily life, I might easily have detected the outline of some hovering shadow which was heralding the advent of some strange, and hitherto undreamt of interruption, into the questionably peaceful monotony of my early career.

One fine August morning, some weeks after my tragic interview with Mr. Dalton, I sat on the step of the outer kitchen stairway, which led into an artistically cultivated vegetable patch at the rear of the house, absorbed in the intensely interesting occupation of cutting some elegantly-coloured ladies out of a superannuated fashion-plate.

On the step above me was my garden hat, inverted, into which I deposited my paper "swells" according as I trimmed them: on the step below me sat old Hannah, scraping some new potatoes, according to her established principles of economy. We both worked diligently and silently for awhile, and then old Hannah, pausing with a half cleaned potatoe in one hand and a knife dripping with water in the other, looked at me seriously for a moment and said half meditatively:

"Well now; arn't you the baby, Miss Amelia, to spend your time over that foolish stuff; fitter for you be knitting a little garter, or hemming a little handkerchief for yourself."

I smiled, and without raising my eyes from the critical curve of my paper lady's bustle, which I was then rounding most carefully, I answered:

"I suppose I might do better with my time, Hannah, if I knew how, but as I don't, I'd rather be doing this than nothing."

"It says a lot for Miss Forty, then," Hannah put in indignantly, "to think you're goin' into your teens before long and that's all you know how to do!"

"Miss de Fortier did not come to teach me sewing and knitting, Hannah. She taught me lessons."

"Lessons how are you! And what's become of them if she did? Oh, its a fine way children are brought up in this country," the old woman went

on half in soliloquy; "a bit of this and a bit of that and not much of either. I pity the housekeepers ye'll make yet. God help the poor men that are waiting for ye. Many's the missing button and broken sock they'll have to put up with!"

"Well, Hannah," I interrupted, beginning an impromptu justification and defence--but Hannah was destined never to have her conviction shaken, for just then I heard a sharp rapping at the library window, and gathering up the fragments of my fashion-plate in my linen pinafore, I ran outside and looked towards that end of the house. My father was standing at the open casement, and beckoned me to go to him. Whether from the novelty of the occurrence, or the instinctive awe in which I stood of my father, I immediately let go the margin of my pinafore, dropping scissors and ladies and all, in a most brusque and heedless manner, and hastened into the library, while I was smoothing out the wrinkled folds of my clean, starched apron.

In my excitement I had forgotten to wonder at the strange circumstance, but when my little hand clutched the great knob of the library door and turned it, and when the placid countenance of my step-mother looked up at me from a comfortable easy-chair at the opposite side of the room, I felt that some awful moment had dawned on my existence. With as much nerve and self-control as a child usually displays on such an occasion, I closed the door behind me and walked towards the window where my father was standing.

He was clad in a gown of ruby cashmere, and wore an expensive cap and slippers to match; the girdle was untied, leaving the rich chenille tassels to trail almost upon the ground, and the velvet fronts so elaborately embroidered were crushed rudely aside by his hands, which were thrust into his breeches pockets.

When I came up to where he stood, he turned slowly around and viewed me in my diminutive entirety from head to foot. Unable to restrain her love of interference any longer, my step-mother here advised me parenthetically to "stand up straight," sustaining her reasons for thus counselling me by the cheerful intelligence that "I was disposed to be round-shouldered any way, and should do my best to check the deformity." I raised my head and lowered my shoulders in silent obedience to this meek injunction, preparing myself inwardly for an attack of a much less generous and still more personal nature than this. What was my surprise when my father, taking a step towards me, and placing one hand half affectionately on my head, remarked in a rather playful and, for him, quite a frivolous tone:

"Oh, we none of us go straight to Heaven, do we, Amey? We must bend our shoulders and droop our heads a little first."

I was grateful to him for coming thus to my rescue, although I understood neither the meaning of his ambiguous words, nor the motives which prompted him to use them. I see more clearly through them now, however.

"But," he continued, taking me by the hand and leading me towards the lounge behind him, "this is not exactly what I want to talk to you about; I admit that you are backward in many respects, but that is not altogether your fault."

I was looking at him with riveted attention while he spoke, sublimely

innocent of the import of a single word he uttered.

"And," he added, in a slower and more directly communicative tone, as he disengaged his hand from mine and leaned his arm on the back of the lounge behind me, "I have decided to send you to a first-rate school, Amey, where you will have a chance to perfect yourself in every way; do you think you will like to go away to school?" he asked, so timidly that one would have thought my opinion on the matter could have some little value.

Before I had time to master this question with all its ponderous possibilities, my step-mother observed obligingly,

"Of course she would like it, Alfred, and even if she wouldn't you know she ought to go; Amelia herself knows," she continued, without looking at me, "that she is quite a dunce for her age, and will need to work very hard in order to make up for lost time. So, your father and I have decided," she added conclusively, "that you shall go to boarding-school, Amelia, as early next month as you can be got ready."

The word "boarding-school" was to me, perhaps, the vaguest and most indefinite in the English language. I knew that such places existed, but it had never entered into my juvenile conception of things to associate them in any way with my present or future career. In my dreamings I had often pictured myself as grown up and matured; I had even pictured my womanhood so far as tying two of Hannah's long aprons about my waist, one in front and the other behind, and with a shawl thrown cornerwise over my shoulders, to fancy myself a lady in "long dresses" like the "Miss Hartmanns" that called upon my step-mother.

I had wished to be the wife of a great, rich man, that I might do as I pleased with myself, and be "somebody" with my airs and graces, but I had never met such an obstacle in the long rambles of my reverie as "going to school." When, therefore, the subject was thrust upon me without any preparation, I felt as if I had seen a ghost and was told to go and speak to it, that it wouldn't harm me; and, lest the reader should attribute my emotion to a more natural, and, I dare say, becoming sentiment, I will confess that it was owing purely to the nervous shock which I sustained at the unexpected mention of so important a change in my life, that my eyes filled up with tears, and that I gave way to other ambiguous signs of appropriate agitation.

All this, however, was neither here nor there, so far as the fixed intention of my parents was concerned to dispose of me for an indefinite period of time, and within three weeks of that day when the announcement was first made to me, I was crying myself to sleep in a narrow little bed, hundreds of miles away from my father's house.

Perhaps there was not another girl among the three hundred boarders of Notre Dame Abbey, that had such little reason to be home-sick as Amey Hampden; and yet--God help us! into what strange moods we are prone to fall! When a wide-spreading distance had thrust itself between me and the home of my early days, I could not help feeling that, after all, my heart had tendrils like other people's, and that this separation had torn them rudely away from the objects, few or many, worthy or unworthy, around which they had twined with a clinging firmness.

The bare, white-washed walls of this strange dormitory brought out in touching relief the cosy corners of my own little room at home, and

the strict and rigid discipline, to which I felt I never could conform, made me look back with a hopeless regret upon the wandering, aimless hours I had spent unfettered, before I became a pupil of this bleak institution.

I did not know then, as I know now, that it is not the house which makes the home; that white-washed walls and painted floors may melt into artistic beauty, where glows the never smouldering fire of Christian love; and I have searched the world in vain for many a year, among riches and luxuries and comforts, but I have never had the smallest glimpse of that same abiding, enduring and self-sacrificing love which presided over me, waking or sleeping, smiling or weeping, during my happy, yet transient sojourn, in that distant Abbey of Notre Dame.

Within its walls my childhood melted into girlhood, and my girlhood into womanhood, and still, when I look out over the tree-tops, away beyond the misty mountains in the west, towards the spot where this my truly happiest home lies nestled, when with one sweeping stroke of my active pen I cancel twenty years of my life, and am back again a laughing, careless girl among my school companions, what is time to me? Only a huge and ugly shadow flitting between me and all that I have ever loved or cherished! A shadow, however, that flickers and bounds away, when, with her magic lantern, memory floods the vista of the past, with the light of "other days."

When I returned to my father's house to spend a short vacation among my earliest friends, I had entered upon my sixteenth year. I had of course, in the interval, been visited alternately by my father and step-mother, who kept me quite *_au courant_* of all that transpired in their fashionable world in my absence.

I had received photographs of my interesting half brother, which made me familiar with the changes wrought in him physically, by time; but all this had no satisfaction for me, who would rather one glimpse of old Hannah's frilled cap, or one peep through the narrow panes of Ella Wray's humble cottage, than all the spicy intelligences of the doings and sayings of possibly great people, for whom, however, I cared but very little.

At the close of our summer session of that year my father brought me home for a visit of three months. I had grown considerably, and for a person of tolerably good health, was very slender, which gave me the appearance of being yet taller than I was, and I felt an instinctively spiteful satisfaction in the consciousness that I had quite overcome any tendencies I might ever have had towards being round-shouldered; the regular calisthenic exercises which we went through at the convent had made a decided change for the better in my personal appearance.

I was not long at home before I detected a resolution on the part of my step-mother to adopt a new, and altogether plausible, attitude towards me. I was no longer a child; that was a self-evident fact: neither was I yet what society calls a "young lady," but now-a-days an interesting medium has been established and acknowledged; it is the first grade wherein the embryo society belles are initiated into all the intricacies of high life. It has its own peculiarities, its flutters of excitement, its rounds of pleasures, and distractions of every kind, aye--it has even its gossip, although the whisperers are but budding misses with golden or raven locks floating down their

backs.

It is the adolescent stage: where the lisp or drawl, most popular in the advanced circles, is affected with unquestionable propriety: when growing girls of susceptible sixteen, or thereabout, are meekly subjected to a rigid training and instruction by their older and more sophisticated sisters, when they learn "dauncing" and "tennis" and "riding," and go to small-and-earlies where a few grown couples are also invited to amuse them, or rather I should say instruct them.

Quite unconscious of any such prescribed routine being the "thing" among my family circle, I was almost stupefied by the look of distracted horror which flashed over my step-mother's face, when, the week after my arrival, I shocked her sensitive good breeding by a coarse betrayal of my unpardonable ignorance.

It was a perfect June day, flooded with a bright but not overwarm sunshine; the young leaves on the maple boughs outside my bed-room window were swaying gently against the lattice, and below in the freshly trimmed garden the flowers were unfolding their early beauty to the summer warmth.

I had sought the safe retreat of my room, that I might, as I had promised, write long and loving letters to some of my much-regretted school-friends. When all my preparations were ready, and I had dated the first of these effusions, I was disturbed by a timid knock at the door. I laid down my pen resignedly and went to open: it was the pert housemaid, who delivered "Mrs. Hampden's request that Miss Amelia would kindly begin to dress."

"Dress for what?" said I, in impatient surprise. "This is Tuesday, Miss," the pampered maid answered insinuatingly, "Mrs. Hampden will be at home."

"So will I, Janet," I interrupted hastily, "and my present toilet is quite good enough for the house."

With this rejoinder I closed the door a little forcibly, and went back to my writing. I had only time to trace--"My darling Ruby,"--when, without intimation or announcement of any kind, my step-mother burst into my room, with her hair half dressed, and her toilet jacket flying loosely about her,--

"Do you want to disgrace us in the eyes of these prattling servants, Amelia Hampden?" she began in a hoarse undertone, beckoning towards the hall outside: "the idea of not understanding my message any better than that," she went on in a whisper of reproachful despair. "Anyone would know, that when you've been away so long, you will be sure to have people calling on you, so put away that"--she added imperatively, pointing disdainfully to my treasured writing materials--"and dress yourself. The Merivale girls, and the Hunters, and all those others will be here before you are half ready."

I obeyed in placid silence; this was not the first hint which circumstances had thrown out of what was before me, while I remained at home. We were very stylish, very fashionable people, it seemed, although I was so unworthy of sustaining my part of the reputation, in my insignificant opinion we were very silly and very empty-minded creatures, and it was with this very encouraging conviction that I

proceeded to stow away my pen and paper, to renounce the rare pleasure I had counted upon for two days before that, and to prepare myself for the possible intrusion of some juvenile Merivales and Hunters.

Janet came in to dress my hair and fasten my new kid boots, and otherwise bore me with endeavors to beautify me for my reception. It was a task, however, that was soon ended, and half an hour later I was seated in the drawing room below listening passively to the small talk of some very well dressed girls who had opened the list of my ceremonious callers.

Having never seen them before, my demeanor was naturally timid and restrained, they were two sisters, and the younger one did all or most of the talking. They were very well dressed, and altogether non-committal, as far as speech and manners were concerned, but our vocabulary of drawing-room chat very soon became exhausted, and with a quiet "good afternoon" they arose and passed out.

As they left the drawing-room they were met at the door by two other young misses who, at sight of them, raised their chins considerably above their natural level, and swept in without condescending to bestow even an accidental glance upon them. From where I sat I observed all this quietly, and with an effort to suppress a smile of bland amusement, I arose and greeted my new-comers--the Merivales! Alice glided towards me with an air of imposing consciousness, and thrust a tiny, gloved hand into mine, and then with a graceful gesture she turned towards her companion and murmured faintly, "my cousin, Miss Holgate--Miss Hampden."

I bowed and smiled, and directed them to convenient seats, the situation was becoming more and more trying to my inclination to laugh outright. When we were all three comfortably deposited in our chairs, Alice Merivale turned her beaming countenance languidly towards me and remarked that "it was a perfectly lovely afternoon," and while I smiled my eager corroboration, her cousin surreptitiously observed, that it was "fairly delicious."

Then followed exclamations over my long absence, and questions too numerous ever to require answers, they were much more finished talkers than their predecessors, and when I thought we had touched upon every subject which could interest us mutually, Alice asked in a most insinuating tone if I had "known Florrie Grant before I went away to school?"

Florrie and Carrie Grant were the slighted heroines who had just gone out. Fully alive to the import of her question, I affected a most placid expression of countenance and voice, and answered that I had not.

"I thought so," she remarked with an incisive smile, looking significantly at her cousin, then changing her tone to one of most provoking haughtiness, she drooped her white lids over a daintily plush satchel she held between her hands and drawled out a languid

"How do you like her?"

I felt that I was taking in Miss Merivale's tone and words and meaning with a wincing suspicious glance. I was being initiated, and the sensation was so utterly different from anything I had ever

experienced before, that my self-control suffered a momentary suspension, when words came to me I used them with a particular emphasis.

"I think I shall like her very much," I answered, "when I have seen more of her. I never like to judge people according to early impressions," I continued, looking straight at the ottoman before me, "because people so often appear to disadvantage at first," but my arrow fell flat to the ground. Miss Merivale had not enough acumen to detect anything personal in the innuendo; resuming her incisive smile she exclaimed quietly

"Oh, but some people you know, Miss Hampden, are always the same, they have only one set of manners, of course I don't mean to say that the Grants are any of these, indeed I never do say anything against anyone. Florrie, I believe, is a very nice little girl, in her set, of course I don't know much about her as I have never met her anywhere."

"Oh, no! None of our friends know her," Miss Holgate broke in with a relish.

The elder girl frowned at this indiscreet remark, and interrupted it with grave remonstrance, saying

"Hush, Edith! You shouldn't talk quite so plainly," then with a wonderful tact in one so young she lit up her face with a happy expression, appropriate to her change of subject, and asked:

"Where does Mrs. Hampden think of spending the summer, this year?"

I could vouch no information on this point, as, I had not troubled to put the question to my step-mother myself, and so, after relating to me in a somewhat confidential tone, all the plans and projects which her Mama and her Aunt Ada had arranged for their holiday season, and their strong temptation to try Riviere du Loup, where so many fashionable people were said to be retiring just then, she finally arose, and with an emphasized request that I would "run in" without the least ceremony, to see her at any time, she bowed herself most gracefully out of the room, followed by her younger and less sophisticated relative.

I need hardly say what turn the rising tide of my impressions and opinions took about this time. To one who had passed from the cheerless, loveless guardianship of a worldly step-mother, into the tender hands of patient and devoted sisters, to become, instead of a wandering, uncared for waif, the object of the truest and holiest solicitude that ever animated Christian hearts, this hollow mockery of fashionable life was nothing more than a matchless absurdity.

Had I grown up to this, in the unpropitious atmosphere of my own home, I daresay such phases of existence would have come upon me quite naturally, and without my ever stopping to question their real or relative solidity. But the "twig" had been differently inclined, by hands more worthy of training tender, susceptible off-shoots. Where can frail young innocence find a safe, secure and profitable refuge, from the destroying influence of evil, if not within convent walls? It is there, or nowhere, that girlhood, growing, aspiring girlhood, ripens into a glorious womanhood. There, go hand in hand the

development of mind, and what is more necessary, if possible for a woman, the cultivation of heart. Everyone who looks about him in the social world, and gives a moment of calm consideration to what he sees and hears, cannot but admit, that though surrounded by a vast field for active and profitable labour, and with multiplied favours of circumstances thrown in their way, our girls lead comparatively useless lives, as if they were a recremental fraction of the human race, than which, indeed, many are no better, since they choose to lead such lives as can be fruitful of no direct benefit to themselves or their fellow-mortals.

It is not because a woman is excluded (rightly or not) from the more public arena of active life, that her energies need become paralyzed and wasted. It is not because the popular idea of propriety would deny her the right or opportunity to do great things for society or for the state, in the same way as men are expected to do them, that she cannot work her own great or little wonders in a quieter, but yet more direct manner.

It is acknowledged that hers is the mission of the heart; it is admitted that her sphere is in the family, and what is the mightiest commonwealth in the world, but a family of families. Ah me! It is a dark day with humankind when the sphere of a woman's action lies rigidly between her toilet table and the drawing-room.

The proof that such limits as these are both unlawful and unnatural, is, that our women who are confined within them, are conscious in their hearts of the wrong they are doing the world and themselves. Conscience is not yet an extinct, though it is fast becoming an unpopular and unfashionable faculty, and men and women play the Pharisee with a deep sense of their own worthlessness and littleness gnawing at their spirit all the while.

I had been taught all this in time, and as early as my first vacation at home, among the fashionable juveniles of my step-mother's circle, I had begun to submit my valuable precepts to profitable practice. My first callers taught me a very wholesome lesson which I have held upon the surface of my memory through all these years.

Whenever I have witnessed a repetition of that early experience, the past has come forcibly back to me, with all the golden admonitions of my school-days, and I have felt myself stimulated anew, towards the steady pursuit of those social virtues which are the outgrowth of Christian charity, and a generous, impartial discrimination.

I have met many Alice Merivales, since my youth, who cast their stylish shadows ominously over the lives of many a Florrie Grant, and I have tried to sustain the weaker one, whenever it was in my power, the evil, I regret to see, is unabating. A new generation of little maidens is springing up around us, are they, too, destined to follow the beaten track their elders have trodden so unworthily? Will they be taught these nice discriminations between wealth and no wealth? Must they, too, meet a struggling gentility with a haughty, overbearing carriage, and elbow out less independent aspirants, whom some capricious fortune has brought within their contact? Does one little star in the vault above shine less brightly or twinkle less gladly because myriads of others do likewise? After all, what vainglory need there be in accidents of birth or fortune. They are not virtually ours, they have been given to us, and rest upon a changing wind that,

to-morrow, may waft them far out of our Reach or sight forever.

"All flesh is grass; and all its glory fades Like the fair flower
dishevelled in the wind, Riches have wings, and grandeur is a
dream!"

To attack this evil, at its root, is to expose one of the most powerful defects of our times, for no one can deny that this spirit which prevails among so-called well-bred people, is the evident result of that "little learning" which is "a dangerous thing." Of this I became more strongly convinced as I grew older.

My summer vacation was not long in coming to an end. I had whiled away some happy hours, and days and weeks, forming fleeting pleasures and seeing novel sights. My brother Freddie had entered very sparingly into my pleasures, as our tastes were vastly different, and his health on the whole rather delicate, he was a pretty boy in a sailor costume, when I saw him after our long separation, with mild blue eyes and a pallid countenance. He was sickly looking, with an expression of helpless peevishness about his otherwise pleasing mouth; his hair was wavy and of a golden colour, and his hands were thin and white, like those of a baby girl.

His mother persuaded herself that in multiplying and dwelling upon his complaints, she was caring for him with affectionate solicitude, and to be told that he was not looking well, was enough to convince Freddie that his life was hanging upon a thread, and that he must swallow powders and pills without a question or a grimace.

One morning towards the end of August, about a fortnight before my return to school, I heard my step-mother remark in a fretful tone that "Freddie's old symptoms" were "beginning to threaten him again," and that she "must send for Dr Campbell to come and see him."

I looked up with some astonishment from the book which I was reading, and ventured to ask.

"Cannot papa cure him?"

"I suppose he could," she answered, "if he were not his father, but Freddie won't listen to his papa's directions, and cannot be persuaded to take the remedies he prescribes--besides," she continued apologetically, "when your father was away last fall and Freddie had a very miserable attack, I called in Dr. Campbell, and he cured him in a fortnight, he is very clever," she added with slow emphasis, straightening a fancy panel on the mantelpiece by which she stood. There was silence for a few moments, as I went on reading.

"And he is by far the most popular person in the city," my step-mother broke forth again, sinking into a seat near the window and folding her arms I looked up, but did not close my book.

"Who?" I asked indifferently.

"Dr. Campbell, to be sure," she answered a little snappishly, piqued that I had not paid more attention to her favorite subject. Still unwilling to drop the topic without having done it fuller justice, she went on, half in soliloquy.

"He is not married either, and has the best practice here; besides being courted by everybody who is anything. I am confident that the Hunters, and those people, call him in for mere trifles, just to cultivate his friendship. I know that Laura Hunter is fairly wild about him--and she is a chronic dyspeptic, luckily," my step-mother added with a malicious chuckle.

"Poor girl!" I exclaimed with well feigned sympathy, "I should think she would not care to see any one she liked under such trying circumstances."

"Neither does she--_except Dr Campbell_--she digests him so well that her family would like to see her live upon him altogether."

I began to see that I was serving as a target for my step-mother's ridicule of something which wounded her jealous tendencies, she knew that I could make no retort for or against the absent ones at whom these sly missiles were being aimed. I knew nothing of the circumstances so broadly treated by her, and I therefore kept silent, and applied myself to my book with renewed interest, and left my step-mother mistress of the field--there was no glory in the conquest, to speak of.

Towards four o'clock of the same afternoon Freddie and I were seated upon the library floor, matching some very irregular blocks that, when rightly fitted together, would display to our eager eyes the vividly coloured representations of that classic and time-honoured tale known as the "Death and burial of Cock Robin."

We were progressing slowly, and had reached that very important part where the "fly," as an ocular witness, gives his substantial and straightforward evidence. I had a little narrow block between my fingers, and was glancing carefully among the unused pieces for its mate, repeating abstractedly all the while:

"I, said the fly, With my little eye I saw him die."

"I, said the fly, with my little"--here the library was thrown open, and my step-mother, accompanied by a strange gentleman, walked laughingly into the room.

"Here are both my babies!" she exclaimed with a well feigned air of proud maternity, as she came towards us. "Are they not good little children?" she asked in grand condescension, looking up into the stranger's face, then turning abruptly around she said in her formal tone

"Amelia, this is Dr. Campbell."

I had sprung to my feet at sight of the intruders and stood distantly in the shadow of the window curtains. I was conscious of looking flushed and indignant, and did not relish the situation from any standpoint. The sing-song testimony of the fly was still ringing in my ears, and I knew how very undignified and ridiculous it must have sounded to an uninterested stranger coming in suddenly upon us in this way.

Instead of going forward, therefore, with the careless simplicity becoming my years, I merely inclined my head from where I stood, and

got perceptibly redder in the face. I must have looked up, since I afterwards remembered the tall serious man standing like a dark shadow in the doorway, but this was the only impression of him I could recall. While he was bending over Freddie in professional solicitude, I effected a stealthy retreat by the door that led into the garden and saw no more of him.

In less than a month afterwards I was bending over my Algebra in the study hall of the dear old Abbey, striving most perseveringly to master an obstinate, unknown quantity that baffled me considerably. I did not suspect that I was then setting myself a double task of this nature, or that many another girl, besides myself, had first begun to chase some "unknown" phantom through the intricate stages of life at the same time that she was puzzling over the hidden meaning of an algebraic equation.

I had worked at my task with a steady perseverance for nearly an hour, but other things distracted me and I could not succeed with it. I laid one cheek pensively in the palm of my idle hand and with the other, which held my busy pencil, I played a random tattoo on my desk. Before me on my paper was a confused multitude of a's and y's and z's which I had failed to master with any satisfaction, although I had repeated many a patient effort with placid, hopeful, good-humor.

Other thoughts quite alien to the subject I was then studying, began to suggest themselves as a sort of refreshment to my mind. My vacation at home among worldly people and pursuits seemed to have thrown open before my eyes the hitherto undreamt of arena of active experience, and whether I willed it or not my memory dwelt persistently at intervals upon all I had seen, and heard, and done during the fleeting summer months.

In a few moments I was far outside the limits of Notre Dame Abbey, hovering in spirit around the neighborhood of my home, calling up those faces and forms that had impressed me more than others. I went back to the embarrassing meeting with Dr Campbell in the library, and as I thought over it I felt the warm blood rising within me and suffusing both my cheeks, as it is wont to do when any of the blunders of my life come back to me in my reverie.

What was most vexing to all in this case was that I could not resolve my floating memories of him into any definite outline or form, he was a mere shadow to me, that had flitted across my way for a short moment and then left me bewildered and wondering.

I was rudely awakened from my reflections by the loud unmusical summons of the class bell which set up a prolonged and monotonous ringing just as I was struggling with all my vaguest and most uncertain recollections of the much talked-of Dr Campbell.

I arose with my task undone and went listlessly down to the class-room. I could not help the dissatisfied mood which crept over me as I strolled lazily along the corridors and down the winding stairway. I felt myself suspended between two distinct lives since my return to school, two lives that ran as widely apart as the streams of the old and new world. The common-place reality of one was a constant and rather unwelcome intruder upon the dreamy uncertainty of the other, and I stood midway between the powers and attractions of both, a neutral, passive, and helpless victim.

As might be expected I was one of Sister Andre's "black sheep" or dilatory pupils that morning. When our Algebra class was called I felt humbled and fallen. It was the first time for many years that Amey Hampden had been backward in her lessons, and what was worse, there were girls in my section who had looked forward with an eager desire to a day when my conquering spirit would be baffled.

I could detect a gathering expression of the meanest gratification on more faces than one as I stood up to accuse myself, without any justification whatever, of having brought my task unprepared to the school-room. The words almost stifled me. I fain would have pleaded illness or some other false reason for my transgression. Nothing seemed so dreadful as to provoke a sneer from my unworthy rivals.

I could feel myself losing ground even at that moment, I, who had felt myself so secure in my superiority, now saw myself threatened with a most inglorious downfall--a mere trifle in the eyes of the matured and sophisticated worldling who has had to do battle with some of the most merciless freaks of fate, but every ambitious student knows that such a crisis as this, under circumstances such as these, tries his moral endurance, which is yet necessarily very limited, as severely as a like turning-point, on a grander scale, tested that of a Caesar or a Bonaparte.

I had made my own little conquests, and had established myself as a leading power among my fellow-students, in a way, maybe, I took a vain pleasure in my own successes which, after all, were only the lawful performances of my duty, but then, it is a very plausible thing for people to do what is expected of them now-a-days, and I had reaped a bountiful harvest of recompense for my diligence and assiduity.

However, I now saw plainly the truth of the proverbial warning that "Pride must have a fall," and I resolved to bear up as bravely and worthily as my self-control would allow me. It seemed to me that Sister Andre's tone had never been so encouraging, or so partial, as she said:

"I see these examples are very intricate, young ladies; I am afraid I will have to call upon Miss Hampden to solve them for us."

Some of my rivals exchanged sarcastic glances. My hour had arrived! I stood boldly up and turned towards the dais upon which our mistress was seated.

"I have not prepared them, Sister Andre," I answered, in a clear, steady voice. Just then a tall, slender girl, with dark eyes and hair, who was seated opposite to me, and whom I had never seen in our class before, rose from her seat and went up to Sister Andre's throne. She spoke to her in a low, inaudible tone for a few short moments, and then went back as quietly, and resumed her place.

Sister Andre followed the stranger with a wistful glance, and then turned her eyes upon me.

"It is all right, Amey," she said, gently, "to-morrow will do."

I sat down in a state of dumb confusion, feeling dazed and mystified. Something urged me to affirm I had no valid reason for being excused,

and looking across towards my apparent benefactor for some vague explanation of her conduct, I saw a re-assuring, encouraging expression in her eyes as they met mine, so I merely smiled and said nothing.

That evening when supper was over and the hour of recreation had arrived, I walked to the end of the pillared hall, where our new pupil stood gazing aimlessly out of a window that looked into our summer play-ground, at the rear of the convent, she did not hear my approaching step, apparently, for she never moved until I slipped my arm gently within her own and whispered:

"I have come to thank you for the great service you have done me to-day."

She started suddenly and looked up at me with the loveliest brown eyes I ever saw, a smile crept into the corners of her rich red lips, which broke asunder quietly and somewhat sadly, revealing, as they did so, two rows of pretty, even teeth. Whether or not, I was partially disposed to admire her on account of the sentiments with which I approached her, I must admit that I thought I never saw such a vision of sparkling, feminine beauty in my life as she presented at that moment.

"Oh, Miss Hampden," she exclaimed, with a suspicion of a pretty foreign accent "don't speak of it, please, I realized your trying situation, and thought I knew something of the cause that provoked it."

She had turned from the window and was toying familiarly with the blue badge which, as a member of the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin, I have always worn, her words surprised me, and I asked with an undisguised curiosity.

"What did you know, Miss. ----?"

"Not _Miss_" she interrupted, while I stopped, not knowing what name to call her by, "Hortense," she emphasized, "Hortense de Beaumont, that is my name."

"Well, Hortense, then," I repeated, "what did you know about me?"

She lifted her fine, lustrous eyes to mine, but this time they were wistful and penetrating; then, taking my hand impulsively, she led me to a bench that stood a little away from us, saying:

"Come and I will tell you, Amey--for I am going to call you Amey," she put in parenthetically. We sat down, and without preamble my interesting friend went on in her pretty foreign way to tell me the following.

"You see, Amey," she began, "I arrived only last night at this convent and I have come from such a long way. Oh! I was tired and _ennuyee_ when I reached here, and then every face was so strange. Oh! it was dreadful" she exclaimed ardently, clasping her small white hands and looking eagerly into my face. "I could not sleep at all, you may imagine," she continued, resuming the thread of her narrative, "and this morning I felt fatigued again and quite lonesome. I went into the study-hall because I had nothing to do with myself, and, do you know,

Amey," she said with renewed earnestness, "when I saw you, it was so queer, I felt sure that I knew you already. Your face was so familiar. I looked at you all the time, while you sat bending over your task, but you never looked at me. I was asking questions to myself about you; I thought I should remember you, and while I was noticing you like that, you halted suddenly in your work and began to think, and then--oh! your face _was_ like one that I have seen somewhere, and that I cannot now remember I knew that your thoughts had changed quickly, and dwelt no longer on your books," she said smiling and laying her hand gently on my two that were folded in my lap, "They were far away, perhaps with mine, and Amey, I liked you so much then, I did want to speak to you, but the bell just rang, and we went down to the class-room. When Sister Andre asked for the algebra class, I knew you would not be pleased, and looking at you eagerly, I saw disappointment and vexation in your face. I went up then to Sister Andre, and said 'Do not blame Miss Hampden if she is backward this morning, it is hardly her fault. I will explain it to you better by-and-bye, Sister,' I said, and indeed" Hortense concluded, gesticulating prettily with both her slender hands, "it was not your fault, as Sister Andre agreed with me when I told her of it after."

Her eyes sparkled with a _piquante_ brightness as she finished her interesting little story. There was a rich crimson spot on each dusky cheek, and her red lips were parted in a bewitching smile. I was enraptured, and told her, without the slightest reserve, the whole prospect which was looming up so darkly before me had she not come to my rescue.

"At the same time, Hortense," I argued, "I think you like me and sympathize with me, under a false conviction. You have surely never seen me before, and I most certainly have never laid eyes upon you until now. If I had, I should not be likely to forget it," I said, insinuating something of the profound admiration, with which her ravishing beauty inspired me, in my tone as I did so.

"O you will make me too proud, Amey!" she exclaimed so innocently, that I leaned over and touched her peach-like cheek with my lips. She coloured still more, as I did so. I noticed it, and I said:

"I will never tell you anything but the truth Hortense, will we be friends enough for this?"

"Oh, yes! Surely we will be friends," she answered warmly, "not now only, but always, will we not?" she urged warmly. I need not say how readily I agreed, and from that moment Hortense de Beaumont and I were all in all to each other.

CHAPTER IV

That there is some subtle sweetness in a true and stable friendship, no one can dare deny. It is divinely ordained that men's and women's lives will cross each other at certain stations on the long and oftentimes tedious journey of experience, and independent of either of

them, a secret and mysterious influence, the exponent of an inherent Christian sympathy, will work its changes on their human hearts as the moulder on the yielding substance between his able fingers. I hold that the friendship of which I speak is fruitful of more real happiness in the world than any other influence of which we mortals are susceptible, and I am well sustained in my belief.

But though so wide a field is granted to our friendship, and though it may reveal itself under a plurality of aspects to those who seek it, strange to say, the world knows very little about it. We speak of it as of some regretted treasure that has been long lost to humanity. We are half convinced that the lightning speed of modern civilization has been too much for it, and that it is destined for time to come, to creep on apace within the range of our backward glance, but never within reach of our grasp.

And all the while we are only building up an opaque and dreary barrier that will shut out much of the summer sunshine from our daily lives of toil and trouble. Men and women who could make each other's burdens of sorrow fewer and lighter by a mutual sympathy and devotedness, look above each other's heads in the hurrying crowd and pass by each other, shoulder to shoulder, wearing a mask of calm and cold neutrality over hearts that are glowing with an unspoken kindness and affection.

"A woman," says Bulwer, "if she be really your friend, will have a sensitive regard for your character, honor and repute. She will seldom counsel you to do a shabby thing, for a woman friend always desires to be proud of you. She is," he further observes, "to man _presidium et dulce decus_, bulwark, sweetness, ornament of his existence."

And indeed his words and their import are most rational and self-sustaining. It is no longer a matter of private or personal opinion to decide whether the friendship of a truly good woman benefits the man upon whom she bestows it or not. There are too many striking arguments in her favor, thrown by the surging tide of circumstances upon the surface of life's agitated waters, to allow a doubt to assail her. Too often, within our own memory even, has the slender yet firm hand of a woman been seen outstretched to snatch the life of a brother, husband or friend from the sluggish and perilous stream which runs slowly but surely on towards a hopeless ruin. "The mere idea," says George Eliot, "that a woman had a kindness towards him, spun little threads of tenderness from out his heart towards hers" and "there are natures," she tells us, "in which, if they love us, we are conscious of having a sort of baptism and consecration; they bind us over to rectitude and purity by their pure belief about us, and our sins become that worst kind of sacrilege which tears down the invisible altars of trust. If you are not good, none is good. Those little words may give a terrific meaning to responsibility, may hold a vitriolic intensity for remorse." Will anyone dispute it? Moreover, it is the teaching of the only true philosophy by which men should regulate their interior selves: that we "love one another," that we mutually assist and encourage one another, that we sympathise with each other in our joy and sustain one another in sorrow. Now, where a natural sympathy paves the way for the practice of this lesson of charity, how easy it is for men to bestow a beautiful living interpretation upon the Divine ordination concerning our mutual relationships.

The idea that a staunch and unswerving friendship is capable of

existing between two women has become quite obsolete and exploded in our day. It is generously admitted that the frivolous tendencies which are innate in us have too much of the upper hand to sanction any sentiment which pre-supposes a self abnegation or exalted disinterestedness on our part. This is a serious heresy which may possibly be accounted for simply enough.

It is a well-attested fact, especially since the sacred precincts of established truth have been raided by every puerile pedant and sciolist who can handle a pen, that any absurdity whatever, so long as it is clad "in the lion's skin" and no matter how loudly it brays, has some fatal claim upon the rambling credulity of the multitude. And a method of reasoning, though resting upon a general assertion which is utterly false, has won its own disciples time and again with an easy effort.

Even in this trifling stigma which denies us women the privilege of being faithful to one another it is easy to see how a fraction of truth has been led astray. It is the outgrowth of a high-sounding syllogism, which deduces the sweeping general assertion that "all women are traitors" from the more limited one, which is unfortunately true and deplorable, that some women are traitors. Nevertheless, I fail to see what relationship can possibly exist between the two parts of the syllogism. The general is as undeniably false as the particular is undeniably true.

I cannot conceive what pleasure human beings can derive from a conviction into which they have coaxed themselves by earnest labor, which has for its object the total destruction of their natural and simple faith in their fellow creatures. We are all of us innocent until by our words or deeds we are branded guilty. And we have an unquestionable right to the respect of other men so long as it has not been forfeited by such actions as are reckoned misdemeanors in the social world.

Hortense de Beaumont and I signed our treaty of friendship before we had, either of us, awakened to a suspicion of those probable impediments which the world is so fond of bringing face to face with any established mutual attachment of ardent hearts. It was enough for me that a sweet, confiding simplicity looked trustfully out of the depths of her brown eyes and hovered with unconscious witchery around her pretty red lips. The very way in which she raised her beautiful chin, so hopefully, so winningly, when she talked, would have conquered me, independent of her other attractions. Although there were no fascinating depths to my grey eyes, and no witchery, natural or artificial, in the smile my lips afforded, Hortense, I venture to say, fully reciprocated the love and trust which I so earnestly bestowed upon her. There was no uncertainty about our friendship, no wavering, no questioning, no doubt. The embers glowed with a strong and steady and cheerful intensity, and we sat before them basking in their comfortable warmth, and sheltering our hearts from the chilling coldness of the world without. Oh! these were happy days that compensated for all the loneliness I had endured in my childhood. After all, I had only been treasuring up my desire for companionship and not sacrificing it, which made my sentiments only the more ardent when an opportunity came at last to indulge them. Looking back from that sunlit eminence upon the shadowy years of my previous life, I was able to smile and forget everything, in the blissful consciousness that a rare, undreamt-of happiness had overtaken me after all, and had

flooded my lot with its dazzling loveliness; and even now I see it standing prominently above all the other varied epochs of my life I can follow with a distinct remembrance, one day after another as they merged into a riper period of my existence, the spot where a shadow first came over the sunshine of our lives has never been a past to me.

I remained at Notre Dame Abbey pursuing my studies devotedly until I was upon the threshold of my twentieth year. A letter from my father then arrived, bidding me make whatever preparations my departure would necessitate, that at the end of the autumn session he would come to take me home for good. This was a sad and unexpected surprise for me. I had just begun to be fascinated by my studies, which were now of quite a dignified nature. I might as well add, since it cannot but provoke a bland and suggestive smile from masculine erudition, that I had actually taken up moral philosophy, and aspired to distinguish myself later as a metaphysician of some repute. But alas! for the vanity of human purposes and desires, this empty little note of my father's came like the chilliest wintry blast and smothered the small creeping flame of my newly awakened ambition. I pleaded and prayed for an extension of time, but the ultimate explanation was a rather lengthy epistle from my step-mother, in which she adduced most persuasively that "there was no help for it, that I must come home." Canada had changed administrators, and somebody very distinguished was expected to replace the old Governor-General. It was a most propitious and opportune occasion for me to make my debut in society, and, all things considered, I had had quite enough instruction now to fit me for an honorable position in the world.

How foolishly and vainly assiduous I had been! An honourable position, according to that respectable authority, was literally no position at all. Its preliminary stage was that of an idle pleasure-seeker; its more progressive, that of an artful husband hunter, and its summit--ah! its summit was where she stood herself, and where a deplorable percentage of our society wives and mothers are standing or strutting about with their brilliant plumage expanded, airing their silly pride and lisping out in self-laudatory accents the story of their empty achievements in society.

Yes, it was true for her that I had received plenty of instruction for the mission which she had reserved for me, but in spite of her, now, I was far outside the limit of her power over me. Not that I was predisposed to cross her plans and wishes with an obstinate perversity as of old. I had grown too sensible for that now; but I knew that education always carries an unquestionable independence about with it, which asserts itself firmly, though calmly, in the lace of polished ignorance. I felt that I was now superior to my step-mother by right of that cultivation, more even of heart than of mind, which had never been bestowed upon her. The good Sisters of Notre Dame had lifted me out of the chaos of fashionable ignorance, and had given me a forcible impetus towards that rising hill of knowledge, whence I could look down upon the fate I had escaped, with a proud and tender gratitude. Without further ado, therefore, I wrote back a reply declaring that I would be ready to leave my happy convent home at the period indicated, and, inserting an artfully-worded hope that they would not be disappointed with the fruits of my scholastic labors, I signed myself their most obedient and respectful daughter.

In three months from that eventful date the gas-light of the Canadian Senate Chamber was falling upon my white brocaded Watteau train, as I

advanced towards the throne where our courteous Governors stand every winter, with a patience and forbearance worthy of a better cause. An officer in glistening regimentals looked at my card through his eyeglass, and dutifully called out "Miss Hampden," while I bowed, and followed the motley procession of young and old, that were wending their way to the galleries above.

I was no longer a child, no longer a school-girl in the eyes of the world, but a "young lady" with ambitions and desires attributed to me whether I thought of them or not.

It was late in November when I bade farewell to Notre Dame Abbey, never more to darken its hallowed threshold as a pupil. That parting was one of the saddest recollections which my memory treasures. Every hall and stairway, every nook and corner of that solemn old building, were bound to my heart by closest ties. It is strange how much deep love we have to spare for places and things that enter largely into our lives. For my part, I know that the dear old Abbey has a claim upon my affections which no power on earth can lessen or destroy.

I left Hortense after me, and while she remained I was always with her--not in flesh and blood indeed, but, better still, in heart and mind and soul, shadowing her wherever she went, and revelling in the same sweet companionship still, though a great distance stretched between us.

Hortense and I said our first good-bye on the 25th of November, the feast of the glorious Saint Catherine. The evening meal was over, and the long procession of happy, laughing girls had passed out of the refectory into the spacious recreation hall, where first I spoke to my dear little friend. Hortense and I lingered behind. I had only one hour more to spend with her, and it seemed that a great deal yet remained unsaid. From where we stood we could plainly hear the buzz of ringing voices in the crowded room beyond. There was unusual rejoicing to-night, for it was a _conge_ in honor of Saint Catherine, but the joyful confusion seemed only to throw our mutual sadness into more pronounced relief, and for awhile we stood in silence, hand in hand, half-shrouded in the darkness of the outer doorway. Then Hortense said, in a tremulous whisper.

"Let us go into the chapel."

I took her arm tenderly, and we passed quietly along the dimly lit corridor that led into the main portion of the building. A single gas jet burned in the large square hall outside. We hurried across it, for the glare was unwelcome to the tear-stained faces of both, all was silent and still as death. Hortense opened the chapel door noiselessly, and we glided in. Darkness here too, and yet not darkness, for great giant shadows leaped over the vacant pews, and chased one another over the cold, white keys of the organ. The sanctuary light was flickering fitfully in its crystal bowl, and peopling the holy precincts with phantom worshippers. Gleams of silvery moonlight flooded the farther end, and brought out to advantage every hoary blade and tree and flower that lay upon the glistening window panes. If we had needed inspiration from external things at this moment, how easily we could have received it. But there was not a fibre within us that was not already awake to such soul-stirring influences. We went on tiptoe towards the altar-rail, and knelt upon the topmost step. To tell what followed would be to

intrude upon the sacredness of the soul's privacy. Suffice it to say that for some solemn moments we knelt and prayed together, each knowing well what to ask from Him who has promised that they who "ask shall receive." When my petition was ended I turned and looked at Hortense. She was praying still, her thin white hands were clasped and rested on the rail before her. Her eyes were raised towards the Crucifix that stood over the Tabernacle, her lips were slightly parted, and a deep crimson spot glowed on each beautiful cheek. I became spell-bound for a moment, wondering whether in Heaven she could look any lovelier; but as I gazed upon her she raised her slender hand and blessed herself. Her prayer was over and it was surely heard.

Half an hour after this I stood robed in my warm furs awaiting my father's arrival. I had said my adieux to teachers and school-mates, and was now drying my eyes for the hundredth time in expectation of a summons to leave hurriedly. At last there was a stamping of horses' hoofs on the cold, frozen ground outside, followed by a violent ringing of the door-bell. The hour had come.

I stood hastily up. Now that the end was near where was the use of delay. I took Hortense's tearless face between my trembling hands and stooped to kiss her for the last time. I had determined to be brave at this moment but I said "good-bye" in a broken sob and two large tears fell upon her pale cheeks from my quivering lashes. She did not brush them away but looking earnestly into my eyes said in a low eager voice as though she were finishing her thought aloud.

"And we will always be friends like this, Amelia, in spite of distance or anything?"

"Always," I answered as her lips lay upon mine and then we parted.

CHAPTER V.

From the quiet, peaceful routine of a convent life I was whirled into the maddest and wildest confusion, at least such did it seem to me then, when I was unsophisticated, and ignorant of the ways in which fashionable womanhood develops itself.

My step-mother went through my wardrobe making incredible additions and alterations, informing me as she did so that I would be the cynosure of many searching eyes when I appeared in the drawing-rooms which she frequented. I also received many graceful hints as to what was expected of me in conversation and demeanour, and I did not need any assistance whatever to realize that I was a sort of speculation, that I would carry an insinuation of my father's wealth and my mother's position about with me wherever I went. I was not given to understand or to fear that my own intrinsic worth would likely be the object of any serious consideration. My step-mother encouraged me by saying that "Alice Merivale was out before me and was quite a success, and all I had to do was to renew my early friendship with her" or in other words to play the parasite as prettily as I knew how. About this, however, I had made up my mind before I appeared in the busy

arena of fashionable society. Twice a week now I put on some of my expensive new toilets and went with my step-mother in our handsome conveyance to make calls. I was presented to every one of any note, and drank tea in the best drawing-rooms the Capital could boast of. So far my step-mother looked happy. I had not been awkward at introductions, nor dull in conversations. I had even made some very pithy remarks where they could do me most service, and knew the name of a historic personage to whom Lady Pendleton alluded vaguely, forgetting his title. I was invaded in my turn on our reception day by all the wealth and beauty of the capital. Great, pompous dames in heavy mantles and rustling robes sat themselves down in imposing condescension beside me to discuss the last dinner party at Government House, or recite a series of domestic woes brought on by that refractory necessity--the cook. Simpering young ladies, and simpering ladies that were no longer young, greeted me with a pretty, patronizing courtesy, and smiled upon my remarks as sweetly as we grown people do at the crude observances of a prattling child.

There was a time I must admit when I was only a child in the eyes of some of these maidens. When I was ten and they were twenty how far apart we stood in sympathies and tastes? But it is astonishing how rapidly youth overtakes maturity. Although the inevitable disparity of years can never be altered or overcome, the material differences which necessarily accrue from it are easily mastered.

So far, the course of my new life ran smoothly and calmly on, but an impediment was looming up in the near distance. Mrs. Hartmann's cards were out for her annual brilliant "At Home." Every one was whispering about and speculating in a hopeful way, as people do when a grand social event of this nature is on the _tapis_. My step-mother spent the whole of the day before among her fragments of small finery, re-arranging tumbled laces and trimmings, and sorting her handsome jewels. I gave my afternoon leisure to Hortense, writing her a most minute and graphic account of my initiation into fashionable life, my progress and its probable result.

When the eventful night came and the gas was lighted all was hurry and flurry and confusion in our home. My step-mother and I repaired to our rooms in quiet walking costumes which we had worn in the afternoon, and an hour or so later we emerged in the fullest ball-toilet. I was ready first, and gathering up my expensive train of satin and oriental lace, I glided across the hall and tapped at my step-mother's bedroom.

In answer to a faint "come in," I admitted myself just in time to see the faithful Janet bestowing her attention upon the bare, plump shoulders of her mistress, who stood before her cheval glass in silent self-contemplation.

She had only to fasten a necklet of diamonds at her throat, to gather up her gloves and lace hand-kerchief and allow Janet to wrap her up in her downy opera cloak, and she was ready. As she turned from the glass her gaze fell fully upon me. I could see that she was not disappointed, but her generous admiration in no way interfered with the consciousness which filled her of her own superior dignity and grace. She may have envied me my youth, for she was loth to grow old among these gay distractions, however, she only said "you'll do nicely Amelia" and we left the room.

We went down to the dimly-lit drawing-room where a cheerful fire

burned in the polished grate, and my stepmother rang for tea. The little French parlor maid appeared a moment later and laid the tiny table beside us. Two steaming cups stood invitingly on the tray, but before taking hers my step-mother suddenly remembered she had left her jewel case unlocked, and she hurried out of the room in a state of anxious excitement. I turned my back to the fire and in utter abstraction riveted my gaze upon the butterfly handles of the teacups. I was thinking. Such circumstances as these always brought back my simple yesterdays with a renewed force to my memory. I was thinking so profoundly that I neither heard nor saw my father, who had appeared in the doorway and was standing on the sheep-skin rug looking strangely at me.

I must have felt the power of his steady gaze, for suddenly and almost involuntarily, I raised my eyes and beheld him leaning against the polished casement, the heavy red curtain over the entrance hanging loosely and gracefully behind him, making an effective background for his white hair and pensive face.

Seeing my reverie broken, he strode noiselessly across the room and stood beside me at the fire. The thought crossed my mind that there was something unusual in his manner and expression to-night. He passed his hand wearily over his brow and eyes, and as if in helpless obedience to some uncontrollable impulse he leaned forward and touched his firm dry lips to my cheek.

I started, and why should'nt I? It was the first time my father had ever kissed me, at least so long as I could remember. I felt a deep blush creeping up to my very ears; in fact I was stupidly agitated, and he saw it. With a tenderness such as his voice had not known for many a year he said:

"Amey, you are a living, breathing vision of my happy past, to-night. I never saw such a likeness before." His words sank into a whisper as my step-mother's footfall sounded on the stairs outside. He heard it, and turning away left the room abruptly. I drank my cup of tea and prepared to leave as one moving about in a dream. This was one of the strangest experiences I had ever had; some secret spring seemed to have been magically touched within me, and all the pent-up love and devotion of a life-time now flowed freely through my veins. I was attracted most powerfully towards the cold, distant man whom I had dreaded all along, and whom I could have hated ardently had it not been a sin against nature.

His words, though vague, had a clear and holy meaning for me. He must then have loved my dear dead mother, I thought fondly, when twenty years of separation have not effaced her memory from his heart and mind.

I was busy with these reflections as we drove through the streets of the city towards the Hartmann's residence, and I alighted at their door with my eyes full of unshed tears. How strangely at odds we can be with the circumstances of our daily lives.

Very soon, however, I was obliged to dispel all such personal and intimate ruminations. I was no longer my own property to dispose of as I willed. I was standing in the doorway of the spacious ball-room with a circle of new-made gentlemen acquaintances around me; my father and his wife stood a short distance from me and watched the proceedings

without looking at them.

"May I have the fifth Miss Hampden," the very good-looking Mr. Haliburton was asking with a smile.

"What is the dance?" I interrupted as he was about to scribble his initials.

"A polka," he replied with sweet urbanity. I shook my head negatively and tried to look pleasantly sorry. He raised his perfect dark eye-brows in thorough astonishment and put in an exclamatory "Why?"

"No fast dances," I said in a seriously playful tone, "I will give you the sixth, it is a lancers."

"Oh, this is too bad," he argued earnestly, "however," he continued with his peculiar, winning smile, "I am thankful for any." He wrote his name very badly on my programme, and mine on his, then with a most graceful bow made way for a new petitioner.

I had nearly the same little dialogue with each hero that addressed me, and as there were but four slow dances on the programme for the evening, I was soon in a trying dilemma. Amiable and courteous as these fashionable lions were acknowledged to be, they could not get themselves to sacrifice the pleasure, great or small, which they found in a waltz or polka, to sit the dance out quietly with a girl of scruples and principles.

I had to be satisfied, therefore, with the conviction that I was doomed to spend the greater part of the evening alone; and what was more consoling still, this being my first appearance at a ball, I was sure to be closely watched by many a fair rival. Already the music for the opening dance was sounding. I was engaged for this one, and had for my vis-a-vis my step-mother and an imposing gentleman in heavy regimentals. My partner was an ordinary man of the period, of medium height, with common-place moustache and neatly trimmed side-whiskers, who made several differently worded remarks of the same meaning upon the same subject.

I was disposed not to enjoy this evening for many reasons, and I was conscious of going through the figures of the dance automatically and tastelessly. I came back after each lady's chain to my tiresome partner, wishing earnestly that it would soon be over. My step-mother detected my listless manner, and came to me later, when the dance was ended and I had been left by the amiable Mr. Fawcett standing before a picture of Siddons which I was ostensibly admiring with enthusiasm. There was a becoming smile on the lace of my step-mother, as there always was in fashionable company, but there was no sweetness in the anger which was interpreted by the quick, impatient words that flashed from behind the glittering plumes of her splendid fan into my ear:

"Don't make an idiot of yourself," she said, hoarsely, coming up to me, and standing in a well-studied attitude before the picture I was looking at. "It is unpardonable vulgar and rude of you to take exception to any dances on the programme, as if Mrs. Hartmann would allow any impropriety where her own daughters are concerned." She went on fanning herself briskly, showing nothing of her indignation in her face.

Without raising my eyes I answered quietly: "Do not excite yourself for nothing, you may be sure I shall not disgrace you, but I am determined not to get into the arms of any of these men to-night."

She moved away while I was speaking and I saw no more of her until we were preparing to leave. During the dances that intervened between the quadrille and the lancers, that I had given to Mr. Haliburton, I had amused myself as best I could, talking to some prosy relatives of the family who stood around the walls, and turning over the leaves of an artistic scrap-book that lay upon the broad window-sill at one end of the room.

I was grateful when Mr. Haliburton came and took me away into the crowd. I was beginning to feel tired of the situation and to wish I were safely at home.

The second dance, however, was livelier than the first. My partner was a vivacious flirt who made every one feel merry for a while, and I began to enjoy it after we had gone through the first figure. We were slower than the dancers next to us, who had finished and were waiting for us, to change the music. I was advancing to my vis-a-vis, looking around the room at the same time, when my eyes suddenly fell. I saw someone in the distance watching my movements, someone who had evidently just come in. He was not a young man, and yet he was hardly old. I had not time to take further notice of his appearance, for the music ceased and we began the last frolicsome figure of our dance. As I passed into the conservatory later on Mr. Haliburton's arm I stole a glance towards the end of the room where this "somebody" had been standing, but he was gone. I need not have felt concerned and yet I did. More than that, I was disappointed, and it was with an unfeigned weariness and impatience that I threw myself into the low, basket rocking-chair under a canopy covered with ivy to which Mr. Haliburton conducted me.

I was glad to see him go from me, though it was but for a moment; I would have time to reason with myself before he came back with the ices.

When I found myself alone, I no longer checked the heavy sigh that had lain heavy in my breast all night. I leaned my head back against the vine-clad pillar behind me and almost sobbed. I was feeling miserable. A footfall somewhere made me spring into an erect, sitting posture again. I took an ivy leaf between my fingers and toyed nervously with it I waited for a confirmation of my worst fears, that my step-mother had followed me and heard me sigh, but there was no one. When all was quiet again I ventured to look carefully around. The secret was out, on a rustic bench at the other side of my graceful canopy "somebody" was sitting alone. His profile met my full view, his pensive half-sad profile. I looked at it for a moment and, springing up, I moved aside my rocking chair and rushed towards him.

"Mr. Dalton!" I cried out impulsively, and then stopped suddenly short--what if it were not he at all?

He turned and caught me in my attitude of suppressed excitement, the bench was between us. He held out both hands over its curved back saying:

"Amey, is it you?"

There was a strange look as of a misty uncertain pleasure in his eyes. I gave him my small hands, for they were small when he had gathered them into his, and we looked at one another in silence for a few moments.

"Come here and sit down beside me little one," he said in his old affectionate way. "How you have grown!" he exclaimed, moving one end of the rustic seat to let me pass. I had forgotten all about Mr. Haliburton or any one else but Mr. Dalton; the glad surprise of seeing him absorbed every other consideration.

"Yes, but not changed, am I?" I put in, eagerly, sitting down beside him and looking earnestly into his gravely glad face.

"Yes, you are very much changed Amey," he said in a serious yet tender voice, "but," he continued slowly, "I should recognize you all the better for the change." His words were meaningless to me, but then they had always been so when we were friends long ago. "You are changed too Mr. Dalton," I retorted reciprocatingly. "At first I did not know you at all, and it was only by rude staring that I managed to remember you. Where have you been all this time, that I have never seen you?" I asked.

"Rambling all over the world," he answered dreamily. "And so you missed me, did you?" he added, changing his tone to one of playful enquiry. "Well, Amey, so have I missed you, at least I have often thought of you in my travels and wondered how you were getting on. I need not tell you," he continued teasingly, "how often I have been haunted by the dreadful threat you made when I saw you last about--"

"Now, don't say any more," I interrupted, "I remember all that well enough. We are all a little silly sometime in our lives," I alleged in self defence.

"Poor Amey!" he said almost in a whisper, "you do not know how prone human nature is to folly--yet, when you are as old as I, you will have learned something of it."

"You speak as if you were very ancient," I exclaimed, making little of his serious talk.

"Well," he broke in slowly, "I can't be very young now, when I had Amey Hampden on my knee some fifteen years ago, but do not tell that of me, like a good child," he added in playful eagerness "for, being a bachelor yet, you see, it might harm me."

"Do you mean that it would excite formidable jealousies?" I asked rising, and laughing carelessly, and then, half sorry for having uttered these words I diverted his attention from them by announcing my wish to go inside.

He arose, and accompanied me, with as much active gallantry as if he had been twenty-five years younger. Leaning on his strong, stalwart arm, I passed into the crowded and confused ball-room feeling peculiarly revived, and strangely happier than when I had left it a short half-hour before. But I could not get rid of a suspicion that was forcing itself into my mind with regard to Mr. Dalton. There was certainly some restraint over him, and the look in his clear, soft

blue eyes was not so steady as it used to be. And yet, what could I expect from him more than he had given me? I did not know, but it seemed that after our long, long separation, he ought not to be so quiet and silent. It is true that our place of meeting was a rather unpropitious one, but this did not satisfy me. He was not quite the Mr. Dalton that I remembered, that, as a child I had loved, and still I felt proudly happy to lean on his powerful arm and exchange occasional glances and remarks with him.

We walked through the ball-room where amusement was now at its zenith, and when we had reached the upper end Mr. Dalton paused and looked at the gay scene before us. He had seemingly forgotten me, while his thoughts were busy with their own weaving. We had only been there a moment when my father advanced towards me accompanied by another gentleman.

"Amey," he began before he had quite reached me, "have you forgotten our friend Dr. Campbell."

I was sensibly confused as I withdrew my hand from Mr. Dalton's arm to give it to Dr. Campbell. I bowed and smiled as at our first introduction in the library at home, and I fear I was guilty even of blushing, too.

Mr. Dalton, seeing my attention diverted, bowed himself gracefully away. My father had vanished before him, and thus was I left completely at the mercy of a trying circumstance.

Dr. Campbell broke the awkward silence happily, saying:

"It cannot be for want of an introduction, Miss Hampden, that you and I are not friends."

"No indeed," I answered stupidly, not knowing very well what to say.

"Are you dancing this evening," he next asked, in a most composed tone which made me envy him.

"Very little," said I. "I am exclusive on that subject."

"Which means that you will not honour me," he interrupted blandly, looking questioningly into my face.

"Oh, no!" I exclaimed seeing how misinterpreted my words were. "I mean with regard to the dances, not the people. I do not like fast dances."

"Neither do I particularly," he answered, offering me his arm, "except when I sit them out. May I?" he asked in such a graceful deferential way that I know I smiled approvingly as I slipped my hand within his arm and went with him into the little ante-room opposite, where coals glowed in the open fire-place and a soft rose-coloured light fell over all the delicate splendor of the furnishings.

There were two heavy plush arm-chairs already drawn up to the fender, and Dr. Campbell moving one gently towards me, smilingly remarked that "we were evidently expected."

I took one and he sank into the other with a gesture of pronounced ease. The light from the fire was full upon his face and form, and

feeling secure in the shadow of a fancy screen that had been shoved beside my chair, I set myself earnestly to work to analyse this wonderful man.

He was passively handsome, with a large brow and very large, expressive eyes. They were blue, too, but not like Mr. Dalton's. They were dreamier and more attractive. His face was quite bronzed, and his fine mouth was admirably set off by well-curved brown moustaches. His chin was bare but for one little bit under the lower lip. He was caressing this seeming favorite with one white, slender hand, almost fine enough for a lady's, while I observed him with keen scrutiny. He was an English Canadian, I learned that before I ever saw him, born and bred under Canadian skies, but this implies little of his bias or disposition.

Canada has not yet shaken off the fetters of her great grandparents sufficiently to bring out in a clear, marked way her own individuality. Her native sons and daughters inherit too faithfully the English, Irish, Scotch or French tenor of the characters of their predecessors to be able to grant to our ambitious country the national peculiarities and idiosyncracies which she covets, in order to assert herself freely, as the mother of a people who bear her resemblance stamped upon their mental and moral features. When a country has succeeded in fixing a seal upon the brow of every son that is born to her, she has secured the right of being paralleled, at least in one respect, with the greatest nations of the world. In time, Canada will accomplish this, for Canadians should be wonderful people. It baffles her to-day, because it is a question of time, and in her incapacity to influence time, Canada is only equal to Caesar's Rome, or Victoria's Great Britain.

There was a look of keen intelligence in Dr Campbell's countenance that pleased me particularly, something so refreshing to see, after all the vapid expressions of uneducated men. I could easily understand now, how he gained that prestige which made conquests for him wherever he went. Truly, I did not believe him a very widely informed man, but he was a man of fixed principles and a man of ambition. Moreover he had a wonderful savoir-faire that carried him through all sorts of adventitious circumstances gracefully. It is a clear counterfeit of genuine acumen, and, with a world that knows no better, gets just as much favor and praise.

During the fifteen minutes that we passed together in Mrs. Hartmann's cosy morning-room, with our feet on her polished brass fender, we learned much of one another's hidden selves, that people who had known us both for years had failed to gather.

I went to supper on Dr. Campbell's arm and gave him a rose from my bouquet. He saw us to our carriage when we were leaving, and promised to call on the following Tuesday.

This is a lengthy and tedious summary of my first and last ball.

For I never went to another. What was the use? I was essentially out of place with my principles about dancing. My step-mother stormed and raged after the Hartmann's At Home, declaring that I had disgraced myself and her; that such guests as I, were a burden to a hostess and an infliction on the rest of the company. All this, along with my own private conclusions, went far towards helping me to make up my mind,

once for all, that I had gone to my last "dance." And to be candid I must admit that it was no effort whatever for me to abstain from these would-be pleasures. They were literally not worth the fuss and trouble and expense of getting to them. But I went to other gatherings which were infinitely more enjoyable. I had many another _tete-a-tete_ with Arthur Campbell before the winter was out. The last attraction before Parliament closed was a "Musical" at the Merivales.

CHAPTER VI.

Alice Merivale had "come out" with the greatest éclat into our social circles. With wealth and beauty, grace and a certain number of showy accomplishments, she had made conquests without the slightest effort on her part. She was a finished musician, and had a sweet, thrilling voice. She talked pleasant nonsense, danced beautifully, flirted very artfully, and altogether seemed the living embodiment of every attribute which is calculated to endear a human creature to its fellow-men. She even gave a peculiar tone to the circle she moved in, and it was quite a forcible guarantee that a gathering was select and most exclusive if Alice Merivale was present.

When I returned the second time from school to prepare myself for a public life Alice Merivale was the first to call upon me. She came in quite unceremoniously one morning, looking very beautiful in a sealskin mantle and hat, and declared in the prettiest manner possible that we must be great friends; we lived so near and had known each other for such a long time that there should not be anything like ceremony between us.

"I shall almost need you now that Aunt Ada is married and Edith has gone to Germany" she argued in pretty plaintiveness.

I liked this, though indeed, at the time it surprised me more than a little. I had expected to find her developed into a feather-brained, affected young lady who was shortsighted in a great many ways. I had never been able to dissociate the early impression she made on me from her later redeeming phases. Poor Florrie Grant vanishing out of the doorway under Miss Merivale's sublime contempt came back to my memory time and again, and I made up my mind that Alice Merivale and I could never claim to be kindred souls.

But when I saw her after the lapse of some years and observed the perfection of her physical loveliness I could no longer harden my heart against her. It has always been a weakness of mine to slavishly admire feminine beauty. There is a witchery about graceful curves, and heavy eyelids, drooping lashes and dimpled chins that stronger souls than mine cannot resist; and when the haughty little Alice of my girlhood stood before me in all the glory of her fresh and beautiful womanhood I forgave her all the past.

I hardly knew what she talked about, so rapturously did I gaze, now upon her delicate pink ear, now upon the melting curves that brought her white chin into provoking notice, then her roguish, winning,

violet eyes with their long dark lashes and languid brows. There was everything to love in her so far as the eye could see, from the waving profusion of golden hair to the toe of her dainty slipper.

I had met her at all the entertainments of the season. I had watched her pretty manoeuvres and followed her flirtations with a quiet amusement. Her admirers were numberless and pursued her with the most emphatic devotedness. She was an item in the individual lives of young people of both sexes, exciting in some hearts the bitterest envy and jealousy, and kindling the name of an all-consuming love in many others. She had earned the palm of triumph and victory all through the gay season, and now that the end was near she decided to gather all those who had witnessed her conquests abroad, within her own home and there make her retiring courtesy under peculiarly advantageous circumstances. She was to leave in a fortnight after for an extended tour through Europe.

It was the fifteenth of March and the Merivales' "Musical" was to commence at eight o'clock. The wind blew fiercely through the stiff, naked boughs of the giant maples, and drifted the light powdery snow madly on before it. I had been in-doors all day listening to the weird wailing of the ceaseless wind as it whistled down the chimneys and swept past the house corners. I had written and read and stitched until my eyes were wearied and my fingers numb, and it was only four o'clock, that turning-point on a March day from the sunshine to the gloaming when we women know not what to do with ourselves; when it is too cold to go out or expect visitors, too late in the day to begin any occupation, too dark to read with any comfort, and too early to light the lamps. I went to the window and looked impatiently into the street but there was no comfort to be had there; a milkman's wagon stood over the way, his horse pawing the frozen ground while he filled his measure with the cold white liquid. A band of little children ran screaming by with a large dog drawing a sleigh; a beggar woman clad in flimsy rags was mounting the steps of a neighboring house, and that was all. I shrugged my shoulders and turned away with a smothered yawn. The piano stood open before me, I threw myself carelessly on the stool and thrummed languidly on the key-board for a moment or so, but I was not in the humor to play, and with another yawn I arose, crossed the hall and passed into my father's library.

He was usually there at this hour, but early that afternoon he had gone into the country to see a patient, and as he would not be back until after dinner, I appropriated his sanctum in his stead. A fire burned in the grate, not a roaring blazing fire, but a pile of steadily glowing coals, intensely red and hot, that kept the room comfortable, but threw no shadow on the tinted walls.

I wheeled the light lounge that stood opposite the door towards the fire, and sank gratefully into it to have a little "think" about the past, all to myself. I began to distinguish the spires of Notre Dame Abbey rising clearly out of the glowing embers. Faces that I loved peeped through its latticed windows, smilingly, and voices that were like the breath of summer in my ear called to me from its hallowed portals. I was back among the scenes of my early happiness, the winter day was flooded with summer warmth and sunshine; the birds twittered in the fresh green foliage, and the stream murmured placidly on at the foot of the convent garden. My languor and weariness were gone; I was cheerful and glad again, as I had been in my careless girlhood. How long it lasted according to time reckoned by minutes and hours, I knew

not. In my dream many days came and went with new and repeated delights. All I know is, that when I awoke the room was shrouded in darkness and the fire had grown cheerless and dull I started up, for the change was a shock to me. I did not know I had fallen asleep, and it must have been a full hour or more since I came into the library. More than that, I felt a sharp sensation for which I could not thoroughly account. For a moment I suspected that some one must be in the room, then again, the unbroken stillness re-assured me that this was mere fancy. I felt an abiding presence which seemed to hover right around me. I raised myself on one elbow and asked in an audible whisper:

"Is anyone here?"

A coal gave way in the fire-place and the embers loosened and fell. I started involuntarily, but there was no answer to my question. I rubbed my eyes briskly and stood up. As I did so, something fell upon the floor with a clinking noise. I put my hand up instinctively to my ears. One ruby ear-ring was missing. I groped my way to the mantel-piece and struck a light. Stepping carefully back towards the lounge, with my eyes buried in the carpet, I spied a glittering object at a little distance from where I had been standing. I stooped and picked it up. To my great surprise it was not my ruby ear-ring. It was a small oval locket suspended from a few links of a heavy gold chain, one of the uppermost links was crooked and broken.

I turned it over and over between my fingers, holding the candle so that the light fell full upon it. It was not my father's; of that I was fully certain. It had a strange, unfamiliar look about it such as other people's small wares always have for us, and yet, the more I examined it, the more I began to think I had seen it somewhere before. I was mystified. As I turned my head I descried my missing ear-ring lying in the threads of a crocheted tidy that had lain under my head. Setting down the candle, I extricated it and restored it to my ear. I then blew out the light and went quietly up to my own room.

I had just closed the door and secured myself against possible intrusion when the sound of the dinner-bell broke upon my ear. I immediately rose, and storing my newly found treasure hurriedly away, I went down to the dining-room.

My step-mother was already there, chatting with Mrs. Hunter, who had come in to spend a quiet hour of the afternoon, and accepted an informal invitation to dinner.

My father had not yet returned, and as Freddie was still at college, we were quite a cosy little dinner party in ourselves.

I apologized for my delay, accusing myself of having fallen asleep, and with a smiling enquiry about the general health of the Hunter family I took my seat and began to unfold my table-napkin.

"Then you did not see what came for you this afternoon, if you've been dozing," my step-mother said pouring a ladle of soup into Mrs. Hunter's plate.

I looked eagerly towards her and exclaimed with a smile of surprise:

"No! Did anything come?"

My step-mother glanced significantly at Mrs. Hunter, but that lady was either very hungry or saw no fun in the allusion, for she went on quietly tasting her soup without looking up.

This piqued my step-mother a little, I fancy, for she said with unusual emphasis and insinuation.

"Oh, you won't be at all surprised, Amelia, it is only what you might expect now, some more of Dr. Campbell's kind attentions, that's all."

"What is it?" I put in with an uncontrollable relish and curiosity.

"_This_ time," said my step-mother, "it is a box of the loveliest flowers, for to-night of course."

"Dr. Campbell is very thoughtful," Mrs. Hunter here ventured to assert, "he often sends Laura books and flowers and such pretty songs; he is a great favorite," she added, half satisfied no doubt that she had knocked all the sentiment out of this offering to me. But my step-mother was not to be baffled even if she had to show me to the highest advantage.

"Oh!" she answered, with an effort at indifference, "he knows how to be a favorite. In his profession, especially, it is far better to court popularity in this way. I would say he studied his own interest in Amey's case too," she continued, spitefully, "only that he knows, since Freddie went away, we never have any strange doctors for the household. What do you say, Amey?" she asked in a teasing tone, changing the nature of the subject.

"I am sure I cannot presume to interpret Dr. Campbell's motives," I answered quietly, "but there is no reason why his gift should not be one of friendship," I added, with conscious dignity.

Mrs. Hunter's "Of course not" put an end to this sensitive topic. It was dangerous ground and could lead to mischief. So we all thought, I fancy, for by tacit consent it was dropped for the rest of the meal.

After dinner we had a tame little chat in the drawing-room over our cups of tea, and then Mrs. Hunter left, for she too had to dress for the "Musical," and there was now not much time to spare.

Arthur Campbell's flowers were truly lovely. When I went up to my room I saw them laid out before me, and, I must confess, I felt a little flattered at this mark of preference from one who was so highly esteemed by all who knew him. I raised them tenderly and examined them one by one. They were rich and delicate and sweet smelling.

There was a little card among them with the words "Will Miss Hampden favor the giver by wearing these flowers this evening?" neatly written upon it; below them the clear signature "V. Arthur Campbell," was inscribed in the same loose but neat characters.

I could not help smiling while I dressed. Maybe I was a little conceited, but no one saw me.

The circumstances of our introduction and acquaintanceship, altogether, were so very peculiar that I could not dwell upon them

with a sober face. Besides, Arthur Campbell was a lion in society, a success in his profession and the desired of many calculating mothers. What would these people say if I quietly stepped inside them in Arthur Campbell's favor?

I took up his flowers and began to choose those I should wear. After all, I thought, it was not always wealth and beauty that accomplished the greatest things. I might surprise our little world yet, though my face had no extraordinary beauty, nor my form any marvellous grace--with which hypothesis I laid a rich spray upon my breast and, finding it becoming, fastened it there.

Ah me! how vain and foolish our weak humanity can be at times! Some little unexpected circumstance gives us a key-note, and we sustain it through a heart-stirring melody that will never charm our ear save in this misty reverie. We girls of one-and-twenty summers are so easily borne along by every passing breath of unstable experience; so easily stimulated by rivalry that begins in little things but may yet creep into the great crises of our lives; so easily stung to impulsive action by the incisive smile and word of jealousy or pride; so easily led away by aspects that show us only their bright and cheerful side; so easily wearied of the happy, careless monotony of our young lives! And yet, there is an exquisite pleasure for us in the weaving of those delicate golden webs that are destined to be torn so rudely asunder by a prosy and matter-of-fact reality.

The thoughts suggested by Arthur Campbell's gracious offering took a firm and exclusive hold of my mind, from the moment I saw it, until I sat beside him in the Merivales' vast drawing-room.

He looked handsomer than ever that night, it seemed to me, as he came smiling towards me and asked leave to take the vacant chair beside me. Every one was busy talking and laughing, for the music had not yet begun and we felt quite secure in our remote corner to say and do as we pleased. It is so often quite easy to be alone in a crowd.

"I need not ask you how you are, Miss Hampden," Arthur Campbell began, sinking down carelessly into his seat, "your looks are perfect."

"Such unworthy adulation Dr. Campbell!" I exclaimed in mock indignation, "besides" I said, with some malice "I would like to know how many times you have paid this compliment before it reached me."

"This is very unfair, Miss Hampden" he retorted with a pleasant smile. "Upon my honor, I did not--well yes, to be candid, I said something like it to Miss Merivale, but she is the only one beside yourself."

"I knew it!" I interrupted triumphantly "and I daresay she is the only lady you have spoken to at all, since you came in, except myself."

He looked at me with his solemn blue eyes for a moment and then said in a half jesting, half earnest, tone:

"I wish I could make you jealous."

He did not turn away his eyes after this, but let them jest in calm scrutiny upon my half averted countenance. There was a power in his words that thrilled me for a second or so. I may have betrayed some agitation in my answer. I closed my fan and opened it again nervously

before I replied:

"Have you heard that I am easily provoked to jealousy?"

"Not at all," he said in quite a serious voice, "and if I heard it a thousand times I could not believe it. You are too sure of yourself to give way to such a sentiment."

"But we cannot rely very much upon ourselves under some circumstances."

"Very true, and very fortunately, for we resolve to support attitudes under some circumstances, that are neither true to ourselves, nor fair to our fellow-creatures. Don't you think so?" he asked, taking my fan out of my lap and looking intently at it.

"I don't think I understand you very well," I answered timidly.

Just then the sounds of voices were hushed, and the loud strains of Rossini's *Semiramide* filled the room. That ended our conversation for awhile. The music proceeded with little or no intermission, for upwards of an hour. All the vocal and instrumental talent of the city was present, and the audience was treated to a rare and most happily rendered repertoire. Miss Hartmann had just finished an *Arietta* of Beethoven's, which was rapturously received, when Alice Merivale stole up behind me, radiant in pale green mist--as it seemed to me--to ask how I enjoyed the selections.

I could scarcely think of answering her until my eyes had taken in the full beauty of her face and form.

"I want you all to be in a very good humour, before I begin" she said coquettishly, "for I will try your patience very hard, yours especially, Dr. Campbell," she added, looking at him now for the first time, "you are such a merciless critic--a perfect epicure in music."

He smiled languidly at her, and swept a glance over her from head to foot.

"Is it any wonder" he asked lazily; "when you spoil us by feasting us with the perfection of every sort of loveliness, what else can you expect?"

She touched him smartly on the nose with a roll of music she held in her hand--for they were old friends--and flitted away, saying:

"It is a good thing that I have never had any faith in men of your profession."

He looked after her in undisguised, ardent admiration. I saw it, and if I remember well, a vague wish was creeping into my heart at the time, that I had been as lithe and fair a creature as Alice Merivale. Before I had dwelt much upon it however, silence was again restored and our charming hostess had appeared before us.

Low and sweet, the first thrilling notes came from her swan-like throat; then a strain of violin accompaniment and loud chords from the piano, and she broke forth into a passionate refrain that held her listeners spell-bound.

I had ceased to look at her, and was busy watching the expression on Arthur Campbell's face. It was one of profound admiration. His eyes were riveted upon her with a devouring look, he was lost to every surrounding, dead to every influence for the time being but the magic power of this beautiful voice that trembled in the scented air and died away into a musical whisper.

She bowed and retired as the pent up emotions of her audience had given way; exclamations of praise and enthusiasm greeted her on every side.

She deserved all this and more, if it were possible to give it to her. I had been enraptured myself over her singing, but still I could not see the necessity or appropriateness of Arthur Campbell's prolonged ecstasy. I began to think it was affected, and turned away from him to talk to a little lady with gold-rimmed spectacles who sat quietly on the other side of me.

When I addressed her she raised her glasses and wiped her eyes with a dainty lace handkerchief.

"Very beautiful, was it not?" I said, for want of something more appropriate.

"Ah! mon Dieu! oui!" she exclaimed warmly, and then proceeded to tell me in very broken English that "Mees Alice" was the pupil of her deceased sister, who had come from France some years before and had undertaken the vocal instruction of _haut ton_ young ladies, in order to save their aged mother from a destitution which threatened her, owing to some heavy reverses which had befallen them in their native land.

I was outwardly very sympathetic as she recited these melancholy details. She did not suspect, poor thing, what an effort I was obliged to make to keep track of her subject at all, and I was conscious of having won her kind favor under false pretences. Before she could pursue her pet topic to any fuller advantage, however, the music began again and our newly made friendship was effectually nipped in the bud. During the next selection, which was a lengthy piano solo by the fashionable Miss Nibbs, I busied myself observing all that transpired about me. Miss Nibbs herself was worthy of some notice; perched upon the piano-stool, her flat feet barely reaching the pedals, and her ill-formed bulky figure swaying now on one side, now on another. Whatever Miss Nibbs had been in her youth, and to speak truly one might doubt at this period of her existence if she had ever known a younger day, she certainly was very much worn and used looking in her decline. Not even the faded remnants of an earlier grace or gentility helped to redeem the weak points of nature about her. She was a stranger to me, and yet I could have declared with the most perfect sanction of my moral certitude that she was the direct descendant of a plebeian stock. Not but that she had counterfeited patrician attributes according to her own interpretation of them as earnestly as she knew how; but such, empty pretensions as these are too transparent to the all-discerning eye of true gentility. They can not easily assume that which they have no right to claim. A haughty, overbearing demeanor, or a powerful drawl, is no guarantee of good breeding, and these were poor Miss Nibbs' only titles to it. I will admit that, in my fretted mood, I saw her at her worst. Not a wrinkle of her

ill-fitting bodice escaped me, not a movement of her ungainly form passed unnoticed, I was dissecting her to a pitiful disadvantage, following up each new discovery with a moral of my own when a half-subdued voice whispered in my ear:

"Spare her, Miss Hampden."

I looked up significantly and met Dr. Campbell's mock-reproachful glance, resting full upon me.

"Spare whom?" I asked, very innocently.

"Oh! you wicked critic of human frailties," he answered slowly, "whom do you think?"

I betrayed myself with an ill-suppressed smile which broadened into a genuine laugh as poor Miss Nibbs retired most awkwardly from her post, very well satisfied with herself, no doubt.

During the interval that followed, Dr. Campbell amused himself with the indulgence of a new freak. He leaned his elbow on the back of the chair in front of us, and turning his face towards me supported his head in the palm of his hand. There was a new expression on his countenance which foreboded the tantalising remark that followed:

"Do you know, Miss Hampden," he began, looking at me through his half closed eye-lids, "you are beginning to puzzle me strangely. Did any one ever tell you you are an eccentric girl?"

"Oh dear! yes! my step-mother persuaded me to that comfortable conviction long ago," I answered laughingly.

He followed up this agreeable retort with a most expressive "Ahem!" and then paused a moment before adding in a very emphatic tone:

"Well, you are a queer girl, you know."

"Because I fall short of your standard, I suppose?" I interrupted, passing my hand languidly over my brow and eyes.

"Well that is not a bad guess, Miss Hampden, but that is not the only reason."

The shaft pierced me. Arthur Campbell was not always in a mood to flatter. I wanted to prove to him that two could play at his little game and I hardly knew how to match him.

"I suppose I ought to feel quite grieved at this intelligence," I answered consciously, "but, dear me," with an artificial sigh, "I cannot bring myself to study people's opinions; that is probably one feature of my eccentricity?" I added in an interrogative tone, looking aimlessly at him.

He was silent for a moment during which he looked around the room. Then he stood up saying:

"Let us go outside, I see the music is over."

I rose and took his proffered arm and we turned towards the door. As

we passed out my eyes fell upon Mr. Dalton's solitary figure standing by the window opposite. A stern, set expression was upon his countenance, and his glance was riveted upon us. I inclined my head with a smile, but he either saw not or purposely took no notice of it, for he went on staring abstractedly until we vanished into the adjoining room.

For a second time in our lives Arthur Campbell and I were alone amidst suggestive surroundings such as met us as we passed under the heavy curtain that screened the cosiest of _boudoirs_ from the general view.

There is such a special appropriateness about certain circumstances that one cannot help speculating to some extent upon their probable and possible issues. It is a known fact that a vast percentage of society marriages are the outgrowth of these little stolen _tete-a-tetes_ that are snatched from the gay confusion of some noisy gathering. No one will be so unreasonable as to denounce the young heart that flutters with some timid anticipation, as it forsakes the mad merry-making of the ball room for the quiet insinuating stillness of some reserved nook by a flickering fireside, where the flower-laden atmosphere whispers interesting suggestions of its own. Far be it from me to overshadow such gleams of sunlight, by censure or cruel mockery, and when I affirm most earnestly that such flutterings of vague expectation never animated my poor heart, so cold, so empty, so unbelieving, it is not that I hold it outside and above such an influence. I only lay bare the barrenness of its nature and the trustless reserve that always made the world around me seem wrapped in a gloomy pall, that inspired me with suspicion, if not altogether fear of it.

I will not take the responsibility of affirming that my views were at all odd or singular, and incompatible with the real condition of feminine hearts at that time. Neither would I like to assure the world that our blooming society girls of to-day are any more credulous or unwisely susceptible than many were at the date I speak of. It has become a popular belief, I think, that beauty coupled with a fascinating manner in a woman, is as heartless and unfeeling as a stone, and yet is just indifferent and neutral enough to abstain from inflicting any more direct pain than that to which its indiscreet victims expose themselves knowingly. There is a certain pity excited by human moths that flutter about our drawing-rooms with their smooth velvety wings charred and disfigured, but even in the sympathy expressed there is a ring of "I told you so," and "beware the next time" that makes the sufferer's burden only heavier to endure.

I can not take upon me to say that Arthur Campbell's beautiful pinions had touched the dangerous flame with any alarming results. I believed him to be very human in spite of his multiplied efforts to establish himself above or below that limit. I saw, when our acquaintanceship was only an hour old, that he was an artful man and, to no small extent, a conceited man. I did not suspect him of regulating his life according to the dictates of a scrupulous conscience. In fact I daresay I was uncharitable enough to look upon him as wanting that blessed monitor, altogether. He professed no definite religious belief, and generally held all creeds to be equally good. Sometimes when he wanted to excite the particular interest of some orthodox young lady he leaned towards the agnostics, and without upholding their tenets, exactly, wanted to know why their right to establish themselves should be so universally questioned and condemned. He liked

to see pretty faces looking shocked, and his ears revelled in the sound of a plaintively persuading voice that argued on the side of old truth; he would even allow himself to be converted for the moment by a reproachful look from indignant blue eyes. It gave a flavour to a languid flirtation and "after all," he was wont to say, "what religion can be better than that whose ministers are fair and beautiful women."

He was an acknowledged flirt; a regular knave of Hearts; and yet totally unlike those professional lady-killers who carry their smooth chins so very high above their would-be rivals in fashionable drawing-rooms. There was no insinuation of his purpose or design about Arthur Campbell as he stepped quietly in among the many _coteries_ of which he was a spoiled darling. His profession excused him for his late arrivals everywhere, and, in the bargain, granted him ample opportunity for intruding himself upon the notice of everyone present without being condemned for presumption or conceit. It was whispered of him that his private life was based upon free and easy principles, and that he was not altogether so circumspect a walker in the ways of righteousness as he was in the ways of society. Such an accusation, however, remained perforce under an open verdict. Too many of those who might have decided against him had delicate glass-houses of their own to care for, and it would likely prove a treacherous missile that would aim at the well-propped reputation of Doctor Campbell.

I had my own private opinion about him, which never prevented me from openly admiring his tactics, from enjoying his company, and, in a sense, from coveting his attentions. Strangely enough, I had every opportunity for indulging all three. We were thrown frequently together, and I could not help seeing that he took more than a passing notice of me. To tell the truth, until a certain time I never questioned the possible motive that might have inspired him to seek my company. I met him always with a cordial, and may be a very cordial, smile. He was an interesting man, who talked well, and as such appealed largely to my ardent appreciation. We became friends in a very little while, and probably contributed largely towards each other's mutual enjoyment. But very soon the all-seeing eye of a jealous scrutiny was upon us, and we were singled out wherever we went. Little rumors were being hatched, destined before long to creep out from under the great fostering wing of that old hen, Gossip, who is ever chuckling over some new and active brood. People caught the message and repeated it with a relish. People said that young Campbell was no fool in aspiring to succeed to Dr. Hampden's practice. People said: Trust the fellow to spy out a rich man's only daughter. People said: The Hampdens have made a dead set on Campbell, always asking him to luncheon, etc. People said: He is fooling her. In fact people gave expression to every uncomplimentary sentiment which the circumstances could possibly suggest, and it was only then that I turned my attention to the matter at all. I heard the floating verdicts that were being pronounced upon us, and thenceforth I also infused a certain purpose into our hitherto aimless relationship. I quietly resolved to meet that respectable body so widely known as the "people" in open combat. I needed no formidable weapon, an old halter would answer my purpose fully, for of course my readers know that this loud-voiced authority, this much feared power, this braying denouncer of men's private, social, or moral attitudes is only our friend the ass in a pretty well-fitting lion-skin, not nearly so dangerous as timid souls imagine, a nuisance certainly, but that is all.

When Arthur Campbell and I vacated the crowded drawing-room,

therefore, and passed into the quiet retreat opposite, many a significant glance followed us besides poor Mr. Dalton's. I knew it and so did he, although no mention was made of it by either of us. We had drifted imperceptibly into that phase of a growing friendship which is silent upon certain interesting topics. We often talked in a vague and general way about the tender influences, but never now by any chance allowed our random remarks to convey any personal reflections. We were puzzling over one another, which is a fatal resource for unfortified hearts, but we prided ourselves upon our well-guarded and invulnerable affections, and, in a way, playfully defied the inevitable to conquer us.

Arthur Campbell held the heavy drapery aside until I had glided into the room. He then drew it briskly across the doorway and followed me to an ebony cabinet before which I had stood to look at a comical crockery pug that lay on one of its tiny shelves. He glanced over my shoulder at my interesting distraction, and was silent for a moment. I could feel his breath upon my hair and ear, then he said slowly:

"You seem to be fond of animals, which is your favorite?"

An answer rushed to my lips and I was conscious of a mischievous expression creeping over my face. Had I reflected for a moment I might never have uttered it, but before I had time to weigh my words, they had been pointedly pronounced.

"Man--of course," I said; "Which is yours?"

He did not answer as quickly as I had, and yet I did not dare look at him or speak again. After a moment's pause, however, I ventured to raise my eyes towards the cabinet, and as I did so, how my heart thumped, how my cheeks reddened. He had stretched one hand out to reach some object that stood on one of the ebony brackets above me, and the reflection in the little square mirror before us was, to say the least, rather suggestive. The bracket being higher than the mirror was not visible in it. The effect produced therefore was that of a broadcloth sleeve, carefully brought around two slender shoulders, and a handsome manly countenance leaning a little towards a blushing maiden's face. Worse than all, he too happened to look into the glass at the same moment, and our eyes in shrinking from one another's glance met under an awkward circumstance. He looked steadily at Amey Hampden in mirrorland, and then said in a very conventional tone, turning his eyes towards the bracket:

"Pardon me, I want to show you something."

It was a beautiful white dove which, though lifeless, had retained much of its grace and softness. In its beak was a dainty little card upon which was inscribed in large characters: "Love one another."

"Do you like it?" he asked after we had examined it silently for a moment.

"The idea is certainly original," I answered evasively.

"Yes, but do you like it?" he repeated

"Which?" I asked, "the bird, or the idea altogether?"

"The idea altogether."

"Oh! ye-e-s," I drawled as indifferently as I possibly could. "It is a very chaste conception on the whole--but--"

"But what?"

"Oh! there is not much in it after all."

"Miss Hampden! you astonish me! Not much in loving one another, especially with such an exalted, enduring love as that which the dove symbolises."

"You mistake me, Dr Campbell," I interrupted suddenly, looking up at him, but I did not finish, for some one just vanished out of the doorway as I turned my head. The curtain was still swaying when I stopped my remark abruptly, and Arthur Campbell following my glance, strode towards the entrance and looked indignantly out. The passage was clear, and he returned, laughing, saying the eavesdropper was no one more formidable than the draught. I was not so easily convinced, however, and asked to go back in to the drawing-room where the merriment was still unabating. He did not seem quite pleased, but nevertheless offered me his arm unhesitatingly, and we passed in among the noisy crowd just in time for the summons to supper.

CHAPTER VII.

When I awoke the morning after the Merivales' Musical, the forenoon was already pretty well advanced and a light, warm fire was burning in my room. Outside, the winter wind was shrieking plaintively, and over every pane of the window were dense layers of frosty ferns and grasses. It wanted a few minutes for the half hour after ten by the prattling little time-piece on the mantel. I arose and dressed languidly, feeling dull and oppressed and rang for a cup of strong coffee. I felt no appetite for breakfast, and drawing my warm, heavy wrapper around me I wheeled a low easy chair toward the fire and sank wearily into it.

It may be a wise policy for the votaries of gaslight pleasures to maintain that there is no baneful result arising from a constant pursuit of such distractions, but, however wise this attitude may be, I hardly think it can rely upon the sanction of our conscience. It is certainly not sound truth. For the abnormal life which society prescribes for her followers is fruitful of most injurious consequences. Evil effects do not always thrust themselves upon our notice in any directly pronounced way. Very often those which are most pernicious have a stealthy and unobtrusive progress, and it is only when their destructive mission is well accomplished that we become aware of their existence. There are physical, moral, and mental wrecks, the playthings of every varying circumstance that agitates the sea of life, who are living examples of the truth I uphold: men and women who have made an oblation of their greatest energies and capacities to lay upon the altars of a profitless materialism. This is

of course the extreme limit of worldliness, but in many cases it had a tame and semi-respectable beginning, originating from circumstances as seemingly safe as those which make up our own individual lives. Who can tell whether danger will allow us to tempt and tease her with impunity. The fortifications around our personal lots are not so stable as we imagine, and they require our constant and vigilant supervision. While we are feasting and rioting the scouts of the enemy are conspiring strongly against us.

For myself I say, that every indulgence of this kind invariably brings me an uncomfortable re-action, and I have never been able to satisfy myself with the explanation which is popularly received regarding it. It is not merely the result of physical disorder, of that I am sure. There is not a morbid tendency, ever so latent within me, that is not brought forcibly to the surface during this re-action, and I never realize so fully that the pleasures of the senses are empty and fleeting as when I have given myself up to an unbridled indulgence of any of them. I have rested my eyes upon every conceivable form and phase of animate and inanimate beauty in my life-time, and to-day my poor eyes are tired and dissatisfied. My ear, that has been inclined to every sort of sweet and sad melody, is still waiting and hoping for a soul-stirring refrain that will never reach it; and my heart, that has quickened at glad surprises and fluttered during hours of the world's happiness, is still asking, still searching for a joy that will minister in full to its demands. No wonder then that so many of us pause in the midst of our gay confusion, and ask ourselves wearily: "What is the use?"

What is the use of all these vain efforts of ours to feed our inner appetites with a diet that can never nourish or sustain? What is the use of all these monotonous beginnings that never have any tangible end? What is the use of playing so burdensome a part upon the social stage? What is the use of deceiving ourselves and our fellow-men, when there is such a glorious cause of truth to fight for? Ah! it is the way of the world, and that is a power which we fear to defy. The way of the world! These little words have justified sin and crime over and over again. They have masked the vilest cunning with a surface of unquestionable propriety; they have quietly sanctioned one fashionable folly after another, until vice and virtue are brought to one level, ay, and if needs be, the former triumphs, and the latter is shoved aside to make headway for its counterfeit. It is the way of the world that poverty be sneered at and denounced, that humility be ridiculed, that modesty be mocked, not openly not daringly, but by covert and cutting insinuation, the ever are weapon of the moral coward. It is the way of the world that sorrow be held pent up in hearts that are dying for care and sympathy, the way of the world that selfish motives be the best, that might is right, and indeed who can say our dazzling, splendid, cruel world has not its way? And we, its victims, its votaries, what recompense have we?

Such reflections as these trooped in solemn order before my mental vision as I sat staring into the coals, that frosty morning after the Merivales' entertainment. Every circumstance of the preceding night rehearsed itself in my memory. I repeated Arthur Campbell's every word. I had not forgotten one. I recalled Mr. Dalton's steady look, even Miss Nibbs' funny little personality rode upon the embers, and brought a faint smile to my pensive countenance. I teased myself with interrogative conjectures of every kind, now leaning towards one, and now towards another. Somehow the vagaries of our hope or of our fancy,

like ourselves, look their best by gas-light, and show a very disappointing complexion in the open daylight. While I sat thus weaving and tangling the webs of my aimless thought, the door opened and my step-mother glided in with a dainty little note between her fingers.

"Lazy girl," she muttered in a half yawn, throwing the note into my lap. "Rouse yourself, and read this. An answer is wanted."

It was from Alice Merivale, to my surprise, and appeared to have been scratched off in a hurry:

"If you have nothing on hand for the afternoon, dear Amey, I wish you would come over at about one o'clock and take luncheon with me. It is so stupid. A. M."

I folded it up and smiled, as I went in search of my writing materials.

In half an hour after I was waiting to be admitted into their house. I was shown into Alice's apartment according to her direction. She was lying on a lounge by the fire, with her delicate hands clasped over her shapely head. Her long, yellow hair fell in soft braids on each slender shoulder. She wore a negligee of white, with delicate trimmings of swan's down and looked, on the whole, the living impersonation of luxury and beauty. When I was shown in she greeted me with a languid smile, but did not alter her comfortable position.

"I am so glad you've come, Amey," she said looking up at me where I stood beside her. "Just throw your becoming wearables anywhere there and come and sit down for a chat."

I did as she told me, and a moment later we were both settled luxuriously before the glowing embers ready for mutual entertainment.

"Did you think I was crazy, Amey, when you received my note this morning?" Alice asked, drawing the vagrant folds of her soft wrapper about her.

"Well, no, Alice," I answered slowly, "but I found it a little queer, that was all."

"Queer world, isn't it Amey?"

I smiled, and still looking into the fire said, as if in soliloquy.

"How much alike we girls are. I came to that very conclusion an hour ago before my own embers."

"What reason have you to think that?" she said, with a wondering look in her beautiful blue eyes.

"Every reason in the world."

"And I have so often envied you, Amey Hampden, and thought you a fortunate and happy girl beside a wretch like me."

"Alice!" I broke in, in consternation "how can you talk like this? You, the spoilt darling of Fortune herself, you, the cynosure of so

many eyes, the possessor of untold worldly comfort and happiness."

"Go on, go on, I like that," she interrupted ironically.

"Well, you know you are," I added emphatically.

"A wretch! yes, without a doubt" she answered firmly. "I am rich in that which can buy everything but peace of mind and contentment of heart. I am fortunate enough to escape that experience which gives a flavor and a charm to existence. I am the cynosure of eyes that are content with surface glitter only, and the possessor of comforts and happiness that have made my life the empty, blighted thing it is."

She paused while the sound of her altered voice vibrated in the room, then laughed a merry, artful little laugh and rising languidly to her feet, added:

"Oh, dear! oh dear! what funny people we are!"

Before any more was said upon this tender subject we went down to lunch, laughing and chatting as gaily as though we were the freest-hearted creatures in existence.

We spent an hour in discussing the good things below, and then went back arm-in-arm to the cosy apartments we had vacated above. The fire had been renewed and our seats still in the same suggestive places attracted us towards them again. Alice threw herself upon her lounge and hummed a snatch of her last night's selection, which she suddenly interrupted with a fully-indulged yawn out of which again emerged a taunting

"Come now Amelia, _a quoi penses-tu_?"

"I was thinking of you," I answered, "you are such a queer girl."

"You will be still further convinced of that opinion when you know a little more about me," she said in a jocosely earnest tone. "You know I intend to go to Europe in a fortnight, ostensibly to see the time-honored sights, to gloat over venerable art, and improve my mind generally with such a broad view of experience, but Oh! what a blind that is!" she exclaimed in mock indignation. "Of course everybody knows that I am being sent out to seek my fortune, matrimonially speaking. I am too rich, and too beautiful, and too accomplished to be thrown away upon a self-made Canadian. I must go in search of patrician smiles across the sea, and win them for a plausible cause."

She curled her lips into an expression of supreme disgust, as she finished, and began to toy with the end of one golden braid.

"You don't mean half of what you say, Alice," I interposed quietly. "Since you are not satisfied with all the good things the gods have provided so far, I know only one other that can infuse a soul into your vapid and savor less comforts. It is possible for your present gloom to be dispelled by the warmth and brightness of a sunshine that cheers the loneliest lives, and I think you can never be happy without it."

"What is it?" she asked curtly.

"Love," I answered, "honest, stable, earnest love."

"Faugh!" she exclaimed, flinging her delicate braid away from her caressing fingers, "is that all?"

"That is all, a mere trifle if you will, but it is the axis around which men's temporal happiness revolves."

"Men's perhaps, but not women's," she added proudly. "I tell you what, Amey, the world waits for no one, each age has its manners, and customs, its social peculiarities and special features since the beginning of time men have had to be led by the age in which they lived, and ours is no exception. Once upon a time marriage was a contract conducted on the great principle of buying and selling. Civilization with deft and tender fingers has smoothened away the rough and repulsive aspect of such a custom, and our ministers now ask, with a bland affectation of pastoral solicitude, 'Who _giveth_ this woman away?' Giveth her! forsooth; and in nine cases out of ten how dearly is she bought! Why, we women are selling our bodies and our souls too, for that matter, every day that comes and goes. But we cannot help it," she added after a short pause, "and fortunately circumstances are trained to suit our dilemma. I shall go across the Atlantic for inspection, and if all goes well I shall return bespoken for life. I shall certainly not marry for love, and as compensation must be found somewhere, I will marry for position. I have the wealth myself."

Her words chilled me. Their tone was cold and hard. I looked at her and said half sadly,

"Alice, why do you talk like this? You have drifted into this peevish sort of pessimism without forethought. How can you deliberately sit in a shadow when the sun is shining all around you. With beauty and riches and intelligence you have the keys to a world of happiness. I cannot think why you should choose to hold this dreary outlook before your eyes. It seems a strange contrast to the popular belief that prevails about your happy condition."

She curled her thin, pretty lips into a smile of incisive sarcasm and drew a weary breath before she answered me. Then she said in a half melancholy tone:

"Yes, I know that it is the fate of rich people to be envied. I know that my different circumstances are coveted by girls that are a thousandfold happier than I, and it is a miserable thing to realize, but how can I help it? Amey, to tell you the wretched truth, I am sick of life, and if there can be respite for me in death, I wish I might die tonight. You may think this is the fruit of a gloomy mood, but it is the result of long reflection. Last night I was gay, I sang and played and chatted merrily. Men admired and flattered me, but what is left of it all to-day? Nothing but ashes. I know that what they said was not sincere, and still I remember it all with a girlish gratification. If we were always singing and dancing, and fooling one another, life might be more endurable, but these intervals of dreary re-action are a dear price for our social pleasures." She paused for a moment and then added slowly.

"Sometimes I am tempted to renounce my wordly life and go quietly into some holy retreat where all such troubles are kept at bay, and then

the thought becomes repulsive when I think of how worthless I have been, and how worthless I would still be among useful women."

She laughed drearily as she uttered these words and came towards the fire saying

"What a fuss I make about a little human life, eh Amey?"

"It is right that you should," I answered gravely, "it is dearer to you I suppose than anything in the world."

She stroked my hair affectionately and we both looked into the fire. One of her dainty slippers rested on the fender, one of her jewelled hands lay tremulously on my shoulder.

I knew that something should be said to her while this mood was on her, but what right had I to speak? I, who advocated every dreary conviction she had just uttered! I, who was so wretched and tired of my own life, what could I say to cheer or encourage her? My heart was full, but my lips were dumb. Something was telling me that there was no perfect happiness for women on earth, but I could not permit myself to express so gloomy a belief at this critical moment, when a fair, young, beautiful creature stood waiting beside me for a stimulus to hope and perseverance.

While I sat reflecting, she herself interpreted my mental soliloquy.

"This is the way with all of us, Amey," she said in a quieter and gentler tone. "I never knew a woman who, if she told the truth, could pride herself on being happy. It is beyond the narrow limits of our present sphere. The maids that wait upon us envy us and think that in our places they would have nothing left to wish for. The discontented seamstress that stitches away at my expensive dresses fancies they must shelter a happy heart, whose lot she covets; and all the while I am wishing for anything else in the world besides what I have. Whether we marry or remain single, life is a burden to us. We go on from day to day wondering how we may best dispose of ourselves. And nothing ever comes of it but this miserable discontent which leaves no possible margin for hope for the morrow. If one could only make a virtue of the resignation which is thrust upon one by an undaunted destiny," she concluded with a long-drawn sigh, "one might be the better for it."

"Yes," I answered earnestly, "if one only could! I do believe that the only sweetness in life is in being good, and those only who have never practised virtue, doubt it. For myself, when I have devoted some time sincerely to my religious duties I know that I feel a better, and most certainly a happier, woman. My life has a higher aim, my ambition a safer guide, and my efforts a more stable support, but I am not always faithful to my good resolutions and I am easily won away from devotional pursuits."

"Well then, Amey, you must blame yourself if you are not thoroughly happy," Alice interrupted almost fiercely. "You have this great advantage over me. I have no religion. I never had any. I am supposed to belong to the Church which we occasionally frequent. I am supposed to take a lively interest in foreign missions and the Jews. I am supposed to sanction a doctrine which has never been explained to me; but do I? Not I. Only for the instinctive belief which I cannot help

holding in God and a life to come, I would be no more than a very animal; and only for a something within me--a sort of moral regulator, which the Church calls conscience, I would never stop to question what is right or what is not. This is all the religion I have ever known. I have been brought up with the conviction that most creeds are tolerable, but that my own is the most fashionable, and it is certainly an easy one to live by, so I have never questioned it much. I should not care to fast or abstain or kneel as much as you Catholics do. I should abhor accusing myself, in sincere humility, of my wrong-doing, or making amends for every trifling misdemeanor, and as my religion does not ask me to do anything I dislike, I cannot quarrel with it."

"Certainly not, if you are happy in it" I put in quietly.

"I am not happy in it" she answered snappishly "but I could be I dare say, if it only assumed an authority over me; if it commanded where it counsels; if it exacted where it approves only, if it bound me under pain of grievous sin as yours does."--

"Ah! if it did! if it did, it would be no longer the same religion. It would lose nine-tenths of its present advocates. However, it is not my intention to enter upon a religious dissertation. I would not disturb your present convictions deliberately for the world, but if you wanted my assistance or asked it, I should be glad to give it to you. One thing I will tell you, however, before I go" I added, rising and confronting her, "it is a deep wrong you do your soul in allowing it to be assailed by so many doubts which you do not take the trouble to satisfy. There are many like you, Alice, I know a dozen whose souls are riding the unstable surface of a religious speculation. This is tempting God, and you owe yourself the duty of satisfying every want of your inner being. There is a why and a wherefore for everything, therefore clear away the dark clouds that lie between you and Truth. Study and read and reflect, until you can lay your hand in good faith upon your heart, and say: Now I have found the consoling truth, now my doubts have disappeared and my belief is made sure, and staunch, and consoling. That religion which shall best purify you, whose motives are entirely supernatural, which shall oblige you to exalt all humanity over yourself, which shall infuse a holy motive into your every thought, word and deed, which shall fill your life with a purpose unlike any it has hitherto known, shall make you happy here and hereafter--and if you like, you can find it with a little search."

We said no more on any subject. The afternoon was well-advanced already, and bidding her a fond good-bye, I left her with a promise to see her again before her departure for her much talked-of trip.

Leaving the Merivales' house, I wended my way in a moody silence toward my own home. The wind was rising and small snowflakes were drifting cheerlessly about in the raw wintry air. I bowed my head against the storm and plodded silently on. I was thinking of many things the while, and allowing myself to become absorbed in an earnest rehearsal of my own prosy life. Other people passed by me with better reasons to sigh I am sure, and yet mine was a deep-drawn breath, full of meaning and misery, which I would have controlled had I not been so distracted and absent-minded at the time.

I doubt if anything could have awakened me from my reverie so suddenly and so effectually as the measured slow accent which broke upon my ear

at this juncture.

"How do you do Amey?"

Simple enough: a mere conventional greeting if you will, but I felt it vibrate through my whole system. I looked up and saw Mr. Dalton standing before me. The way was narrow, and he had moved aside into the deep snow to let me pass. Involuntarily, I stood and looked up at him. I felt more kindly toward him than I had ever done before, I knew not why. In some vague uncertain way he had been associated with my recent thoughts, not asserting himself as any distinct feature in connection with my cogitation, but underlying it with a merely insinuated influence that made his presence felt in a secret, undetermined sort of way. I had been wondering about him and questioning his motives within myself as I plodded through the sprinkled streets and now, he was standing before me, a real personage, the substance of a dreamy memory of him which I had been dwelling upon since my departure from the Merivales'.

When we had stopped and saluted one another an awkward silence ensued. I felt as if he had read my secret in my tell-tale countenance, but his face wore that passive look it always wore and his voice was calm and commonplace as usual as he asked.

"Are you going home now?"

"Yes" I answered, "I have been visiting Alice Merivale. I had luncheon with her and a little talk."

"I will go back with you if you like," said he turning around to follow me.

I assented of course, and we hurried on to where the path was wider that we might be companionable and walk side by side.

"You had a little talk you say? I fling discretion to the winter wind, and ask, what about?"

"It is a wonder you don't say whom about" I returned with some emphasis.

"It is" he answered. "I must have been distracted indeed not to have put it in that way, however, it will do now, will it not?"

"Quite as well" said I, "for early or late the question can elicit no definite answer, as we talked of no one."

"What?"

"Surprising, isn't it?" I asked satirically, "nevertheless it is the startling truth."

"Maybe so," said he softly. "I thought on the day after an event such as last night's young girls had a great deal to say in confidence about people and things. I see I have been mistaken, although--"

"Although what?"

"Well--although last night lay itself particularly open to an

interesting criticism, I think."

"Musical evenings generally do I think."

"I mean everything else but the music."

"What else was there?"

"Desperate flirting or earnest love-making, I wish I knew which."

"I wish I could tell you really, Mr. Dalton, but you seem to know more about the matter already than I do."

"I cannot help it Amey," he said in a muffled tone, then looking up.
"It promises to be a stormy night," he added in an entirely new voice.

"I am afraid so" I answered, standing before our own gate. "Will you come in for a moment?"

"Thank you, I have an engagement, good afternoon."

"Good afternoon."

He raised his hat and turned away and I passed into the house filled with the strangest emotions I had ever known. I went straight to my own room and threw myself into a capacious easy-chair near the fire. The gray shadows of the early winter evening were just touching everything around me. I was in an excited mood and for what? A new suspicion had suddenly thrust itself in between me and a happy, satisfying conviction which I had cherished of late. The reader will not question whether there is one thing in life more annoying or more discouraging than to see one's settled belief in anything suddenly uprooted and tossed about by unexpected yet not unpleasant circumstances. Some small whispering voice from the farthest depths of my heart struggled to the surface now and asked me plainly and brusquely to come to an understanding with my inner self once for all, instead of leaning in this half-decided way, now towards one conviction, now towards another.

"I cannot help it, Amey." What was he going to say? What did he think? Why did he stop there? "Desperate flirtation, or earnest love-making. I wish I knew which." Queer thing to say, that. But what a queer man he was! What did it matter to him which it was? Did he mean to allude to Arthur Campbell and me, or was he perhaps thinking of himself and somebody? Why did I dismiss him summarily? If I had urged him to come in he would have consented, and we might have talked it out. We each thought a great deal more than we said, but after all, maybe it was well as it stood. What could he ever be to me more than an old friend--twice my age--and maybe I was too precipitate and presumptuous. How did I know he thought of me in any other light than the child he had always known me? I stood up with this impediment thrown voluntarily in the way, and took off my street apparel. In a quarter of an hour later dinner was served, and I went down cheerfully to the dining-room.

CHAPTER VIII.

To age and experience, I doubt not that this period of my life seems childish and aimless. There is something in a pair of spectacles, astride the wrinkled noses of maturity, that makes the world of sentiment seem a mere nursery where growing boys and girls amuse themselves carelessly before stepping into their manhood or womanhood. Can it be that this glowing love of which poets sing, is, after all, survived by such a short, uncertain thing as a human life? When we are young it is so easy to believe our love will last unto the very end, and this conviction darts a golden sunbeam across the unborn years: a sunbeam in which our heaviest sorrows become dancing motes, a sunbeam which spans the full interval allotted us between this world and the next. But it is only rational to fear that some of those huge, black shadows which are ever flitting through the "corridors of time" will cross our sunbeam when we least expect it, and yet this is a warning we will not hear, until a personal experience teaches it to our hearts in sorrowful accents.

I had toyed with my own conjectures and speculations all through the gay season. Every where I went I met the same people. I saw the origin, progress, and final consummation of many a love-match, from the formal introduction of both parties, to the glittering tell-tale diamond on the finger of a dainty hand. I had learned many lessons both from passive observation and active experience, and now as the season of feasting and flirting and merry-making was waning into the quietude of advancing spring, I had only to sit me down and rehearse the wonderful little past which had come and gone, bringing wonderful changes to many another heart besides Amey Hampden's.

May came, with its dazzling sunshine and its whispers of summer warmth, and the birds carolled as birds have done every spring-time since the world began. June came, and the bare branches sent forth their tender buds to greet it. The birds flitted from bough to bough and carolled louder and lustier than ever. It was the early summer-time; that short but blissful interval between the ravages of spring and the tyranny of scorching mid-summer. It is our misfortune in Canada to know nothing whatever of the beauty of that spring-time which has been flattered and idolized by poets' pens in every age. With us this intermediate season is nothing more nor less than an eminently uninteresting transition, invariably announced by such harbingers as bare and brown and dirty roads; slushy pathways, running with melted snow and ice; a warm, wet and foggy atmosphere, with great drops falling constantly from the twigs of the trees and the drenched, black eaves of the houses. It is a time for macintoshes and sound rubbers; a golden age for patent cough mixtures and freckles, the sworn destroyer of artificial curls and long clothes. It is true that a glad, golden sunshine floods the earth at times, but what of that, when sullied, muddy streams are rushing and bubbling on with a roaring speed, plunging into hollow drains at every street-corner; when sulky foot-passengers pick their uncomfortable way through all the debris of what had been the beauty of the dead season. Fashionable young men, with the extremities of their expensive tweeds turned carefully up, choose their steps over the treacherous crossways, leaning upon their silk umbrellas with an unfeigned expression of utter disapproval, and ladies in trim ulsters and very short skirts pilot themselves along the unclean thoroughfares, with very emphatic airs of impatience and

disgust. This is certainly not the season, in those Canadian cities whose winters are so severe, when "the young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love." If there is a time in the year when this worthy sentiment is ignored, and I may say deliberately ostracised, by Canadian youth, it is in the spring. But like all earthly circumstances, this, too, dies a natural death, and is succeeded by a truly enjoyable and suggestive period, that of early summer. It has been my experience to meet with many people who become the victims of a depressing melancholy in the spring. Some acknowledge that it is a presentiment, and resign themselves to many morbid feelings about the uncertain issue of this period of the year; but common sense rejects this theory. It is only natural that after having indulged our every energy while the air was bracing and cold, after having walked and talked, and feasted and danced, and made merry without interruption day and night during the winter months, we should feel a physical prostration in the end, and as a consequence something of a mental depression as well. For my own part, I have always had a reflective and serious spell in the spring-time. Those things that a few months before would have dazzled my eyes and tempted my senses, seem empty and vapid and worthless, and I go on wondering over my recent follies and weaknesses as if I were never to commit them again. It is true that the contemporary season of Lent has something to do with these effects. "Remember, man, thou art but dust," is not the most enlivening of warnings which can be submitted to us for moral digestion, and we who carry these solemn words back from church on Ash-Wednesday morning need not be surprised if our gayer inclinations desert us almost immediately.

All these changes had followed fast upon the receding items of my interesting season, and it was now summer time. My half-brother came back from college, an altered youth, as uninteresting in his transition as the season I have just described. He was an overgrown boy, of that age when boys are seldom interesting except to one another; that age of physical, mental and moral conflict, when the anxious mother can scarcely trust the testimony of her confidence in the future greatness of her growing son; when the calculating father becomes agitated in his eagerness to know if his bashful heir will favor religious, professional, or commercial tendencies, and when the grown-up sister tries to anticipate in a grown-up sisterly way what sort of a drawing room item her now unsophisticated relative will prove to be. This last is the most trying speculation of all. How big a boy's feet invariably look in a fashionable sister's eyes! how long his arms, and how shapeless his hands! Poor blushing youth, is not the ordeal worst for himself, at that period when he scarcely dares trust the most modest of monosyllabic discourses to be articulated by those lips that are warning a waiting public of the dawn of whiskerdom! Freddy, once so lithe and graceful and pretty, had been transformed into an ungainly being, all length, without breadth or thickness. He had not even the advantage of the average immatured youth, he had neither muscle nor physical bulk. He was still a delicate boy with a nervous cough and a fretted look. He was more than ever peevish and self-willed, with this only difference. In his earlier years his selfishness was at least manifested in a dependent sort of way; his thousand wants were made known in impatient requests. Now, it spoke in imperative accents and decided in its own favor, regardless of the comfort or concern of any other person. Of course I was not surprised, for "as the twig is bent so is the tree inclined," but my step-mother was disappointed with the results of all her anxious solicitude, and began to see when it was vain, how thankless such indulgent efforts

prove in the end. Freddy's soul was altogether absorptive, taking in whatever offerings gratified him, but yielding no return, and I ask, is there anything so discouraging to an ardent love as this cold neutrality, which proves, without a scruple, that all affection lavished upon it is an irretrievable waste.

As fortune or accident would have it, I was destined to see very little of this relation. Before he had been a fortnight at home I received a letter from Hortense de Beaumont's mother, informing me of the serious illness of my little friend, and entreating me, if it were at all possible or convenient, to go to them for a little while, as my name was constantly on the lips of the dear invalid.

I had begun to wonder at the breach in the correspondence between Hortense and myself, but it had not then been so protracted as to have excited my fears. I attributed her delay to a thousand and one possible impediments, and went on, hoping each day would put an end to my vague conjectures. That day was come at length but the tidings were not what I had prepared myself to hear. I persuaded myself that her mother's excessive love had exaggerated the unfortunate condition of my little friend's health, but, nevertheless determined to go to her as soon as possible. I showed the letter to my father, who had long ago become familiar with the name and attributes of this loved companion, and having obtained his sanction to my eager proposals, I set about making immediate preparations for my journey.

Before ten days had elapsed I was nearing my destination and Hortense de Beaumont's home. My father had entrusted me to the wife of a professional friend of his who was travelling with her son, and whose route opportunely corresponded with mine at this particular time. But I may say with truth that I travelled alone, for with the exception of a few crude observations now and then, the silence of discretion was unbroken between us. The lady was old, bulky, and the victim of a prolonged bilious attack all the way. The son was a red-haired gentleman with very new gold-rimmed spectacles and a scented silk handkerchief. We travelled by rail to Prescott, keeping our peace in contemplative sullenness all the while. The day was hot and dusty, and the car as uncomfortable as it could possibly be.

I sheltered my tell-tale face behind a friendly paper, and distracted myself with an impartial view of the surrounding country. It was early in the afternoon, and the full sunshine lay hot and strong upon the tilled and furrowed fields that stretched away as far as the eye could see on either side. Picturesque little farm houses skirted the road here and there, and stalwart men with their bronzed arms bared to the elbows rested pleasantly on their instruments of toil as the train rushed past them, shouting and waving their broad-rimmed hats until we had left them far behind. Immediately in front of me propped up by innumerable coats and bundles, my lady patron dozed heavily. The thick green veil that screened her bilious expression from the general view quivered and heaved as each deep-drawn breath escaped her powerful nostrils. In her fat lap lay her folded hands with their half-gloves of thick black lace, the pitiful victims of countless flies. The exertion of eating a sandwich had sent her to sleep. The remnants of this popular refreshment were now being actively appreciated by a hungry, buzzing multitude that made their very best of their golden opportunity. Her hopeful heir sat at a little distance on the same seat twirling his thumbs with an apparently decided purpose. Once or twice he drew his scented handkerchief from his side pocket with an

artful flourish and frightened the troublesome swarm away from his parent's sleeping form, but seeing their undaunted determination to restore themselves almost immediately, he respectfully stowed the scented article away with a final flourish and re-applied himself to the interrupted pleasure or task of twirling his thumbs with an apparent purpose.

Busied with my own intimate thoughts I escaped an _ennui_ that would otherwise have proved almost unbearable, and was pleasantly enough distracted until the first monotony of fields and farm houses was broken by the outskirts of the romantic town of Prescott--romantic, because to the traveler who steps from the dusty afternoon train and alights amid its unpropitious surroundings, it suggests itself strongly as a living illustration of a "deserted village," as melancholy to look upon as ever sweet Auburn could have been. My drowsy chaperone was awakened too suddenly, and was therefore very cross and ill-humored for some time after. It was with difficulty we persuaded her to follow us along the track, at the end of which loomed up a dismal wooden building whither we directed our vagrant steps, not knowing what better to do. Here we deposited our sundry parcels and awaited some crisis, we hardly knew what. We were informed that our boat would not reach there before evening, and to escape the monotony of our new surroundings we decided to board the ferry which was now nearing shore, and spend the intervening hours with our neighbors across the line. The comfort and compensation which my drowsy chaperone found in a capacious rocking-chair on the upper deck of the ferry restored her ruffled temperament to its original neutrality, much to her hopeful heir's gratification, and sinking into its sympathetic depths, she made a worthy effort to repair her recent rudely broken slumbers.

Her son, with alarming gallantry, placed an easy-chair near the railing of the deck for me, paid the triple fare and discreetly kept at a distance. His bashfulness and timid reserve recommended him to my genuine admiration as much as if it had been pure amiability, or a desire to do me a good turn that had prompted him to leave me to myself.

I was gathering experience on new grounds and I feared interruption from any one. The briny odor of the St. Lawrence carried on the soft summer breeze was grateful and refreshing to me. The brightest sunlight I ever saw was dancing and riding on the green sparkling ripples that wrinkled the broad surging surface before me. Beside me on a bench under the awning sat a party of American ladies from the other side--at least so I conjectured, and with reason. A look decided it. They were clad in pronouncedly cool costumes, dresses that would make a full ball toilet in Canada, but which exposed much prettiness to the ruthless action of the sun and wind on this hot midsummer afternoon. They were using their lips and tongues in a violent manner, accompanying commonplace remarks with the most exaggerated varieties of facial expressions I ever saw. But they were only harbingers of what one meets on landing. These strangely attired damsels in elaborate head-gear and high-heeled shoes strutted about the streets of Ogdensburg in any number. They give life to the pretty town I must admit, and excite the interest of the uninitiated tourist who is accustomed to judge women, especially, according to the standard peculiar to Canada. It is a wonder to me that the drowsy and vapid condition of Ogdensburg's _vis-a-vis_ does not check, in some measure, the animation and spirit of that busy town. There was more life there

on that sleepy summer afternoon than I have seen in a month in some of our cities, with all their pretensions. It is only fair to the United States to admit that the spirit of progress and enterprise underlies every square inch of its soil and animates every fibre of its constitution.

In the evening we boarded our boat for the West, and began our journey in earnest. I shall never forget this trip, and I cannot but wonder why. I was alone, for the most part, with my thoughts, which were far from being cheerful companions; still, whenever I steal into the adytum of my memory I find it there to greet me with its peculiar associations.

The evening being warm and sultry we remained on deck for many hours after supper. There was no moon, but heaven's vault was alive with twinkling stars. I sat a little apart from my friends, leaning over the railing, looking abstractedly into the dark restless water. I was disturbed once by my considerate cavalier, who brought me a shawl, saying the night air was likely to provoke rheumatism or neuralgia, or such other inconveniences to which our flesh is heir.

I took it with a grateful smile, made a limited remark upon the beauty of the panorama before us, enquired solicitously about the old lady's comfort and spirits, and then considering my duty accomplished, I wrapped myself warmly in the folds of my shawl and settled myself cosily for another reverie.

With a wonderful acumen, the gaunt gentleman seized the insinuating situation, and considering himself summarily dismissed, he edged away by stealthy strides and left me to my cogitations once again.

Strangely enough, I began to think of Mr. Dalton, and my several interviews with him. He had puzzled me, that was all, there was no harm in wondering about him, surely, if I did not give too much time and attention to the possibly dangerous subject. After all, there was something in him so different from other men, even from Arthur Campbell. There was always some deep, happy meaning to his simplest words, and his most commonplace conceptions of things were flavored with this mystifying attraction whatever it was.

That he had had some peculiar experience was evident in his every look, and tone, and word. His very reserve betrayed him and excited people's curiosity about his past career. I had known him all my life, and he had always been the same. I had sat upon his knee with my tiny arms twined about his neck, he had told me thrilling tales, had played with me, and had kissed me--not often--but on two or three occasions the last time was just before I went to school. Then, when I came back--how strange it was--he seemed surprised to see me grown and matured, while he apparently had remained the same.

I suppose he saw that I was no longer the dependent child who confided to him her petty joys and sorrows, but a young lady, self-conscious and reserved to a certain extent; a young lady with her own pronounced tastes and settled opinions, whose life had drilled out into an independent channel away from the early source which he had been pleased to control and guide.

Perhaps he was taking the right course, and that I had no need to feel disappointed over his attitude towards me, but I was disappointed all

the same. I thought he would always be a dear friend, on whom I could lean and rely, but here my thought was checked. Would I have been satisfied with his _friendship_? Could I have kept within its narrow limits and been content to see him lavish something still more precious upon another?

We are frank at the tribunal of our own most intimate thought, and I know what answer came whispering itself into my heart at this crisis. I roused myself from my reverie and looked out at the changing scenery before us. We were among the Thousand Islands.

Dark broken outlines of trees and rock, with here and there the glimmer and twinkle of a light, the murmur of broken wavelets touching the shore on every side, and the faint sound of happy human voices somewhere in the misty distance, were what greeted my eyes and ears. I could see nothing defined in the wild panorama about me, only that the darkness was broken here and there, by a darker something, from which tall pine-tops reared themselves majestically, less shrouded than the rest. It was a soul-stirring sight, so gloomy, so misty, so silent. I was almost sorry later to have looked upon the same scene by daylight, although the hand of man has put an artificial touch here and there, which, by the light of day, improves the general view.

After all, what are nature's grandest phases to us unless they suggest something of our own selves? I have never been able to look upon mountain or valley with other than my corporal eyes, and I have always admired those places in a half-regretful way, where the print of human footsteps is unknown. There is no perfect beauty in the external world without the presence of man, and all that silent waste of prairie land and towering mountain, which stretches away in an unbroken monotony towards our northern limits, is to me a lifeless, useless mass, and will be so until it has submitted every inch of its wild, untrodden surface to the honest industry of toiling humanity. When these giant mountain-tops look down in friendly patronage upon the gables and towers, and curling smoke-wreaths of some struggling hamlets lying at their feet, I shall see their grandeur and admire it, but where dumb nature sits in lone and pensive solitude away from the hum of golden industry, beyond the reach and influence of civilization, it has for me only a cold surface of beauty like the sleep of death.

This thought came back to me on the following day, when we were riding the restless waters of Lake Ontario. As far as the eye could see in any direction nothing was visible but waves and sky. I tried to imagine myself doomed to live alone with nature's reckless beauty, such as I saw it then above and around me, and my heart shivered at the mere thought of such a terrible destiny. I know "there is society where none intrude," but I prefer to believe "it is not good for man to be alone." All the richest and rarest charms of Nature or of Art have never had more than a relative value for me, but give me one short moment of sympathetic human companionship, and with its borrowed light I see beauty above and around me everywhere. Yet how hard it is for us to find this influence that gifts the hours of time with golden opinions, and bears them away as if to the measure of some hallowed strains. There were human souls of every nature beside me, while I leaned over that sunny deck, looking vacantly out upon miles and miles of heaving water, and yet it was to me as if I stood alone calling after friends that could not hear my far-off voice, no bond of mutual interest, care or devotion united me to any one among that motley crowd. To them perhaps, I was not even a definite individual, but only

a fraction of the bulk that moved about the boat in moody silence.

If circumstances such as these did not cross our daily lives at certain intervals, I wonder what would become of all the wholesale moralising and reflections which they engender for most of us. We, who are the playthings of the moods of fate, what would we do with ourselves if these moments of quiet reverie and placid realizations were taken away from us altogether? One thing is certain. Many a noble generous deed, the outgrowth of one pensive hour, would never have been performed; many lives now re-united and happy on account of some calm impartial meditation, would be drifting in lonely wretchedness asunder, the victims of some hasty, ill-explained impediment, that a little reason could easily have removed.

Thus busily entertained by my own peculiar cogitations, time sped without bringing me as much _ennui_ as I had feared. When night fell again we were in view of Toronto City and looked upon our journey as well nigh accomplished. So much is suggested by the distant prospect of giant towers and steeples, the glimmer of countless lights and the muffled buzz of active reality, as one sees and hears them from the deck of a steamer nearing the shore. There were the lusty shouts of boatmen on the wharf, rising above the ringing of discordant bells, and the rumble of railway trains. There was clanging and clashing of metal on every side, hauling of ropes, pitching and heaving of merchandise, with now a shrill scream from the throat of some dainty craft hard by, and again a hoarse sepulchral response from a larger vessel as it came or went. There was a buzz of human voices expressive of every sort of agitation and confusion, and quietly through it all, the great waves slapped against the shore with a heavy monotonous splashing, and bounded back in sullen fury into the depths beyond.

The half-hour after ten rang clearly out from an illuminated clock in a distant tower, as we picked our steps along the narrow gangway, and deposited ourselves with a sense of infinite relief on _terra firma_ once more.

CHAPTER IX.

Hortense was very ill and Madame de Beaumont very disconsolate, when I reached them. The lively, sparkling look was all gone from the pretty face I had learned to love so dearly, only a wasted remnant of her former beauty remained. Who could detect the change more keenly than I? I, who had feasted upon every line and curve that constituted her physical perfection, whose memory had been fed upon the recollection of their rare loveliness, and whose hope had lived upon this expectation of seeing her soon again.

When I arrived she was sleeping, the still quiet sleep of an infant, her breast scarcely heaving as the feeble breath came and went. Her mother was standing by the open doorway in an adjoining room looking in upon the peaceful invalid with tearful eyes. She advanced on tip-toe to meet me, and twining her arms around me led me away down a dimly-lit corridor into a cosy sitting-room at the end, where a

cheerful gas-light greeted us. Our noiseless entrance disturbed the solitary occupant, who, as we crossed the threshold, rose up abruptly from where he sat by a small table near the window, and gathering up the books which he had been reading, strode eagerly towards a curtained doorway opposite, and vanished behind the waving drapery, just as we passed into the room.

There was an uneasy look in Madame de Beaumont's eyes for a second or two as they followed the receding figure. Then with an affectation of ordinary solicitude she turned and said to me,

"I did not know that anyone was here. We disturbed Bayard at his studies I am afraid."

"Let us go somewhere else," I suggested a little eagerly.

"Oh," she answered, shaking her head significantly, "that would not bring him back I assure you, we may as well be comfortable here as elsewhere, now. He is such a queer boy."

She was evidently under the impression that I knew something definite about this person who, in spite of his suggestive name, seemed timid and strange as a fawn, but as I had a burning desire to know everything about Hortense's illness I was not tempted to indulge this secondary curiosity, so his name was summarily abandoned for the dear invalid's.

Madame de Beaumont could not account in any definite or satisfactory manner for her daughter's present condition. It was the result, she said, of a growing indisposition that had stolen over her lately, and this was why her fears had such little hope lest her complaint should prove a constitutional decline that would baffle all the skilful efforts of her physicians.

"She began," the mother said in a voice of sobs, "by renouncing all her pleasures. She did not care for one thing and was too tired for another. She took no interest in anything that had distracted her before; she would only read, and write letters to you and in the end she renounced even these relaxations. The doctors suspect that some mental strain may have been worrying her, but I can think of none. All that we could do to make her happy and comfortable we did, and I have never heard her complain, or wish for anything that she had not already. What will I do if I lose her?" Madame de Beaumont suddenly cried, burying her face in her hands and weeping bitterly. "Her father, you know, died of consumption," she added in a hopeless whisper, raising her head and looking at me sorrowfully.

It was a sad scene and one that I was not prepared to meet. I had assured myself that Madame de Beaumont's letter was exaggerated, and now it seemed not to have conveyed to me half vividly enough the actual state of the unfortunate circumstances.

We had some slight refreshment served on the little table before us, but neither of us could partake of it heartily. I swallowed some mouthfuls of food more out of duty than anything else, and indulged myself with a cup of strong tea, my favorite beverage, after which we repaired quietly to the sick-room to have a look at Hortense before retiring.

Faint glimmers of light, leaping from the night lamp that burned dimly on a table by the bedside, danced in flickering shadows every now and then upon her pallid cheeks, but still she slept quietly and peacefully. One would think it was the sleep that knows no earthly waking were it not for the warm look of her paleness, and the feeble throbbing of something in her thin white neck.

"She will spend the whole night like this," her mother whispered, drawing me away. "The nurse watches her steadily and Bayard occupies the next room, but they are never disturbed. She dozes quietly the whole night long. To-morrow she will know you and talk to you. You must go to your room now, my dear, for you are tired and travel-worn. Come, I will show you the way," she added, putting her arm around my waist and leading me out of the room.

When we reached the door we were met by the timid hero of the sitting-room, who now found himself almost in our arms. He was making a stealthy entrance, and we a stealthy exit, and we came upon one another so suddenly that we all three stood motionless and silent for an awkward second or so.

Madame de Beaumont relieved the stupid situation by saying, "Miss Hampden, this is my son, I suppose you know him already by name."

I was too surprised to say or do anything appropriate. I merely raised my eyes and inclined my head a little, and worked my way through the door with an impatience almost equal to that with which he had flown from the room which we had invaded an hour or so before.

In a few minutes more I was safe and secure in my own apartment, free to sit down quietly and make out a calm realization of the whole state of affairs for my own private benefit. The figure I had just left standing in the opposite doorway came back to me now, more clearly-defined in memory than he was to my corporal eyes as they rested on him. He was a handsome fellow, very handsome, but how strange looking, with his rich embroidered gown falling about him in heavy folds, and his cap shoved back off his brow, throwing his marked features into exquisite relief, this was Hortense's brother of whom she had never spoken to me, whose name I had never heard until to-night! This was Bayard de Beaumont!

I stood up and began to unfasten my trinkets, and my eyes were instinctively raised to a picture which hung over the mirror beside me. It consisted of two photographs in a pretty delicate frame, one was Bayard's, the other was a woman's, not his mother's, nor his sister's. It was of some one I had never seen. I raised the lamp above my head and scrutinized it. It was a beautiful face, but one of cold, passive loveliness. There was something in the handsome mouth which made me wince as I looked upon it, and those large speaking eyes. What a depth theirs was, too deep, I thought, too alluring, might not one get lost in such labyrinths as these?

I gazed upon the picture until my hand, exhausted, trembled with the lighted lamp it held, and even then I had not seen it half enough but I turned away and went on in moody thoughtfulness with my final preparations for retiring.

I knelt and said my evening prayers, with many a struggle against teasing distractions, I must admit.

Such a queer nature was mine! I do not know whether others resemble me or not in this respect, but from my young girlhood, I have always been led away by those faces, books, sounds or pictures, that are suggestive of any kind of deep or pent up emotion. I know not exactly whether it be that I look upon them as associated in some dim distant way with my own uneventful life, yet how could that be? What have vagrant strains of unfamiliar music conceived by unknown minds, and played by unseen hands to do with the mechanism of one undreamt of human soul? What can those heart-moving pages of the authors I love, have to do with the issue of an existence of which they have never heard nor thought? What part could these fascinating faces have played in the personal drama of my life, when they have never been called upon to bestow even the tame smile of conventional greeting upon me? What bearing could those speaking pictures have upon the story of my individual experience when they are often the only reflection of days long past and forgotten, children of some pensive artist's fancy that never had another life outside of his conception, than that infused by brush or chisel? Yet it always seems to me that as I look into those books and faces, or as I lend my ear to those engaging sounds, some chord vibrates within me that makes me feel as if my memory were struggling to awake from some lethargy: scenes and sorrows of my yesterdays come back for a short moment to my vivid recollection, and seem to hang around these powerful incentives in a misty halo. It may be the caprice of an extravagant imagination, it may be the freak of a foolish fancy, an empty day-dream, an idle reverie, but to me while it lasts, it is sweeter than any reality.

Thus was it with this picture that hung upon my bedroom wall that night. I could not take my eyes from it. There I lay, tired and travel-worn, on an easy bed; but the light burned beside me and I could not sleep. Something held my gaze fixed upon the opposite wall. I could but stare and wonder at the curious loveliness of that woman's face, and ask myself doubtfully over and over again whether such beauty always engenders proportionate happiness for its possessor.

"And Bayard loved her," I went on in mental soliloquy. "This strange, handsome fellow with the sad face and solemn air." Did he still love her, I wondered, or was she called away in her youthful grace and loveliness to where he could only see her with the eyes of faith? Did he now live upon her cherished memory, isolated from all the profane distractions of social life? Where was she, or who was she, and why had Hortense never spoken of her in all her intimate conversations with me? Was she his wife? May not this picture have got there in some accidental way? She might be a relative. It might have happened that they were just the same size and style of portrait, and were put together on that account. But no! something in the faces of both insinuated a close relationship. They were more to one another, I felt sure, than friend or relative. There was love, quiet, steady, absorbing love in his great dark eyes, as if in resting upon the beauty of that other face they had found happiness and repose forever. They even suggested something of a reproachful love, as if they found those attractions too winning, and not human enough. I almost coveted the respectfully devouring glance of those contemplative brown eyes, for we women with faces of very ordinary fabric cannot believe that men love us altogether as they would if our cheeks were like damask roses and our eyes like dew-kissed violets. Nor do we blame them. Yet how often does it come to pass that a woman's beauty is the stumbling-block to her earthly happiness? With only a face for her

fortune, many a bright-eyed, laughing belle has gone out to seek sorrow and misery. The world is full of them, they are rolling in easy carriages up and down the thoroughfares of life, each a pampered and dearly bought idol of some powerful old Croesus, whom to love would be to outrage every principle of nature and worthy sentiment, and, therefore, to live upon milk and honey and be clad in the finest of purple, beauty will sanction her own destruction, living a loveless life, ever haunted by a memory of something brighter and happier that might have been. And all for this, that others may look with admiration, and possibly with envy upon her glittering wealth, or that she may reflect some of the social power and prestige of the man who marries her. She may escape destitute gentility; she may pass into the higher walks of refined society, may be waited upon by many servants, and be the cynosure of eyes that under other circumstances had never deigned to favor her with a casual notice. What of that? She may, at last, recline in an expensive casket, and rich exotics may lie in splendid profusion about her, there may be tolling of many bells and sighing of many friends, but after that? Does the grave show any more respect to these remnants of dainty humanity stowed away in the stillness of an artistic vault, than to the handful of pauper human bones that crumble to their final dust under the unmarked, unnoticed sod?

With such reflections as these, and while my eyes were still fixed upon the fascinating photograph I fell into a deep sleep.

I dreamed strange things that night. Phantom forms with a dark mystic beauty about them glided round me. I saw a woman with long raven tresses and tear-dimmed eyes shrouded in flowing draperies, leaning over a narrow rustic bridge under which dark and muddy water ran in a gurgling stream. Her elbow leaned upon the railing, and her pensive face lay half-buried in one slender hand. She was looking into the depths below, and a great misery was written upon her handsome features. I dreamed that I was hurrying by the spot where she was standing, eager to reach the other side unobserved by her. As I stole with noiseless tread behind her, I heard her talking to the waters in a slow and humdrum monotone:

"Even if I did it," she was saying "he wouldn't care now. No! Bayard wouldn't care, no one would care. Would you care?" She screamed, turning suddenly around and clutching me tightly with both trembling hands. My blood ran cold, my very hair stood up on end, as I saw the wild glitter in her dark, lustrous eyes, and the hopeless frenzy in her harsh and hollow laugh. I wrestled once, with all the strength I could command, and with a piercing scream I awoke! Cold clammy drops lay on my face and hands. My heart was throbbing wildly against my breast. I lay prostrate, paralyzed with fear, staring into the outer gloom. It was just at the turn of the darkness when things are outlined though still colorless and shadowy, and I could see the delicate frame opposite me suspended by invisible cords from an invisible nail--that cursed thing that had haunted me in my sleep and reduced me to this painful condition.

There was a flicker of light through the keyhole and crevices of my bed-room door at this crisis. Someone turned the handle cautiously and finding the bolt drawn from the inside, whispered huskily.

"What is the matter?"

I could not recognize the voice, but sitting up in my bed, I answered faintly:

"Oh! it is nothing. I have had a dreadful nightmare, that is all."

The light flickered again and the cautious footsteps retreated, leaving me alone with the dusk and my fears. I fell back upon my pillow and crept under the warm coverings. I was weak and shivering, and a violent pain darted through my head. In a few moments that seemed like hours to me, I fell asleep again. This time it was a quiet, dreamless slumber, which restored me greatly, and refreshed my looks and my humor for breakfast.

When I awoke a second time, a bright morning sunshine flooded the room. The birds sang lustily outside my window, carts and carriages rumbled along the road; bells were ringing and all the voices of industry and activity were united in a great chorus which proclaimed the advent of another day.

No one spoke of my tragic experience when I appeared at the breakfast table. Madame de Beaumont and her son were already in the dining-room when I went down, and we took our seats almost immediately. Hortense was still sleeping, they said, and looked quite refreshed after the night.

"I hope I did not disturb her when I screamed?" I ventured to remark.

"When you screamed!" Madame de Beaumont exclaimed in bewilderment.

"Yes! did you not hear me?" I asked, just as astonished.

"No indeed," she answered, "did you Bayard?" turning towards her son who sat at the upper end of the table.

"Miss Hampden had supper too late last night," he said, evading a direct reply, "and that with traveling, and the excitement of seeing Hortense so very ill, would disturb any one's slumber."

I thought he intended that the subject of my nightmare, should be summarily dismissed with this explanation, and feeling a little unkindness in the arbitrary way in which he expressed himself, I turned to Madame de Beaumont and with a self-justifying tone remarked:

"It is the first time in my life I have ever had a nightmare, and I cannot account for it. I had been looking at a picture that hangs over the looking-glass in the room you gave me, and do you know it suggested such a queer train of thought, that immediately on falling asleep I dreamed of it, and such a dream! It would have frightened any one."

Madame de Beaumont busied herself among the tea-things while I spoke, and never raised her eyes, but Bayard, laying down his knife and fork, turned his gaze full upon me. There was a covert sneer, I thought, in the look which he directed at me so steadily, and feeling painfully mystified and uncomfortable under the whole situation, I bent my head over my chocolate and sipped it slowly for need of a better distraction. After a moment or so of unflinching staring, the courteous Bayard resumed his breakfast with double the appetite, it seemed to me, with which he began it. This was my uncongenial

initiation into my friend's home.

CHAPTER X.

Before the week was out, Hortense, to the surprise and delight of us all, was able to move about from one room to another. She looked white and wasted still, but her old manner had returned to her in a great measure, and she laughed and chatted eagerly with us, one after another, thus giving strong confirmation to the hopes expressed by her medical adviser, who now predicted a rapid convalescence.

The sun was warm and invigorating, and nature at the very climax of her summer beauty, the leaves green and plentiful, and the breeze gentle and refreshing. Everything in the external world tempted one to "fling dull care away" and be happy while these propitious moments lingered with time.

Madame de Beaumont and her son were so hopeful now of Hortense's complete recovery that they ventured to leave home for a week or ten days to attend to some family business that had been delayed on account of her serious illness, but it was with many a parting injunction, regarding the care and attention that should be unceasingly bestowed upon her darling during her enforced absence, that the solicitous mother left me in charge. Anxious to fulfil my pledge to the very letter. I gave myself up to the exclusive companionship of my little friend from that moment. It was indeed a pleasure and a recreation for me, now that she was able to laugh and talk as before.

Two weeks had elapsed since my arrival in Toronto and many strange conjectures had held possession of my mind during this comparatively short interval. I had seen nothing, I may say, of the quiet hero of the household. His time was spent either in the solemn seclusion of his own apartments or out of doors. Occasionally we met going out of, or coming into, a room, going up or down stairs or passing along some corridor. We nearly always had meals together, and on a few occasions he even sat with us for an hour after dinner, but of what good was that? The conversation was tame and impersonal when we were all together, and when we two met by accident there was a quiet mutual greeting which began and ended on the spot.

I was still of the opinion that he was a handsome man and a fine fellow altogether, but the suspicion that he was shrouded in mystery repelled me, despite my best intentions and desires. I have never taken to those deep natures that talk in discreet monosyllables and cling to the sheltering refuge of such safe subjects as are the substance of everybody's and anybody's chit-chat. Maybe I judge them harshly when I persuade myself that the records of their past could not stand the open daylight of a free-and-easy discussion. This verdict is, however, the suggestion of my instinct, and need not carry weight with anyone but myself.

Lest any of the ardent believers in the pre-eminent curiosity of

womankind be wondering how I could have restrained my burning desires to ferret out the secrets of this man's life for so long, I must hasten to inform them that conjointly with this feminine weakness I had a most unyielding pride, a pride that absorbed even my curiosity. Though I pined to know the wonderful story of his past, this prevailing vice forbade me to quench my devouring thirst at the fountainhead of satisfaction.

Hortense had not volunteered to open the subject with me, neither had her mother, though both must have known full well that my suspicions were aroused. I did not therefore intend to ask a confidence which could not be given willingly and freely. It was virtually nothing to me what this man did or did not, and as his experience had probably a painful halo about it, I was not eager to refer to it in the remotest possible way.

Before he left with Madame de Beaumont he came into the sitting-room where I was standing, looking out of the window, to bid me good-bye.

He wore a traveling costume of a becoming gray color, and held his hat in one gloved hand. I heard him come in, but purposely did not look around. As he was generally engaged with business of his own when he went in or out of a room, I was not supposed to know that, on this particular occasion, he was making a flattering exception for me. I went on biting my lips abstractedly, with my head leaning against the casement. He cleared his throat emphatically, but what was that to me? "Ahem" was not enough like either of my names, to justify my looking around.

He walked to the mantel-piece and inspected its familiar furnishings for a moment, making what seemed to me unnecessary noise and fuss as he did so. I would have given worlds for a pair of keen eyes at the back of my head during this artful performance, but as no such abnormal desire could be favored, I had to be satisfied with my conjectures and suppositions about his motives, and the various expressions that were chasing one another over his face as he went through this programme of failures.

At last, having spent his every indirect effort to attract my absorbed attention, he took a book from the table, and placing it deliberately under his arm, as if it were one of the many things that brought him into the room, he strode quietly towards me, saying in a very non-committal and yet courteous tone.

"I shall say goodbye, Miss Hampden, I hope you will take every care, of yourselves, and that we shall find you well on our return."

"Thank you," I answered, very politely, "there will be no fear of me. Good bye."

He took the tips of my three longest fingers, my thumb and little finger not having been ordained by nature to meet the cordial grasp of men of this stamp, and having repeated his good-bye, he stalked out of the room in conscious dignity and grandeur.

I made a mocking face, I know I did, when his back was turned. I hated him for not taking more notice of me than this. I did not want any violent attentions or silly love-making from him. He need not think I was a frivolous heart-hunter, for I was not. If I had been a man, he

would have discussed politics or science or newspaper topics with me long before this. How did he know I could not match him in these being a woman? He was one of those wonderful erudites, I supposed, who think that a girl's conversational power lies rigidly between dry goods and sentiment. Poor things! What a heresy they foster? But what need I care? He was a glum, unsociable recluse anyway, may be at a loss for a second idea to keep his mind busy. He was certainly not worth worrying about, so I gathered up my needle-work that rested on the window-sill, and with a deliberate sullenness went in search of Hortense.

She had fallen asleep on the lounge in her bedroom, and the old nurse, having closed the shutters and drawn the curtains to keep out the afternoon light, was seated in the adjoining room, busily knitting a stocking.

Free, therefore, to dispose of myself as I wished for the next hour, I put on my things and went to stroll about the busy streets of the city.

Avoiding the fine, open thoroughfares, where business and pleasure were airing themselves, I leisurely turned down a gloomy by-way which was lined on either side by the massive walls and rear wings of huge, dismal, commercial establishments. Not a soul was visible anywhere, it was long and narrow and dirty, with deep ruts in the mud that lay in a thick covering over the road. It was intercepted, some distance down, by another street much worse to look at, and a little farther on, the woeful panorama became still more awful and repulsive. A little passage which seemed to have strayed away from all connection with human decency or sympathy ran to the left. It was so very narrow that though the surrounding buildings straggled up to only an ordinary height, the daylight scarcely penetrated it. And indeed it is to be wondered whether a bright sunlight would not but bring out more clearly than ever the appalling features of the place. Could gold and silver sunbeams hope to beautify the heaps of refuse and rubbish that were piled up here and there at intervals against some staggering fence? Could a flood of sunlight improve the dingy house-fronts that looked drearily out upon this cheerless prospect, or lend a charm to the hardened faces of those that peered through dirty window-panes, or who stood idly in some rickety doorway?

The spectacle was indeed heart-stirring.

"Why shines the sun except that he Makes gloomy nooks for grief to hide? And pensive shades for melancholy When all the earth is bright beside?"

The words seemed written on the dingy house-tops before me, and borne on the gusty breeze that wafted noxious odors far and wide. My heart turned sick, and yet this was what I had come out to see. I could not have gone away from a lively city like this, where towers and steeples of lofty and majestic buildings reared themselves in proud beauty towards heaven, without having also looked on the picture's gloomy side. Where so much wealth and fashion and finery dazzled the casual eye, there must, said I, be also 'poverty, hunger and dirt,' and were my words not fully verified now?

I have been warned more than once of the danger of going unattended along these haunts of misery and vice, but whether or not it is because my motive is one of pure philanthropy, and my sentiments

exclusively sympathetic I do not know, I have, however, escaped up to this without interference from the lowly inhabitants of these obscure corners, and can vouch for the latent gallantry of many a ragged hero, who restored a fallen umbrella or parcel with as much courtesy as his brother clad in broadcloth ever showed me.

That human mind which feasts exclusively upon the dainty morsels of life is only half educated, though there are grand fragments of knowledge and experience to be gathered among the haunts of high art, and where stand the immortal monuments of power and fame, though the heart may swell with a just enthusiasm at sight of the marvels which have risen out of gold piles, the coffers of nations or individuals, I hold that all the majesty of the best-spent wealth has not power to awaken such a depth of feeling in the human breast as one of these tottering huts with its mouldy walls and mud-spattered window-panes, the "Home Sweet Home" of flesh and blood as real and as sensitive as our pampered own.

To think that in the world's great capitals there is squalor which could never compare with what my eyes then beheld! Think of Murray Hill and the Alaska District, Fell's Point, or the Basin, and what a sea of human wrecks we contemplate in a fraction of America's continent alone. And again, think of the waste of wealth the wide world over. Think how vice is wined and dined, and clad in the finest of fabrics, while honest humanity, in helpless hunger, cries out to ears that are deaf and hearts that have turned to stone. Oh, well may it be said that the rich man's chances of heaven are as those of the camel going through the eye of a needle, if the recording angel pencils down the use and abuse of every dangerous penny that might have been well spent, and was not.

With such reflections as these I turned my steps slowly back through the dingy by-ways.

The afternoon was waning, and the hour was near when daily toil would be suspended, and the workers would repair to these their miserable homes. I had met a few already with their picks and shovels on their ragged shoulders, and had stood to see them vanish under these crooked doorways where little children lingered waiting and watching for their cheerless coming. I saw some others lay down the instruments of their honest labor outside the corner entrance of a large but smoky row of wooden tenements that skirted one gloomy street. A doorway cut through the sharp angles of the corner of the building, allowed a small canopy to project in a triangular peak over two dirty battered steps that led into a dimly-lit room on the ground floor. Suspended from the point of the canopy was a lamp of a dull red color, which with rain splatterings and droppings, and a long-standing accumulation of cobwebs and dust had grown barely translucent, and must have emitted but a sickly light at night-fall. A worn and ragged rope-mat lay on the second step, and across the upper half of the dilapidated door (which was of glass) a faded screen was drawn that kept the inner room secure from the curious gaze of passers-by.

Those who had been born and brought up under the shadow of this ominous establishment, must have known many a tale of sorrow and woe that owed its origin to that vile ground-floor.

I discovered, on closer scrutiny, that some faded letters across the dirty lamp, intimated to the general public that this was the "Ace of

Spades." And in the money-till of the Ace of Spades, doubtless was the price of many a poor man's toil, the bread and meat of his hungry children squandered and sacrificed with a fiendish recklessness. Within the dingy walls of the Ace of Spades was bartered the domestic happiness of many a home that had been cheerless enough, God knows, without this extra curse.

I shivered as I passed it by, to think that amid such haunts of misery and starvation, a place like this could flourish, growing fat upon the life-blood of famishing humanity, and a pity that is akin to a most contemptuous hatred swelled my breast, when I asked myself: What sort of being presides over this soul-trap? Can it be rational? Can it have a soul? Can it ever understand what even animal sympathy is?

The gold that is stolen from the rich man's coffer has some claim to respectability, over these ill-gotten coins that are so many mouthfuls of bread snatched from the jaws of perishing hunger.

I turned away feeling sick at heart, and directed my vagrant steps towards home. All the pomp and glory of the world's wealth were dimmed and darkened before my eyes by this huge black shadow of penury and suffering, that had darted across my way at that moment. If such thoughts as these could be ever with us, if such vivid reminders of the shallowness and vanity of earth's transient splendors would abide with us constantly, how paltry would our idolized and coveted honors appear, and how much more profitable would our wasted energies become! But our minds are frivolous, and easily distracted from great pursuits by petty, external circumstances. We become too readily absorbed in the study of our own selves, and those elements of experience that may yield us pleasure or pain during our sojourn among mortal men. Very often our own instability of purpose annoys and discourages us. Our spirit has desired the accomplishment of one thing, but our contrary flesh has silenced these better demands in gratifying its own caprice. It takes us a very long time to learn the danger of trusting our fallible natures too far. The man who goes forward to defy temptation, telling himself he will not fall, is running down towards a steep precipice, and has not the power of self-control when he reaches the critical point.

I was faithful to my wholesome meditation while I sauntered back alone through the busy streets. When I raised my eyes to look upon glittering carriages, bearing beauty and ease and comfort along the highway, I said to myself in all sincerity, What will it avail them in the end?

But, gentle reader, if I have found fault with the weakness of human nature, and censured its infidelity to noble purposes, it is because I have taught myself the realization. Think you, I have stood where my brothers and sisters have fallen? or have been much the better for knowing so well where the straight path of duty lies?

When I entered the house of my friend I left the best part of my new convictions upon the threshold, and bounded up the stairway with as light a step as if life's darkest phases were unheard of mysteries to me.

Hortense was still lying on the lounge, and the curtains were still drawn, but her eyes were wide open, and the rosy warmth of a recent happy slumber lay on each delicate cheek.

I crept softly towards her, lest perhaps I should find her dozing, but her sleep had not left a languid trace behind. She looked up at me with a bright smile, saying,

"Oh, you naughty truant, where have you been?"

"I went for a little walk," I answered, stooping over her and kissing her brow. "I saw you were sleeping, and having nothing to do, I took a fancy to explore the town. Have you been awake long?"

"Oh, yes! for hours!" she said playfully. "I have counted my fingers about a dozen times. I have discovered that that picture between the windows hangs to one side, and the table-cover is longer at the back than in the front. That bottle casts a shadow just like a man's face and--"

"Oh, come!" I broke in, "you are improvising as you go along. You would not look so rosy and good-humored if you had been lying awake all that time. You will not make me believe such ponderous fibs," I added, throwing my hat and parasol wearily on the bed.

"You are quite too cute, Amey," she answered, rising slowly and taking my arm affectionately, "in fact you are a genius my dear," she added in a pompous tone.

"So they all tell me," I retorted quietly, "and yet I feel very much like other people."

"Well, you are not like other people, indeed you are not!" she exclaimed earnestly. "If you were I would never have liked you."

"Don't you like 'other people'?"

"Not generally, some other people I do, but not all _Mon Dieu! non pas tous !_ " she added, shaking her head emphatically and looking abstractedly before her.

The current of her thought must have changed suddenly, for she raised her face with a bright expression upon it now and said

"Let us do something--something to keep us alive--What shall it be?"

"We might drink your cod liver oil," I suggested; "it is recommended for that purpose, is it not?"

"How smart you are Miss Hampden!" she exclaimed. "Well, I will leave all that sport to yourself, it has no charm for me, I know," she then cried, interrupting herself, "let us go to your room, and you will show me all your pretty things. I have not seen anything since you came, such a prisoner as I have been."

"I hope you will feel repaid," I said, putting one arm tenderly around her frail waist, and leading her out, "but I have not much to show you, Hortense."

We repaired to my room at the other end of the corridor, and Hortense, seating herself on a pile of pillows on the floor, insisted on being shown all the new jewellery and trinkets that had been bestowed on me

when I "came out."

This trivial circumstance is, I am fully conscious, quite enough to provoke the blandest of smiles from masculine lips.

"Such a paltry distraction for sensible people!" I hear them utter. So be it; we will not dispute the point in our own favor, but we will confess that whether it reflect or not upon the tone and dignity of our leading tastes, there is an undeniable gratification for every woman in the contemplation of another's wardrobe or jewel-box. It is a rest for our eyes that are wearied of gazing upon our own familiar belongings, to search among the novel trinkets of a friend. We like to touch them, to hold them, to try them in our ears, or on our fingers, or to twine them around our wrists, not that we covet them either, for a moment's inspection gratifies us, and we tire of them quickly.

It is an inherent peculiarity I dare say, and most certainly a harmless one. We all have it to some extent. I will admit that it has its abuses like all other innocent things, that it is often a powerful channel for individual venom and an incentive to the emptiest vanity. There are women I know, who buy bonnets on purpose to vex Mrs. Jones, their rival neighbor, and I have seen Mrs. Parvenue, time and again, indulging a magnificent caprice with some rare luxury, upon which straitened aristocracy was bestowing covetous and admiring glances. Our daily observations confirm the fact that feather brained _protegees_ of fortune, expend much wealth, and flaunt much finery for the passive pleasure of being looked at with wonder by a struggling gentility; and the essence of their gratification, virtually lies in the consciousness that they are provoking a scrutiny, at least, from better-bred people not in possession of such solid wealth as affords them these material comforts.

All this however is an abuse, the offspring of most sordid and contemptible motives. It is the unmistakable brand of the plebeian, and compromises the one who favors it, beyond amendment. It is well to mention it, however, for there are persons of limited observation, and there must needs be persons of a limited experience at all times who, for want of knowing the whole truth, will be tempted to pass a comprehensive general verdict where a particular one only is deserved. It is the misfortune of good to be counterfeited by a simpering evil which works its wonders among the uninitiated, and for this reason, it is not injudicious to openly discuss both sides of a question before adopting a partiality for either one.

When however as in our case, the pleasure is equally divided between the owner of the fine things and the one who appreciates them, there is a possibility of spending a very happy hour in their inspection. When one is free, as I was, to take up each pretty trinket separately and tell its little story to an attentive ear and a sympathetic heart, the circumstance becomes quite propitious for an interchange of friendly confidences, as we shall see.

I had opened and closed more than a dozen jewel-cases. I had revealed to my friend's devouring gaze, my newest acquisitions in silver and gold, and how earnestly she had admired them all. It was refreshing to me to watch her as she clasped my bracelets on her slender wrists, and hung my ear rings from her delicate little ears; now exclaiming over the novelty of one, now listening eagerly to the whispered account about another. At last we had emptied out the great box that held all

these little cases of morocco and plush, and putting them back one by one, I turned the tiny key in its tiny lock, and opening my trunk lodged it safely inside. Hortense was sitting beside me still, pouring out a volley of impulsive praise upon what I had just shown her, and as I raised the lid of my trunk, with the privilege of an intimate friend she leaned over and peeped curiously in.

"What is in that red case there Amey?" she asked half timidly, then looking apologetically into my face added: "You see my curiosity is not satisfied yet."

"That is my ivory-covered prayer-book I told you of," said I, drawing it from its seclusion and laying it in her lap. "I seldom use it, it is too showy."

"It is very handsome" she muttered under her breath. "From your father," she continued, speaking to herself, "a Christmas gift. How lovely!"

She put it gently back in its padded holder, and returned it to me. Then peeping into the open trunk once more she said

"Don't be cross, old woman, I want to know all your things, so that I could recognize them any where again. I like them, chiefly because they belong to you. What is in that Japanese box over there?"

"Oh, that is not worth showing you," I said, with a smile of ridicule. "I keep all my odds and ends there, broken and old-fashioned trinkets. It is a very uninteresting heap, I assure you."

"I don't care," she persisted obstinately. "You must let me see them. I like old broken stuff, it will be a change from all the finery I have been feasting on."

"Well, if you will, you will I suppose, you tantalising child!" I exclaimed in mock resignation, dragging out the shabby receptacle upon which lingered the faint outlines of Japanese ladies in brilliant costumes.

"I hope you will like the contents," I remarked derisively, handing her the box. "While you are improving your mind studying them, I shall just restore some order to these dilapidated quarters," I said, as I turned around towards my neglected dressing table that was reduced to a most confusing state of chaos.

The fragments rattled and clinked awhile between her busy fingers, and then were silent. I was so occupied with my new purpose that I did not notice the stillness at first, but suddenly I looked around in questioning scrutiny. The box lay on the floor beside her, unheeded. Between her fingers was some small, shining thing, upon which her eyes were fastened greedily. While I stood watching her, she turned her head slowly round and in a quiet, almost supplicating, tone said,

"Amey, come here."

I went and knelt beside her, laying one arm fondly around her neck.

"What do you want?" I asked, hardly noticing what she held in one slender palm.

"Where did you get this Amey? Do you mind telling me?"

She looked up into my face as she spoke, with such pleading sorrowful eyes, that I snatched the trinket impulsively from her and turned it over in my own hand.

It was the forgotten locket I had found in the library on that March afternoon before the Merivales' musical. A change passed over my own face at sight of it, and it was with some agitation I answered Hortense's timid question:

"It is a strange thing how you came by this. I have never seen it but once, the night I found it, until now."

"You found it then," she murmured slowly with her eyes still buried in my face. "Have you ever opened it?"

I laughed dryly and said, "It is a queer thing, isn't it, but I never have."

"Open it now," she interrupted seriously. I took it between my fingers and after repeated efforts managed to open it. There were two small photographs inside. One was Ernest Dalton's--and the other was mine!

A crimson flush deluged my face and neck, my hand trembled and the locket fell into Hortense's lap. She raised her solemn eyes now grown sadder and more solemn than ever, and said in a voice more plaintive and pleading than any voice I ever heard before,

"Then you know him?"

I was mystified. I could hardly remember afterwards what I had answered to her strange question. I think I said in a seemingly indifferent voice,

"Is it Mr. Dalton?"

But I know she looked at me with an expression of infinite reproachful longing and asked,

"Have you a doubt of it?"

"But I never gave him a picture of mine," I argued, "and moreover, I never had pictures taken like this one. If it is he, where did he get this, and why did he put it here?"

She shot a wincing, suspicious glance at me from under her white lids and repeated huskily,

"You never gave him this picture?"

"On my word, I did not Hortense," I answered. "How could I? It never belonged to me. I never saw it in my life until this moment. We cannot be sure that it is my portrait."

"Look at those eyes and that mouth, and the hair waving over that brow," she muttered, half in soliloquy, with her gaze still bent upon the mysterious locket. "Of course it is you, Amey Hampden, and no one

else."

"Well, it is a dark puzzle to me," I said, "and I wish I could explain it."

Then suddenly remembering the other strange feature of the circumstance, I turned impulsively to Hortense and observed:

"I did not know that you and Mr. Dalton were friends. I never heard him mention your name."

"Nor did I know that you and he were friends," she interrupted, a little incisively, I thought. "I never heard him mention your name."

"That is strange" said I, "for he has known me from my infancy. I have sat upon Mr. Dalton's knee time and again, listening to his thrilling anecdotes and telling him my petty confidences."

"Have you?" very indifferently.

"Yes, and that is why I am morally certain this picture can in no way be associated with me, for there is no reason why Mr. Dalton should have one and keep it secret. Besides, I ought to know" I argued warmly, "whether I had ever had such pictures taken, and whether he had been given one or not."

"Well it is very like you, Amey," Hortense resumed in a more calm and friendly tone "So much so, that when I saw you for the first time at Notre Dame Abbey, I recognized you from this."

"Oh then you have seen this before," I exclaimed.

A deep, red shadow flitted across her face for one moment and she answered timidly.

"Yes, he showed it to me, but when I met you I could not remember where it was I had seen your face before. It troubled me then, and it has often puzzled me since. Now, the whole mystery is solved" she said, rising from her lowly seat, and going towards the window. She still held the locket in one open palm, and I know she muttered, half audibly, as she turned away

"Who else could it be?"

From that moment Hortense was not the same. She tried hard to appear her old self. She even laughed and chatted more merrily than ever, but I felt rather than saw the difference. There was some undertone of mystery about this affair, that she was striving to hide from me, and that conviction built up an ugly barrier between our hitherto unswerving loves. I had never broached any subject to her that required to be spoken of reservedly or discreetly. I would not have had her know that secrets should exist between us, and therefore I could not help feeling the sting of these unfortunate circumstances that had been so strongly evolved out of chance.

Of one thing I was certain that Hortense did not look upon Earnest Dalton as an ordinary friend or acquaintance. Ordinary friends have not the same influence over us as he seemed to exercise over her. We do not blush at the mention of their names, nor are we agitated by

every little reminder of their lives or persons. We can think of them without a far-away look in our eyes, and can speak of them without a tremor in our voice or a sudden change of expression in our countenance.

"If she loves him" said I, in my reverie, that night, and why should she not, it is no wonder that this strange likeness should be disagreeable to her. It has given me some pleasure to see this thing that only looks like me so carefully stowed away in his locket. There is every reason why the same discovery should grieve her--if she cares for him.

I then went back in memory to that dull March afternoon, I had passed in quiet reflection before the library fire. How vividly it all rose up before me. My sudden awakening from a stupid slumber, my firm conviction that some one else was in the room, my timid whispering question, the tinkling sound of something falling upon the floor, and my subsequent surprise on finding this queer, unfamiliar trinket lying at my feet. Now that it was proven to be Ernest Dalton's, the mystery was thicker than ever. How had it come there? I asked myself this perplexing question over and over again. Perhaps it had been lying in the folds of the upholstery for days or months, and that by chance I had disturbed it when I threw myself wearily upon the sofa. Mr. Dalton often came to sit and talk with my father of an evening when we were out. In fact we were never surprised to see him drop in at any moment, and it was quite likely, I concluded, that he had lost the little ornament without knowing it, and as no one of the household had made mention of it to him, as they would have done had it been found, he evidently thought it useless to speak about it under the circumstances, and out of his silence and mine grew this new aspect of affairs.

Satisfied with the probability of this solution, I dismissed the first view of the subject and gave my thought and attention to that other more interesting one, which compromised, to all appearances, my little friend's affections. There was no doubting her sentiment. All the artful veneering she could ever put upon her words or actions had no power to deceive me. There was no indifference in her indifferent attitudes, none at least that was real. Who could tell better than I, who had myself gone through the ordeal? I knew too well what the nature of such a conflict was, not to have detected its workings when they were going on under my very eyes. Besides, was there not some strange new feeling awakened within my own breast, by this unexpected turn of the tide; and was I not striving to guard it and hide it, maybe as vainly as my friend, for all I knew.

I had been making vague conjectures about Ernest Dalton for some time, wooing the possibility if not the probability of being more closely associated with his life some day, than I was at this period. His words had always an underlying signification for me apart from that which any casual listener would detect, and I had studied him so! Every outline of his face and figure was engraven upon my memory, the very curves of his ears, the shape of his figure, the form of his eye-brows, the fit of his collar, the pattern of his neck-ties, all were quite familiar to me. I had taken a pleasure in noticing them, and a still greater pleasure in telling them to myself over and over again. Surely then, he was more to me than all those other people who came and went and left not a trace of their personality inscribed upon my mind or heart. In spite of my wilful protestations, and avowals of

indifference, I must have been living all along in the fetters of happy slavery, else, why so many fond recollections of a past that was, after all, but the interesting progress of a prosy human life?

It takes very little to settle our doubts sometimes, and rudely awaken us from dreams and fancies that have colored our idle hours with a tinge of exquisite gladness. The best of us are jealous in the abstract, though even in words and deeds we are above the paltry passion; and the fear that, while we are holding our idol at a distance the better to feast our eyes upon the beauty of its form, intruders are creeping dangerously near to it is enough to stimulate us to prompt action.

We make a rush forward to seize our treasure and bear it triumphantly away where no one dares to trespass. But Mr. Dalton had not sanctioned nor encouraged such a regard for me, and I was proud, more than anything else, more proud than loving, more proud than persevering. For my own peace of mind I would not stop to analyse my real feeling towards him. A passive friendship seemed to satisfy him, why should it not also satisfy me? He saw that Arthur Campbell showed a preference for me and might seriously engage my affections at any moment. But he did not care evidently. Perhaps he thought he was too old; maybe he was poor, maybe he was not sure of a return of love from me? Did this uncertainty justify him? Not in my eyes. Faint heart never won fair lady. A man who "never tells his love" cannot be judged by the same standard as the pensive maid who lets

"Concealment like a worm i' the bud Feed on her damask cheek."

If I were a man, I would win the object of my love in spite of destiny herself, and therefore have I little faith in timid hearts that shrink from such impediments as inevitably obstruct that course that never does run smooth.

The man who loves a woman as a true woman deserves to be loved, will never give her a second place in his regard before the world. We have nothing to be ashamed of in our honest loves and therein lies a rigid test. It is true that in our day it makes a great difference to us whether certain persons attract the potent attention of fashion's votaries or not. A plain face, or an awkward gait, or an eccentric manner, can turn the tide of a whole human life; for such superficial irregularities have proved many a time to be a stumbling block to our most willing affections, when we could have loved and cherished a soul were it not for these accidents of the flesh: an uncouth demeanor, an unpolished exterior, an old fashioned accent, or something just as trifling which our modern propriety ridicules. It has come to this, I know, in our times, that the world expects an explanation or an apology of some kind, when people of social standing allow themselves to be wooed and won by persons whose lives are not regulated according to the popular taste. Men marry beauty and talent and accomplishments as though any of these things were solid enough to maintain their prospective fortunes and women betroth themselves to men and manners, and are satisfied that if they have nothing to eat, they will always have something to look at. The great majority of rejected men in the higher walks of civilization, as the word is used in our day, are whole-souled fellows, whose clothes have the misfortune to fit awry, whose shoes are clumsy, and whose ways are natural. It omens ill for the human race that in spite of its much vaunted development and progress, there should be such a mental poverty and moral weakness

prevailing among the representative classes. It is nothing else than a serious reflection upon this self-glorifying century of ours, to note how subservient our people are to harmful, social regulation, and how indifferent they have become to those moral restrictions that encroach upon the liberty of these questionable conventionalities.

These, however, are not the people that are ever associated with the mention of the nobler and grander phases of human life. We pity them for sacrificing their better selves to so thankless and perishable a cause, and we would redeem them by gentle persuasion if they were willing, but there are aspects of the situation upon which our eager solicitude may not trespass, and having reached this limit we must turn away with a shrug of the shoulders and leave them to their own hazardous guidance.

Ernest Dalton was not one of these, although he happened to be markedly favored by persons of every distinction and rank. He was received with a smile and a pleasant greeting wherever he went. He had won the goodwill of social, political and scientific magnates, and yet it could not be said of him, as of many another such luminary, that he paid too dear for his whistle. He had not purchased his popularity with servile adulation and at a sacrifice of his own personal dignity. The smiles of the world are too transient and uncertain to repay one for such a compromising tribute, especially when we can provoke them in a worthier and more respectful manner. I doubt, however, if ever a laurel-crown were worn more comfortably than Ernest Dalton could have worn his.

And yet he was a very plain man, who spoke with an ordinary accent, who wore unfashionable clothes, who never boasted of pedigree, but who earned a distinct individuality about with him though he never intruded it upon others. He was affable and agreeable without that exaggeration of either quality which spends itself in profuse laudation of social comets. He was a favorite but not a parasite, and could lay his hand sincerely upon the clumsy waistcoat that sheltered his sterling heart and say to that world of artifice and cunning. _Non serviam._

Surely if it is possible to extract any sweetness from a world-given fame or distinction, it is when that world has thrust it on us, and not when we have begged and striven and pined for it, and bribed hidden forces to unite in supporting and advocating our cause. There is no flavor to the cup of fortune when we have used our fellow-mortals as stepping-stones to the rank or wealth which brings us within reach of it.

It may seem that I had an exaggerated view of Mr. Dalton's standing in society, but it was the popular view that every one fostered, and could not, therefore, be magnified by my personal appreciation of his true worth. I had always admired him, even before I began to think of him in any particular way, the thought that he had been one of the few kind patrons of my neglected youth, seemed to bring him yet nearer to my deepest regard as I grew older.

But he had changed with my life. He was not now what he had been in my younger days. No one would have thought, to watch us together or listen to our aimless conversation, that we had ever been more than ordinary acquaintances. This vexed me. I wanted him to show me more attention on account of our long-standing relationship. I thought he

could have presumed upon our early friendship to call me by name before strangers, or in some way insinuate that I was more to him than all that motley crowd of fashionable humanity that flitted and buzzed around us.

Ah! there are many such petty needs as this gnawing at our poor, dissatisfied hearts. Things are going wrong on all sides of us, and the beautiful harmonious mechanism of life that enthusiasts sing about, seems nothing but a helpless repetition of jarring discords for some of us. The circumstances of our varied experience do not fit into the places allotted them, and we find ourselves often in false and painful positions, with no alternative but to endure patiently or peevishly what men call the inevitable.

If only we did not wish so ardently for those things that may not be! Why does not the human heart control itself with some philosophy that can despoil forbidden fruit of all its tempting qualities? Why need we covet probabilities that may never be nearer to realization than they are now?

This sort of reasoning had helped me in some measure to combat the worrying dissatisfaction that threatened to preside over what should be the happiest epoch my life. I drifted into a voluntary forgetfulness of old associations. I stifled the suggestive voice of memory, and since this is the way of the world, thought I, let me subscribe to its profane regulations as well as the rest. I will be the plaything of chance, and risk my lot for better or worse.

But here was an impediment, already, which awakened the long dormant memories of my past. Here was something that needed investigation, and might possibly in its issue, interfere with my worldly-wise policy. I could not tell yet, but the time must come now when these vagaries would end in one thing or another.

With these conflicting reflections storming my pillow, I fell asleep. My mind was tired, and I slept the heavy, dreamless slumber of exhaustion. When I awoke again it was morning, although it seemed to me, I had but a moment before turned over and closed my drooping eyes.

I arose and dressed abstractedly and went in search of Hortense. We were to have breakfast in her room, she informed me, as she was feeling unusually lazy. I looked at her curiously and saw less color and freshness in her cheeks, less sparkle and vigor in her eyes.

"You are sure it is laziness, Hortense?" I asked leaning over her, and touching my lips to hers.

"Why, of course it is," she answered, stretching her arms drowsily over her head and laughing lazily. "You have all been so good to me, that I feel quite spoiled," she added, rising slowly and coming towards the dainty, impromptu breakfast-table which had been set for us, near the open window. Our meal proceeded in subdued gaiety. We talked and laughed about many things, as if neither heart was busy with other and deeper reflections, and we did not fail to do justice to the tempting provisions before us.

When the meal was over Hortense said

"I do not like the way you have dressed your hair this morning Amey,

you do not look like yourself at all."

I laughed and answered indifferently

"Oh! it will do well enough. What difference does it make?"

"Well, it does make a difference, Miss!" she broke in with playful emphasis. "It makes the difference that I am going to do it over. Come into the dressing-room and I will make a perfect beauty of you. You shall see."

I arose and followed her into the adjoining room, where she placed two seats before a long mirror that reached nearly to the floor. Mine was a low footstool, and hers a padded chair. I threw myself down at her feet, and drawing out my hairpins gave myself up entirely to the gratification of her latest caprice.

Very soon her old humor broke out in merry little peals of laughter, as she turned me into a Japanese or Feejee Islander, by appropriate arrangements of my plentiful hair; or her old partiality asserted itself as she praised my flowing tresses and made me assume attitudes that were peculiar to the representation of Faith or Undine.

"Oh! now you look like pictures of Mary Magdalene!" she exclaimed suddenly, as I stooped to pick something off the floor. "Stay that way just for a moment. I hear *_la bonne_* coming and I want her to see you. Here she is." There was a hurried tap at the door and *_la bonne_* came in, with a face so full of purpose that we forgot our fanciful amusement. She advanced towards me with a little folded paper which she held out saying

"Mademoiselle, c'est un telegram!"

It was probably from Mde de Beaumont, I thought, announcing her return, and quietly signing the necessary paper, I tore open the sealed message and read it.

The room began to turn about me. The words grew blurred before my eyes I raised my hands in distraction to my head and fell sobbing on Hortense's knees.

"Amey, dear Amey, what is the matter?" She cried, eagerly bending over me with quick starting tears of sympathy in her eyes.

"My father!" I moaned, "my poor father!"

"Is he ill or what? Do tell me what ails him Amey?"

"Worse than that, he is dying," I sobbed out convulsively. "He will be dead before I get back. Oh! What will I do!"

"Do not cry so, Amey dear," Hortense interrupted faintly. "It may not be so bad as you think; These telegrams always sound so blunt and dreadful. While there's life, there's hope, you know. Come and get ready immediately, time is your best friend now."

I took her arm and went passively with her to my own room. Her fortitude sustained me greatly. I rolled my flowing hair up again carelessly enough, God knows, this time, and began my preparations for

my sorrowful journey home.

Hortense talked to me all the time and kept my own maddening thoughts at bay. I gathered together only those things I would urgently require, and gave her my keys to attend to all the rest when I was gone.

In an hour from the time I had received the dreadful intelligence of my father's sudden and serious illness, I was taking leave of Hortense, with a bitter sorrow and fear within my heart.

"Good-bye Amey, and may God bless and comfort you!" she said reverently, with both hands clasped about my neck, "and remember," she added, kissing away my fast falling tears, "if ever you have need of a friend to love you, or serve you, or comfort you, you must come to me, will you not Amey? tell me you will."

"You are very kind Hortense," I answered in a broken sob, "some day I may have cause to remember these words."

"And you will act upon them, Amey? Will you not?" she put in eagerly. "Can you doubt that my heart will ever be a refuge for you? If you think anything of me you will make me this promise before we part."

I looked steadily at her through all my blinding tears, and saw the hallowed light of the noblest and most generous human sympathy reflected on her wasted countenance. I could never doubt her again, no matter what strange or suspicious things came to pass. I took her thin, warm hands in mine and answered firmly:

"I promise you, Hortense, when I need the love and devotion of sustaining friendship, I shall come to you. Good-bye!"

And then we parted.

I stopped on my way to the depot to send a telegram to Mde. de Beaumont, apprising her of the cause of my enforced departure, and entreating her to come home as soon as possible lest Hortense should have another attack of illness. Having discharged this duty, I gave myself up entirely to my own sad thoughts.

CHAPTER XI.

It was evening when the train reached my destination, a quiet, pleasant, Autumn evening. The tinted leaves were stirring gently on the boughs, and here and there an early star was twinkling in the dusky vault above me. As soon as the noise and tumult had abated a little, I arose and sauntered slowly towards the doorway of the now deserted car. On the platform outside stood Mr. Dalton and Freddy, looking anxiously at the passengers as they filed out from each exit.

Freddy saw me first and cried out impulsively. "Here she is!"

Mr. Dalton turned quickly around and hurried towards me.

"What is the news?" I asked, studying both their faces. "Is he dead?"

"No Amey," Mr. Dalton answered with a voice of deep sympathy, "it is not so bad as that, though he is very ill indeed!"

"Thank God!" I muttered, "I shall see him and speak to him then after all."

I got into the carriage with them and drove towards home. Mr. Dalton did not wait for me to question him, but began to tell me the sad story of my father's sudden prostration, as soon as the horses' heads were turned away from the noisy depot.

He had been sitting with him the night before, he said, and they talked quite cheerfully as usual over their cigars. "He had even been quizzing me as an old bachelor," Mr. Dalton observed, with a faint smile, "telling me I had wasted my life in solitude, and all that kind of thing. It was a fine night and we sat smoking and chatting until it was quite late, when suddenly I looked at my watch and started up. It was near midnight."

"Although I have no one to scold me for keeping late hours," said I, "I must hurry away now; it is time for respectable Christians to be dreaming."

"And are you a respectable Christian, Dalton?" he interrupted, playfully.

"Well I might be worse," said I.

"Yes yes, old fellow, that's true" he answered, "I wish more of us were like you. You're a good fellow Dalton," he continued, rising up and slapping me vigorously on the shoulders.

With this we shook hands and bade one another goodnight. I lit a fresh cigar and went out by the library door. There was a bright moonlight outside, and I sauntered quietly down the causeway towards the street beyond. I had just reached the gate when I heard Mrs. Hampden's screams in the distance. I listened and heard her call my name. I flung down my cigar and rushed back towards the library. The door was open and your father was lying on the floor with his eyes closed. I persuaded them all to be quiet, for the servants, and Mrs. Hampden, and Fred here had all rushed frantically in. We despatched a messenger immediately for the doctor and in a little while we had the patient removed to his room, where he now lies. "We are awaiting a crisis" he added in a low tone, as we drew up in front of our doomed house, "the doctor says nine hours will bring one change or another."

We stepped out of the vehicle and passed quietly in. Not a sound was audible anywhere. I went up to my own familiar, little room, and flung my hat and other out-door apparel listlessly upon the bed. I bathed my eyes and smoothed my hair, before going out to encounter any one of the household. In the dimly lighted hall outside, I met old Hannah, who dropped her apron from her eyes at my approach and whispered:

"The Lord be praised, Miss Amelia but I am glad to see you back. How do you feel yourself?"

"Oh! I am all right Hannah" I answered, "but how is poor papa, will he ever get better?"

"God is good Miss Amelia and he does what's best" she put in vaguely, "when our time comes, you know, the best of us has to go. It's right to be prepared for the worst, for the will of God must be our will too."

Her words brought the hot, blinding tears into my eyes again.

"Can I go to him?" I asked, leaning towards her, "Could I speak to him, would he know me?"

She shook her head silently for a moment and then said:

"The doctor will be here in half an hour or so, perhaps he'd let you in to see him when he comes. In the meantime" she added, "come down and eat a bit, for I am sure you don't look much too well yourself."

"What doctor have you?" I asked after a moment's reflection.

"Well, there's two, you know," she answered me gravely, "but Dr Campbell comes the oftenest. Dr. Jasper and himself came together last night but he's been here twice to-day already. Oh! he's been so kind and attentive Miss Amelia, it would do you good to see him."

I changed the subject by asking bluntly, "Where's Mrs. Hampden?"

Hannah hesitated a moment and moved towards the stair.

"She's lying down" she said, "the shock's made her weak."

I followed and we descended into the dining-room below. Some tea things were spread out upon a tray and Hannah brought in the urn. I sat down and resting my elbows carelessly on the table, I buried my face in my hands. With a strict injunction to take some supper Hannah left me, having various duties to perform outside. The strong aroma of the freshly-made tea was almost enough to satisfy me. At any rate I did not pour out any immediately. I was too tired, too dazed, too everything to exert myself in anyway. My head was still unsteady from the motion of the car. My eyes burned from the bitter tears I had shed. My lips were parched, and dry, and feverish, my temples throbbed with a dull oppressive pain, and my heart was very heavy. I heaved a deep unsuppressed sigh which died away into a plaintive moan. My lids closed wearily and two large hot tears fell upon the smooth white linen table-cloth.

"Amey, my poor child," said someone, laying a heavy hand upon one of my shoulders. I started and raised my eyes involuntarily. Mr. Dalton was standing by my chair looking down upon me with an infinite pity in his face.

"I thought no one was here" I said coldly. "When did you come in?"

He did not answer me with words but I shall never forget the way he looked when I asked this unfeeling question. His reproachful glance brought the color to my pale cheeks. I felt ashamed and sorry for having spoken thus, and I sought to excuse myself in a measure by

saying, "I feel so wearied and distracted, I hardly know what I am doing."

"Drink a cup of tea, it will refresh you," he said with much deep solicitude in his voice.

He poured it out himself and laid it down beside me. It was an action as gentle and graceful as any woman's. Through all my grief and fatigue, I could not but notice it.

I took it from him and sipped it obediently, while he, with his hands thrust into his pockets, walked up and down the room in silent meditation. Before I had finished, the door opened again and Freddy appeared saying:

"Doctor Campbell is with my father now. He has asked to see you."

Remembering Hannah's words that he might allow me to talk a little to my father, I jumped from my seat at the sound of this intelligence and hurried after Freddy.

Mr. Dalton held the door open for me as I passed, and though he spoke not a word, I knew immediately that he had put a wrong construction upon my eager response to this summons. It was not a time for explanations, however, and I hastened past him and up the broad stairway outside.

At the door of the sick-room Doctor Campbell stood waiting for me. He put out both hands eagerly and clasped mine. When we are condoling with one another in such hours as this, we throw off the restraint of conventionality and stand before one another, as two human souls, bound by the holy ties of an earnest sympathy; the question of ordinary decorum becomes suspended, while we weep with our afflicted brother and sister, and we call one another tenderly and respectfully by name, though the next moment we must be distant and reserved as before.

Doctor Campbell led me quietly into the room where my father lay prostrate, the victim of a dreadful illness. There was hardly any change discernible in his placid features, only a haggard line about his mouth that told of inward pain and struggle. His face was a little flushed and his breathing labored. He opened his eyes so, we approached the bed and smiled at me. Doctor Campbell seeing that he recognized me stole from the room and left us alone.

"Poor Amey!" Were the first faint words he uttered closing his eyes wearily again.

"Do you feel any better?" I asked bending over him and touching my lips to his brow.

He shook his head on the pillow and muttered feebly:

"It's all over with me, child, only a matter of time."

"Maybe not, father" I argued, but with little confidence. There was something ominous in his changed expression, something that smote my heart with a solemn fear as I looked with anxious scrutiny upon him. I stole from the room for a moment, and went in search of Doctor

Campbell. He was in the library standing before the book shelves when I entered.

"I want to know Doctor," said I, full of my purpose, "whether my father is in danger of immediate death."

He started at my question and turned quickly around.

"I am afraid that his chances of life are few indeed Amey," he answered earnestly. "Perhaps it is as well to let you know."

"It is better" said I, "it is your duty," and with these words I left the room as abruptly as I had entered it.

It was indeed his duty, for it concerned the destiny of a human soul that was soon to pass from time into eternity. My father was really dying, and every moment was of infinite value to him now. As soon as this terrible realization was thrust upon me, I dried my eyes deliberately, and calmed my agitated feelings. There will be plenty of time for grief afterwards, I said to myself, when I am friendless and alone in the world.

No one had thought of caring for my poor father's spiritual needs in this awful hour. My step-mother considered her best was done when the services of two able medical men had been secured, and no one else wished to make any delicate suggestions while she was assuming the management. I had arrived therefore in the nick of time, for before the sun was very high in the heavens on the morning following my return, my father lay cold and white upon his bed.

All night long, I had watched and prayed with him. Now and then his feeble voice broke forth in earnest responses, as his dim gaze fell upon the bronze crucifix I had placed between his fingers, and once when I had paused to listen to his breathing, he uttered plaintively: "More, Amey, go on."

How I thanked God for this favor! I, who had prayed so often on bended knees and with tearful eyes for the ultimate conversion of my father. When I placed the lighted candle in his dying hand and saw him receive the last rites of Holy Church, I felt that all the gloom and sorrow of my heart had been lifted and dispelled in a moment.

When the gray of the early morning crept in through the latticed window, his eye-lids drooped slowly and shut the things of earth from his mortal gaze forever.

His lips trembled with a final effort. "Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy," and with the words "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit!" his last breath was spent, and his voice echoed into eternity.

CHAPTER XII.

It was easy for us to understand the cause of my father's sudden illness and death, when we came to enquire into our financial condition. The family treasury had been well-nigh emptied of its contents, by a series of pecuniary losses that had been sustained unknown to us by my unfortunate father previous to his demise. He had risked his money with good motives and a hopeful outlook, but the realization had brought such a merciless contradiction to his sanguine expectations that he gave way under the cruel and unlooked for blow, and passed out of the medley and confusion in which he had been thrown by Fate to grope his way unaided and alone. Although we were no longer what the world calls rich, we were by no means left destitute or poor. We were, of course, called upon by the exigencies of our altered circumstances to make many sacrifices. As this was an inevitable necessity, it was as well for us to put our shoulders bravely and generously to the wheel and accept the decree with a respectful resignation. "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away" and men's defiant or wailing attitudes under an unexpected visitation of adversity only re-act to their own ultimate prejudice and do not lessen the heavy burden by a feather-weight.

My step-mother took a rather sensible though worldly view of her position. She silently resolved that if abnegation were at all compulsory, and sacrifices demanded by the new tide of affairs, they would of course be practised, but not where the eye of curious pity could penetrate.

The world, that had honored and respected her as the wife of a wealthy man, should never through any fault of hers gain an insight into her reversed fortunes. This very consciousness, that she had the scrutinizing eye of society to deceive and a deep misery to veneer with smooth words and a false glitter, that a fashionable pity had to be defied and coldly rejected, lent her a heroic fortitude, schooled her to a forbearance worthy of less sordid motives and flavoured her very misfortunes with a vital determination that half-soothed the pain they naturally inflicted.

In the first sad hours of our bereavement we were comforted and consoled by many friends. I believe that my father was universally mourned as a good citizen, of sterling worth; he had been no man's enemy, and had served a goodly number of his fellow-creatures nobly and generously, without ostentation or self-glory. He was ever a careful and indulgent, though not an affectionate parent, and now that he was gone I could afford to interpret his indifference, even in this way, in a new and more partial manner. He had had no conception of what the needs of a clinging, susceptible heart may be, and transgressed entirely out of his ignorance and not through any wilful intent to make his coldness or carelessness keenly felt.

We never know what our true estimate of any one is until he or she has been removed beyond the power of our amending or repentant love. If such a one be called beyond that bourne whence there is no coming back, how soft, and hallowed, and subdued a light is shed by our tender, respectful, and sorrowing memory upon what once had been incentives to our unforgiving and deeply injured pride. If such a one be cast by accident of circumstances or fate so far away from the yearning glance of our regretful eyes, so far beyond that pass, where pleading, human voices become lost in thousand-tongued confusions, how changed the once bright picture of our lives becomes; how vain and purposeless all other aims, save that which, with the powerful

strength of a hope that is half despair, pursues the object of our rash unkindness, with outstretched hands and plaintive tone, beseeching for a pardon that may never greet our mortal ears? I, who had lived an obstinate alien from the love and devotion of my parent, who never went outside the narrow, rigid circle of my unyielding pride to tempt or merit his regard, now felt a great void left within my heart which nothing on earth could ever fill again.

When the veil of my former prejudice was rent asunder, and I could only see the still white features and the folded hands of him from whose timid love I had become a voluntary exile, how I hated the sensitive young heart that had turned away in cold rebellion, when its duty was to glow with an undaunted, even servile fidelity.

Perhaps it was because I found myself so utterly alone, for this death closed up the narrow by-ways of mutual sympathy that had ever existed between the widowed Mrs. Hampden and myself. An elder brother of hers had come to attend her husband's funeral, and had evinced the deepest and most exclusive solicitude and compassion for her in her bereavement. He took an intense interest in Fred, holding him at arm's length for a flattering inspection of his physical perfections, and looked upon me as some curious outside appendage to the family pretensions.

They revelled in one another's sustaining sympathy and love, holding confidential councils by themselves for hours at a time in my late father's library. I was not intruded upon in my early grief by their condolences or companionship, they left me uninterrupted to my broodings and my tears, as if I had not the same right to the privileges of investigating our altered affairs as they.

Oh, how slow and how weary are those moments of solitary anguish, when the great tide of universal sympathy is ebbing from us in our grief! How oppressive the silence of suffering when no soothing accent of tender and comforting encouragement breaks upon our listening, impatient ears! How feeble the heart when no helping hand is nigh! How cheerless the prospect upon which the smile of a sustaining love has ceased to play!

About a fortnight after the funeral, on a gloomy October day, as I sat by the window in the privacy of my own room, looking out at falling leaves, and fading flowers, and drifting clouds, old Hannah rapped timidly at the door and informed me that "Mrs. Hampden and the gentleman would like to see me down stairs."

I arose listlessly and sauntered down to the library where they had all three been just assembled in solemn conclave. My step-mother, in her fresh black costume and stiff white cap, was seated in a rocking chair near the door, wearing a placid look of the most harmless and innocent neutrality: her solicitous brother occupied the extreme outer margin of a chair by the centre-table, on which his bony hands with their well-trimmed finger nails were modestly resting, becomingly folded. The hind legs of his sparingly patronized seat were thrust into the air by the weight of his high-bred humanity being entirely deposited upon the front ones. Fred occupied the sofa, where he was comfortably stretched at full length, with his arms thrown carelessly over his head which was resting tenderly in his palms.

When I came into the room the three pairs of eyes were simultaneously

turned towards me. My step-mother gave me a gradual look beginning with the hem of my skirts and reaching my serious face by slow degrees. Her solicitous brother, without apology or explanation, lowered his spectacles which, during the family conference, had been shoved up on his capacious brow, and directed an unflinching stare at me in the vicinity of my eyes. Fred, who could not take me all in at once without disturbing himself somewhat, satisfied himself with a full gaze upon as much of my outline as was easily defined in his recumbent attitude.

"Have you sent for me?" I asked, indifferently, not addressing anyone in particular, my aim being merely to break the monotonous silence which prevailed during my inspection.

The solicitous brother dropped his lower jaw as if he intended to answer me, after he had given me to understand that I had either shocked or surprised him very much, or both, and said

"--a--yes, young lady--yes, we have sent for you--a--be seated, young lady, be seated," he continued, disengaging his modest hands from their becoming, mutual clasp, and waving one in a graceful, curved line towards an unoccupied seat in a remote end of the room.

"We think it our duty," he began, in a sepulchral monotone, fastening his spectacles upon me as if he intended to add, "to frighten you out of your very wits," which was a rash presumption on my part, however, for he only said, "to submit to you the result of our careful investigation into the affairs of your late lamented father." I nodded a quiet assent, my step-mother pressed a deep-bordered handkerchief to her eyes, and Fred looked vacantly at the pattern on the wall.

"As you are aware," he continued, clearing his throat which had grown somewhat rusty from his pompous exordium "the late respected gentleman in question did not leave matters in as satisfactory a condition as might have been desired--in fact--eh--well, altogether, the residue of his once considerable fortune makes but a paltry annuity for his bereaved survivors. Were Mrs. Hampden the only claimant she would even then have but a widow's mite, but there are others, unf--others, as you know, these others, ahem, ahem, of course, have a sort of right to a reasonable share, although they have youth and energy on their side, which she has not--however--that is not the point," he put in hastily, as he detected an uneasy gesture from the object of his solicitude. "The subject which we have to submit to your consideration, young lady, is this--we have decided that in her present condition of health and spirits, Mrs. Hampden is unfit to remain here in the gloomy presence of depressing associations--in fact it is a question whether she shall ever be able to resume her domestic duties in this place," here the handkerchief with the deep border was again produced, and the doleful widowed countenance buried in its folds. "We deem it advisable," said the solicitous brother, casting a look of tender, heart-stirring compassion upon his afflicted relative, "to remove her to her native town, where her surroundings will be less suggestive of the recent heavy loss she has been called upon to sustain, and where her crushed energies may regain some of their old buoyancy." The shapely shoulders of the afflicted relative shook with convulsive sobs, after which melancholy interruptions the solicitous brother proceeded in a less feeling and more business-like tone.

"As circumstances have kept you estranged from the friends and

immediate relatives of your late father's surviving wife, we feared you might not be willing to accompany her on this journey. Her son, of course, would not desert her in any case just now but being still under age, must submit himself to her immediate guardianship, therefore, young woman, if you have any particular friends or relatives of your own whom you would like to visit for an indefinite time, we beg that you notify them and prepare yourself as soon as possible. It is Mrs. Hampden's desire that the furniture be disposed of for safe-keeping, and the house carefully locked and secured before her departure; I trust, therefore, that you will not delay in considering the subject, and that you will kindly submit your decision to us as soon as possible."

There was a dead silence for a few moments after this eloquent address.

"Is that all?" I then asked coldly and firmly, rising from my seat, and looking at him straight in the face.

"A--ahem--yes, young lady. I think there is no other point left to be discussed" the solicitous brother simpered, dropping the hind legs of his chair and coming towards the door to escort me, and "I trust you will not experience any inconvenience" he added in a half conciliatory tone--"we lost no time--eh--in making known our decision to you."

"Oh, you are very kind and considerate. I shall always feel deeply indebted to you!" I retorted quietly as I swept past him, out of the room.

I went back to my vacant seat by the window, and threw myself wearily into it--then--it had come to this--that I was politely turned out of my own home with no option, no alternative but to seek whatever shelter I best could find among strangers! It was hard, to be left at the mercy of such a bitter fate as this! So young, so friendless, so proud, and a woman!

I did not burst into tears at the melancholy realization, tears were a mockery then: there was too much fire flaming in my eyes, and boiling my blood with indignation; my bosom heaved with quick-drawn sighs, and my lips were smiling in angry scorn. This, then was the result of their secret conferences, to get rid of me! It was not a difficult task, if they only knew it, for my pride would fight more than half their battles for them, and carry me anywhere, to the farthest corner of the earth, rather than see me trespass upon their privacy or interfere with their selfish plans. I was their toy, their tool, they were not honest enough to challenge me in fair and open combat, they plotted without me, and behind my back, I would not buckle on my sword, for so unworthy an engagement, no matter what the issue cost me. I would let them carry the day. It is the only kind of triumph designing heroes ever know, and we who are above the cowards' subterfuge, can well afford to give them this, we would not have it said, we stood to meet them, lest it might be inferred, that we had come down from the pedestal of our untarnished dignity, to their inglorious level.

But these boisterous reflections soon became spent. I could not afford to be quite so defiant, I, who was alone in the wide world? A serious duty lay before me, the future, with its burden of uncertain sorrows lay at my feet, the past was nothing to me now, but a receding vision

of happiness more secure than any I was ever likely to know again. I must go in search of a home, where would I turn my eyes? North, South, East or West? they were all strange alike to me? I thought of Hortense, and my parting promise to her, but there was no comfort in the remembrance of it now. Any other test of friendship but this! How could I live under one roof with uncongenial souls like Bayard de Beaumont? How did I know whether they would welcome me now, when I was homeless, and in a sense dependent?

I thought of the dear, distant Abbey, where I had passed the happiest days of my not over-happy life--but it was now some years since I had left its safe seclusion, and those who had known me and cared for me, were likely scattered and gone.

I would be greeted with that reserved kindness which good stranger hearts extend to any homeless waif--and that, would be worse than all! I thought of my fashionable companions, who had pampered me, and courted me, in my palmy days. How different they all appeared to me now, when I was in need of their kindness and favour! Alice Merivale was away, pleasuring in England, the Hartmanns! the Hunters! the Pendletons! what a cold shoulder they would turn to me, any of them, did I seek their shelter in comparative poverty!

And even if they welcomed me, and ministered to my every want, could I rest quietly beneath their roofs? Could I subdue my rebellious pride and accept their patronage humbly and gratefully "Ah no," said I, rising up, with a deep-drawn sigh, "I must think of some other plan, none of these would ever do?"

While I was yet standing in deliberation by the window, the door opened softly, and my step-mother glided in. I turned, and looked at her for a moment, as she advanced towards me and then directed my gaze back again in silence to the street below. She came nearer and laid her thin hand upon my shoulder. I recoiled involuntarily.

"Amey" she began in the gentle tones of an eager peace maker, "I have come to talk to you a little about the subject just mentioned by my brother."

"Is there anything he left out, pray?" I interrupted incisively.

"No," she answered reproachfully, "but you may not understand our motives properly?"

"Through no fault of his then," I muttered half savagely, "he was most explicit, I thought!"

"You are inclined to be unfair to us Amey, and we are trying to do everything for the best," said my step-mother persuasively.

"That depends on what you mean, by _the best_" I interrupted curtly.

"We mean, the welfare of all concerned," she broke in, "my brother insists upon my returning with him, and Freddie will, of course, accompany me. So might you," she added courteously, "but I think it would not be wise. You would not be happy among my relatives, of that I am sure. So we think, that leaving you the option of a choice from among your own numerous friends, is the most discreet policy of all."

"You are very kind," said I, with choking sarcasm, "to have thought of me at all. You might have given me up with the furniture for safe-keeping, or locked me securely away here in the house until your return."

"Don't be so unkind, Amey," my step-mother pleaded amicably, "you ought to know, that I am concerned in your welfare and will not leave here, until I see you comfortably lodged."

"Like the furniture?" said I.

She did not answer this with words, but I felt her scrutinizing look directed full upon me, I knew I was in a most uncharitable and provoking mood, but I was not responsible, heaven knows, for what I said or did under such maddening influences. I did not want to give full vent to my momentary hatred and indignation, and as my step mother's attitude was tempting me strongly to indulge both, I turned, and said as calmly as I could:

"Have you anything in particular to say to me, that I have not heard before? If not, I think we had better separate!"

"I thought you would not object to discuss our projected plans, a little, with me," she answered with a subdued peevishness. "If you were not so cold and proud, I would like to offer you a few suggestions and in some way prove to you, that my guardianship, limited though it may be, is not merely a formal responsibility."

"What would you have me do?"

"I can't say definitely--but if you would only rouse yourself to a full realization of your position, there is a great deal in your power to do. You are an orphan now, and reject my authority in every way--it is evident that we can never be friends. Why don't you look about you, for love and devotion that will make a happy substitute for what you have lost? You are no longer a child; you are quite able to face the more serious responsibilities of life. If you gave your present attention to this, there would be no necessity for your going among strangers."

"If I gave my attention to what?" I interrupted sullenly.

"You understand me very well--if you wished, you could make yourself very comfortable. Some of the best chances which the city affords are within your reach; other girls would not need to have them pointed out so."

"I suppose you mean marriage!" I said indifferently. "Well, there is just this difference between me and other girls, on this point, I shall never choose matrimony as the lesser of two evils. I shall never seek it as a refuge, nor grasp it as a ready alternative; I have been brought up to look upon it as a sacrament, of course, I must allow for that," I added pointedly.

"That is a very high-sounding principle indeed," she replied, "but it can hardly be applied just now. You can't help the issues of fate, and if you were worthy of men's special admiration and love before this, I suppose a change in your condition, or in the outward circumstances that affect you but indirectly, can make no difference--" She stopped,

and after an effective pause added, "It will make none to Arthur Campbell, anyway, of that I am sure."

"Arthur Campbell has never asked me to become his wife," I broke in emphatically.

"That is your own fault. You have not given him proper encouragement."

"No, because I am not at all certain that I would accept him."

"Then you are a fool," she cried out warmly and indignantly, "and you deserve your lot. He is everything that one could wish, as far as wealth and appearance, and family and rank, are concerned. He was, moreover, a favorite of your poor father's and his friend to the end," she added with a tremulous voice, "and your poor father often spoke of you being married to Arthur Campbell," she continued, persuasively, "I heard him say it time and again."

"My father said this, you are sure," I exclaimed, looking eagerly into her face.

"He did indeed, I remember well having heard him," she answered with deep emphasis.

"But, my father did not know," I began in a low murmur, looking wistfully out at the yellow leaves and fleeting clouds. I stopped suddenly, remembering that I was not alone. Before either of us could speak again Hannah appeared in the doorway with the afternoon mail between her hands.

This interrupted our tete-a-tete. My step-mother took the bundle of letters, from which she handed me three, and went away to share the contents of her own with her sympathetic relatives below. Two of mine were familiar to me; one bearing an English post-mark was from Alice Merivale, the other was Hortense's dear writing.

I tore them open and, resuming my seat, read them leisurely. How different they were in every respect! One the effusion of a worldly, artful, diplomatic beauty, the other an earnest interpretation of the loving, ardent sentiments of a whole-souled emotional child woman.

Alice had not yet heard of my father's death, and her closely-written pages told tales of fashionable pleasures and distractions of every sort. She had yachted and hunted, and bathed and danced, she had dined with the pompous Lord Mayor of London; she had hung on the braided coat sleeve of high military relics of modern antiquity, and had been kissed on both cheeks by all the wrinkled-lipped dowagers of the surrounding country.

She had been riding and driving, eating and drinking, walking and talking, with magnates of every age, sex and condition. "At first it perfectly appalled me, Amey love," she wrote in her strange, facetious way, "none but the upper, upper cream of humanity wherever I went. Of course it is taken for granted that I am worthy of the great privileges extended to me. Everything is so intensely exclusive in this Christian country. People whose hands are soiled with the stain of labour, I don't care how refined or how honest it is, never by any chance find themselves at the mahogany board of aristocracy. Coat-sleeves bearing the finger-marks of honourable industry could not

safely rub against the sleek broadcloth of high-life unless by sacrificing some of their beautiful (?) hieroglyphics and forfeiting to some extent the reputations they have earned and not inherited."

"I wonder what some of these starched patricians would do in our country, Amey? for there respectable commercial industry is wine and dine without question by Her Majesty's worthy representatives, the least evil, I suppose, would be the complete loss of appetite, that would be sure to assail them."

"I can't tell how much longer we may remain here," her interesting letter continued, "Papa is still hopeful of wonderful results, there are some placid suitors going about, loaded with a burden of pedigree and the honours of their dead, and I know that my sanguine parent fondly expects, that he shall awake some morning and find our generation made famous by such a burden being condescendingly laid before my satin slippers. *_Vanitas Vanitatum!_* But, how grand it would be? Picture it, think of it, common place men! Sir Maximus and Lady Adelpait? How would the obscure Miss Hampden, fancy that? To be sure, this indefinite suitor has nought but the borrowed chivalry of his departed ancestors, and if he seek to crown me at all (which is only a heart-rending possibility) it must be with the laurels, hard won by the heroes of a former generation. His silky hands will be full of nothing more tempting than slender veins of genuine blue-blood--but, as papa says--what do we want any more money for, we have enough for any ordinary human life-time?"

"If the project of my anxious parent should assume any definite or reliable outlines, I shall let you know immediately, for I have implicit faith in you, and I know you would never betray me, I must tell my novel experiences and opinions to some one, and the best someone is you. Take every care of yourself, while I am absent, some day you will be coming to my manor-house on a visit. I will try to get a husband who has some unmarried masculine relatives, so as to keep up the fun of my own courtship among my particular girl-friends. I intend to make the most of my life while it lasts, I believe in the world I am most sure of, so don't trouble me with any of your pious lectures, they only upset me, and make me feel very gloomy. Give my love to every one who thinks of asking about me, and write a long, chatty, gossiping letter, very soon to your sincere ALICE."

Her bright, spicy pages had wooed me away from all my gloomy thoughts and surroundings. My tired spirit had flown across the broad Atlantic at sight of her missive, and revelled for a few happy moments, amid phantom pleasures. Now, with her finished letter lying in my listless fingers, upon my lap, I was creeping back to my sorrows from this outward sunshine, that had fallen in a golden flood, upon the dark shadows of my present miseries. The slow awakening to my actual condition reminded me of my third, unnoticed letter. I took it up aimlessly, it was unfamiliar to me, and turned it over in my hand.

"Who is it from?" I muttered in quiet astonishment, tearing the thick envelope across with a half amused curiosity. The reader will not wonder that my curiosity became still more deeply aroused as I took out the neatly folded paper which was enclosed, and read the following--

"MY DEAR AMEY,--I have learned with profound regret of your dear father's recent demise, and hasten to offer you my most earnest

condolence. It is a great grief, I know, but not without its consolations, for it is our beautiful privilege, to live in hope, awaiting the day of a happy re-union with those who are not lost but only gone before.

"In the early hours of our sorrow, no matter what its nature may be, we cannot incline ourselves to look upon the brighter side, which our friends will endeavour to hold up to us; therefore I will not intrude my feeble words of comfort upon you now; my object in writing to you at present is to ask you whether you intend to live on with your father's second wife or not?

"If you should find yourself in any dilemma pertaining to this critical question, I wish you to understand, that my house and home (such as they are) will always be open to you. You have a right to them, and nothing would give me greater pleasure, than to have you with me. In a sense we are strangers, for circumstances have kept us apart, but, I think I love you more dearly than any of those with whose names and lives you are more familiar.

"I am the only surviving relative of your dear, dead mother in this country; our fathers, being brothers, but as I lost mine in my early youth, I was brought up in my uncle's house, with your mother for a little sister.

"It now happens, that you may need the shelter of a real home. I wish I had better to offer you, but such as it is, I beg you will not hesitate to accept it, if it can relieve you from greater discomforts.

"I am, my dear Amey,

"Your loving and sincere cousin,

"BESSIE NYLE."

My hands fell into my lap a second time; I was almost dazed with astonishment. To think that at the very moment when I was puzzling over the melancholy enigma, of where to find a home whose shelter could be both generously given and comfortably received, this strange but earnest offer should suggest itself.

Without a moment's hesitation or forethought, I sat down and wrote a hurried reply, accepting with eager enthusiasm the shelter of her home and love, adding, that circumstances would force me to avail myself of her cordial hospitality even sooner, perhaps, than she expected, as my step-mother was leaving the house in a week from that date and would like to see me safely disposed of before her departure.

It was only when this letter was sealed and dispatched that I began to analyse my extraordinary situation and its possible issues. It is true that at the time of my decision I saw only a haven of rest rising out of the gloom and mists that hung heavily about me, some definite shelter from the storm of confusion and sorrow that had broken upon my life so suddenly.

But when time wore on a little I began to question myself uneasily about the step I had so precipitately taken. To act upon my cousin's kind suggestion, was to go away from all my dearest and fondest associations; it would oblige me to give up my past life, sorrows and

joys alike; to abandon the few friends, in whose companionship I had found one of my rarest delights, and to go among strangers who could not care for me except in a relative or, at most, an indirect way.

What would they say? those who pretended to be interested in my welfare and happiness, when they found I had gone to a new home among new faces and strange hearts, would they miss me? Would they wish me back? or would they soon forget me amid the other gay distractions of their daily lives?

Should I let them know that I was to leave so soon for an indefinite length of time? If they were anxious about me they could come and find it out; but they had come after the funeral and I would not see them; how could they tell I wanted them now? It was the penalty of my former indifference that I must need sympathy and consolation when they had both passed out of my reach.

What a dreary, endless thing life seemed at this period!

A sort of lethargy had taken firm hold of all my senses. I went about like one dreaming, sighing and weeping, and wishing I were dead. My heart lay like a heavy stone within my breast, and a dark impenetrable gloom seemed to have shut out all the brightness of life from my eyes forever.

It was dreary Autumn weather besides, and that fed my morbid tendencies considerably, the wind was plaintive and the leaves were dying, the very sunshine looked pale and cold.

A few days after my reply to cousin Bessie's generous offer I received a second letter from her which was earnest and loving, and gentle as the first. She expressed great delight at my decision and ensured me the heartiest of welcomes on my arrival.

It was now the eve of our departure and most of our preparations were consummated. I sat in my usual retreat by the window looking out for the last time upon everything that could remind me of a period when I was less miserable than I was then. Now, that I had nothing to distract or busy me, I could sit with folded hands communing with my past and making uncertain conjectures about my future.

I could be happy with Hortense de Beaumont, I thought, if her family were not so strange--and yet--could I? after what had passed. My friendship with her had cost me more than I had ever feared or dreamed of and still it was not her fault nor my own. It had been our fate, that we should both have loved the same man, at least not love him, but be capable of loving him, which is a different thing. She really loved Ernest Dalton and I?--might have loved him at any moment, but that moment must never come now.

Hortense should never have cause to think regretfully of what might have been, were it not for Amey Hampden; I should never stand in her way except to guard her, to shield her from sorrow or harm.

I could imagine too well what the pain would be to love and to lose in this instance, and I should therefore never inflict it upon any heart whose happiness was as dear to me as my own. It is true that up to this, Ernest Dalton had never spoken to me of his love, how could I then presume to sacrifice him, when he was not mine to give or to

hold? Ah! whoever does not believe in any love but that which finds an outlet in articulate words, knows little or nothing about its power or depth. There is a voiceless love that is neither seen nor heard by other eyes and ears--and I believe it is the best--underlying the framework of our lives; it is a part of every pulse and fibre of our being, no one may know it, no one may heed it, but it glows on undaunted, with its steady, faithful purpose, ministering to its own great needs out of the fulness and abundance of its own intensity. Such is the nature of the noblest sentiments which have ever inspired a human heart, the love of God is a silent love, but it is also an active, self-abnegating love, the love of country is a silent love, too great, too sacred for paltry, feeble words. Is it an active love? History knows best.

And our love for one another, may it not lean towards this wonderful perfection? May it not be a silent love of that silence which is far more expressive than words? May it not brighten our eyes and quicken our pulse, though our lips look so neutral and dumb? Does any one doubt it? Anyone at least, whose own keen perceptions have left him above the necessity of falling in with the ready-made judgments and opinions of the surface-scanning multitude?

I do not say that such was Ernest Dalton's regard for me; I do not say that at this time he loved me, I mean in a particular way; but I do say, because I do think, that he acted as if he could. I was not quite the same to him as every other woman friend, he had not spoken to me on many occasions since my return from school; but though they were few they were sufficient to convince me of this.

If a person be honest and trustworthy, the art of veneering is almost beyond his grasp. His smile is a true smile, and his frown a sincere frown; he will not caress you with one hand and cruelly smite you with the other; he can never be a friend to your face and a foe when your back is turned. If he loves you it is written on every feature of his truthful countenance, if he despises you he will show it to you alone. I doubt if there ever lived a more honest or trustworthy being than Ernest Dalton.

It was a temptation to fall in love with a man like him, with his depth of character and his strength of feeling, with truth and wisdom on his lips, with honor and virtue in his heart. According to our common ideas of men and what we would like them to be, it was little wonder that Hortense and I both knowing Ernest Dalton, should have leaned towards him impulsively from the first, though his years were double our own. So tall and so dignified as he was, with such a striking face and such engaging manners, so courteous, so clever, so good, and he was not yet old, the sprinkling of gray in the hair that crept over his handsome brow seemed to lend fresh vigour to his looks and confirm the character which his appearance otherwise insinuated.

But all this was nothing to me now, no more than if it had been some passing dream of summer sun-light and flowers; no more than if some optical illusion had dazzled my eyes and gladdened my heart for a short moment, and left me as suddenly again, with my tame and common-place reality.

I must not even dwell upon the memory of what might have been, for I was pretty sure to marry some one else, and then Ernest Dalton could never come back to me in any other light than that of a devoted

friend. "I have saved myself in time," said my thought, as I stood up and went away from the window, "a day might have come when to give him up would be to renounce the happiness of my whole life--that day that I had sometimes fondly, though vainly, dreamed of, with all its witching possibilities and which now lay crumbled to dust at my feet.

"What else could I expect?" said I, with a weary sigh, "Is not pain the fate of the great majority, is not sorrow the portion of the children of men?" Anyhow, I was not likely to see Mr. Dalton ever again. I had sent him his locket, with a few words explaining that "_it had been found_" in the library, and "_being identified_" as his, I was happy to return it, hoping that its temporary loss had not caused him uneasiness or worry."

I thought that was the best way of returning it, under the circumstances, and the safest for me, it would prevent any awkward explanations, and accomplish the chief end as effectually as a personal interview. This opinion, however, was not Mr. Dalton's, for as I turned from the window I could hear the shrill ringing of a bell below, and a moment later Hannah came to announce--

"Mr. Dalton!"

"I cannot see him!" I said, "I am busy and tired--and--tell him, I do not see any one, that will do!"

"Miss Amelia, I think you'd better come," old Hannah suggested, with a respectful, suasive tone, "he says he is the oldest friend you have, and so interested in your welfare, you might show him a little more deference, that's just what he said, when he saw me looking reluctant about obeying his wish. You know Miss he's always been like a limb of the family--and it seems unfair."

"Yes, yes Hannah, I will go!" I interrupted eagerly, "tell him, I shall be down in a moment." I flew to the glass, and began to smoothen my ruffled hair, it was better after all to go down, as if nothing were the matter, he was only my friend, my good, trustworthy friend, and I was not treating him as he merited to be treated in this capacity.

Having restored some order to my appearance, I followed old Hannah down the broad stairway, and entered the drawing-room. He was standing by the mantel, with his back turned, as I went in; in one hand, he held his hat and stick, in the other some vagrant trifle he had taken from the mantel-piece, and which he was studying with seemingly great interest and attention.

At the sound of my foot-fall, he turned slowly around, and came forward to greet me; his face was very serious, and his manner steady and quiet.

"I am glad you have come Amey!" he said, as he took my hand and held it tenderly for a moment, "I feared you would send me away again to-day--although, I do not wish to intrude upon you in your grief. I hear, you are going away!" he then added, motioning me to a seat, and throwing himself half wearily into another, "Is it true?"

"Yes, my cousin, Mrs. Nyle, has written for me," I answered timidly, "and I have decided to go--to-morrow!"

"To-morrow!" he repeated with some surprise.

"Yes, to-morrow morning, the others take the afternoon train for their destination," I said quietly.

"How long do you think you will remain away?" he next asked.

"I cannot tell, it will all depend upon circumstances."

"What circumstances, Amey?"

I coloured a little, and looked across the room. It was his privilege as a friend to ask these questions I supposed, although I was not quite prepared to answer them.

"Whether I like my new home and friends, and whether they like me," I began awkwardly.

"Oh, that is what you mean?" he exclaimed gently, interrupting my reply.

I was silent, this was not a safe subject, what else did he think I could have meant?

"I suppose if I had not called this afternoon, you would have gone without bidding me good-bye," he resumed, after a short pause.

"I have not said any good-byes," I answered with an effort to justify myself. "I didn't see the use" I added, half scornfully, "I am not the Amey Hampden to the world, now, that I used to be."

"You are to me--you will always be!"

This was a most stable friendship. How good and sincere he was!

"Thank you, Mr. Dalton, it is kind of you to say so, a friend in need, you know, is a friend indeed."

"It is the only time I could ever feel that I was your friend, Amey," he said, with a half melancholy voice, "even when you were a little child, you never took much notice of me, unless something had gone wrong."

I liked this allusion to the past, it was timely, and brought out our present relationship clearly and comfortably. I laughed, and looked at him freely, as I answered:

"That must have been pretty often, for it seems to me that things have been going wrong all my life," then fearing to strike a dangerous key-note, I added, hastily, "but I must not complain, there are hundreds of people more miserable than I in the world."

"I know one, at any rate, who is," he interrupted, in an undertone. "I have to thank you for returning my locket," he continued, in the same strain, as if it had been suggested by the first remark, "I had given it up as an irretrievable loss."

"Oh! then you got it safely," I exclaimed, with a forced

gratification, "I am so glad it was found, for your sake."

"I would not like to lose it now, it is older than you are, Amey," he observed, without changing his sonorous voice.

"Is it indeed?" I answered, not knowing what else to say.

"I lost it on the day of the Merivales' last 'At Home,'" he went on, as if talking to himself, "I had it when I came in here, and I missed it when I went out."

"You were not here on that day, were you?" I interrupted, impulsively, after which I could have bitten the end of my tongue off.

He was confused for a moment; it was the first time I had ever seen him in the least agitated, and in my curious astonishment I lost all self-control.

"I would remember if you had been here, for the day is clearly stamped in my memory: it was cold and stormy," I argued, warmly, "I don't think anyone went out of doors that could help it; it was drifting and blustering so."

"So it was," he answered, evasively, "what a good memory you have."

"For trifles--yes," said I, somewhat playfully. A pause ensued, during which he looked straight before him at the pattern on the carpet I twisted my rings abstractedly round my fingers, trying to think of something safe to talk about, when, to my surprise, he stood up abruptly before me, and held out his hand.

"It is growing late," he said, with a friendly smile, "and I must not detain you; this is," (and he took my timid fingers firmly in his own deep grasp) "good-bye, I suppose?"

His full gaze was upon me I could feel it I could see it even before I had raised my eyes.

"This is good-bye," I repeated, meeting his glance bravely and openly.

"Good-bye then, and may God bless you, Amey," he said, with a deep, earnest voice; "Sometimes when your memory flies back to your old home, give a kindly thought to your old friends as well, for we shall often, often think of you."

He was holding my hand all the while, which is not forbidden between such friends as we were, and without taking it away, I looked reproachfully into his face, and said:

"Don't think so little of me as to imagine I need this parting rejoinder, Mr. Dalton; I can ill afford to forget my few good friends, and you have always been one to me. I hope when we meet again, I will have no more to reproach you with in this respect than you will have against me. I could not say more than this."

"Oh, yes you could," he faltered, laying his other hand over my captive fingers, "but it is better not, my--Amey, at least--never mind, I was forgetting--good-bye once again, and God bless you."

I could feel the touch of his trembling hands upon my own; I could hear the sound of his agitated voice vibrating around me--and I might never see him again!

I stood motionless for a few seconds in the open doorway where he had just left me, feeling dazed and bewildered. His presence seemed to linger a little with me after he had gone! Something in the very atmosphere thrilled me as if his spirit had tarried to witness the re-action that now took place, and had in tender pity shrouded me with its consoling and protecting love.

I felt miserable and lonely, and creeping up the stairway again, I returned to the refuge of my room, and threw myself wearily on my bed. The twilight was beginning to fall, and with its advancing shadows came trooping before my tearful eyes all the various episodes of my chequered life.

To think that mine were what the world had ever called favoured circumstances! I knew a hundred and one persons who looked upon me as a happy, gifted girl, because, forsooth, I had had money and position because I had education and social advantages! If this was what the world called happiness, what then could its misery be?

The question tormented me, whether in the end it were better to follow in the dazzling wake of this all-conquering worldliness, and by crushing all my scruples arise to a new life of careless, thoughtless gaiety, like Alice Merivale's; or whether the whispers of my better impulse were the more salutary and satisfactory of the two, and bound me in all conscience to an obedience and sanction of its precepts.

It was too late now, however, to discuss this point any longer with myself. I had acted so far upon a magnanimous resolve, which, though doomed to cast a shadow upon my own personal lot, would flood another life with the beauty and glory of a compensating sunshine.

"It is more blessed to give than to receive," I said, inwardly, and if I persevere in this generous determination, though it engender repeated acts of self-denial, I cannot but be recompensed in the end. My new home and friends will distract me greatly from my broodings, and by and by all these ephemeral sorrows will have passed away, as young sorrows always do, leaving but a faint trace behind them.

"But, if Ernest Dalton be in love with Hortense de Beaumont," said the little voice on the plaintiffs side, "why does he show you such signs of preference as these; is that the course, of a truly honourable man?"

"Surely!" said the defence "If I magnify evidences of a substantial friendship into something more serious, that is not his fault--besides, he may love me in a way, but he must love her better--and, in any case, supposing he should love me best, if I offer him no encouragement, if I even positively refuse him, Hortense's happiness cannot but be ultimately benefited by it."

I arose, in a little while, and bathed my face, for the dinner-hour was near, and I had to play my part for the last time, before the trio below.

When I went down, they were already seated around the table, my

step-mother in solemn consciousness at one end, and her solicitous brother looking meekly up at her from the other. Fred had all one side to himself, the other, was reserved for me.

It was a quiet, formal meal, disturbed now and then by a curt monosyllable from one or the other of us. We had not much to say to each other, considering that it was our last repast around that family board, the dishes and cutlery had all the chat and confusion among themselves. When it was over, I went back to my own quarters and attended to my final preparations, the time of my departure was now near at hand.

Next morning I looked in vain for some friendly face at the depot. No one had thought of me at the last, though most of my friends had heard of my intended departure. I could not be convinced so soon that I was no longer the same person whom these people had flattered and courted a few short months ago.

Our home, disturbed by the hand of death, was no longer a temple of society worship where gas-light revels would be held and the comets of the gay world gathered together to feast. Henceforth, I was an orphan girl with limited means and uncertain prospects. Some day, if I married well, these people would suddenly remember my past glories and then, these slumbering friendships would be likely to revive; to open their hearts and homes to me again. Until then I must consider myself as set aside, not rudely, nor coldly, but with a negative intimation of my altered circumstances which has quite sufficient force for any soul so keen and sensitive as mine.

In one sense, of course, it was all the same to me. I had never counted upon these social ties to any extent, and would not feel their loss acutely but--these poor human hearts of ours--how they will yearn for other human sympathies and regards? I could have been resigned to leave my home and early associations if I might take away with me the soothing conviction that my absence left a void somewhere, anywhere, that would always be a void until I came back to fill it. I had an exalted notion of fidelity and remembrance then, which has been roughly used upon the touchstone of experience since.

But as even this frail compensation was denied me, I saw more clearly than ever how urgent it was for me to go forth resignedly where thousands of my fellow-toilers were struggling already, and, without looking back upon my brighter yesterday, press onward patiently and forbearingly in the course which an unexpected reverse had opened out for me.

When night fell I was lodged in my new home.

CHAPTER XII.

My cousin Bessie, or Mrs. Robert Nyle, lived in a small, comfortable house, on a quiet street, in a small comfortable city, not more than a day's journey from the place of my former residence.

I had, of course, made many conjectures about the relative merits and demerits of the new home towards which I was travelling in all haste. With nothing more accurate to build upon than my cousin's reserved letters and my own vivid imagination, it could hardly be expected that I could arrive very near the truth in my speculations about my uncertain destiny.

Nor did I. I had pictured my cousin Bessie as quite a morbid and prosy character, suspended midway between a hopeless resignation and a helpless despair. I thought there must be lines of sadness about her mouth and a profusion of silver in her hair, I had almost heard her plaintive sighs, and had begun to invent cures for her nervous headaches. I do not know why such gloomy foresights loomed up before me, unless it be because I fancied she was poor and yet educated, and in our circle at that time it was generally believed that people so situated were eminently miserable and uncomfortable. We will not be satisfied with the uncertain until we have made mental sketches of the people and places connected with it, even though they be all awry, as mine were in this instance.

Cousin Bessie was a tall, graceful woman with chestnut brown hair and fine soft eyes, her figure was slight as a girl's, though she was no longer young, and her step was as active and light as ever it could have been in her maiden days. She was not a beautiful woman, but there was as much kindness and dignity combined in her dear face as to make it more attractive than many a handsome one. I was simply charmed with her appearance and manner, and made up my mind that I had no further reason to be solicitous about my future happiness after she had taken me securely under her charge.

Cousin Bessie's household consisted of her husband, Robert Nyle, and their two children, Zita and Louis. Mr. Nyle, who was somewhat older than his wife, was one of these placid, easy going husbands that the world knows little about on account of their retirement and admirable domestic qualities. Zita was then a pretty, growing girl of sixteen summers and Louis a handsome boy of eighteen.

I lived with cousin Bessie for many seasons, and at the end of that time I had become more truly attached to her and her dear family than I had ever been to my own. Yet they were plain people, living a quiet, unostentatious life in the very heart of social exuberances, they were not rich either, in fact they had little more than medium comforts, of those which it takes money to buy, but the sweetness and happiness of their home was not of that kind which gold can gather, it is richer and rarer far than that.

It pleased me to find that they were not wealthy nor worldly. I had so little now, myself, that richer relatives would have pitied me and been urged to bestow petty charities upon me now and then, when my own diminished income proved insufficient to meet the great demands that stylish living could not fail to make upon it.

"I hope you won't feel like a captive bird in this little cage of ours," cousin Bessie remarked with a quiet smile the morning after my arrival. "I offered it only as a shelter, Amey, you know, until you can make yourself more comfortable elsewhere."

I looked at her reproachfully and answered without hesitation:

"I am glad you do not specify my time. I hope I may take as long as I like, to find some place I prefer to this."

"Oh certainly!" said she, with a covert amusement. "You are more than welcome to remain here, as long as you are contented."

There was a time, when I would have doubted the possibility of my being satisfied under circumstances such as these, but to look upon respectable seclusion from a distance, is not really to see, and understand what it is; there is a latent charm about it, which is known only to those who embrace it with cheerful hearts.

Cousin Bessie had no servants, not even one, fashionable humanity, think of that! This surprised and even disappointed me at first, but soon it also became absorbed by that all prevailing spirit of quiet contentment that presided over their domestic circle, and kept the sun shining when it was shadow outside.

I did not question cousin Bessie about the necessity for dispensing with menial assistance. It was a delicate subject, but when Zita and Louis and Mr. Nyle went away, one morning after breakfast, I began to clear away the dishes and make myself generally useful.

Cousin Bessie watched me from her corner by the kitchen table, where she was engaged in preparing some sundries for the next meal and when I had made my last trip with an armful of the breakfast equipage, she looked up with a meaning smile, and said,

"This is the see-saw of life, Amey, yesterday you were away up, and to-day you are away down."

"It is the safer place of the two, Cousin Bessie, don't you think so?"

"Well, if I did not think it, Amey, my life would hardly be worth living," she answered with a quiet emphasis.

"Why? You don't think you will always be down, do you?" I asked timidly, plunging a cup and saucer into the boiling water.

"I don't know; we were better off once, in one way, but it is a long time ago," she answered, taking a large white apron from a peg beside her in the wall, and offering it to me, "Put this over your dress, child, and take off your pretty rings," she put in parenthetically, and then went on--

"Robert was a man of wealth when we married, we had a fine house with servants and horses and every such luxury--while the money was there he lavished it upon us: but he lost heavily one year, there was a bank failure first, and a series of smaller misfortunes followed quickly in its wake. We had to sacrifice house and horses, and all, and come down the ladder to our present station. The children found it hard in the beginning, but they have come to look upon it now, nearly as their father and I do."

"But you are not poor, cousin Bessie," I interrupted, as I dried a plate briskly with my linen cloth.

"No: not poor exactly: but we must be careful and economical for

awhile, until Zita and Louis are educated: we will make every sacrifice that is necessary to grant them a thorough education. When they are rich in knowledge they won't mind how empty their purses are; they will feel themselves equal to the best in the land. When they have finished their courses here, if they show themselves susceptible to a still higher training, we will make still greater restrictions upon our household expenses to favor any particular talent they may have developed. Robert and I decided that long ago."

"I suppose it is a good plan," I said half doubtfully, "if it does not unfit them for their after-life."

"You mean it may raise them above their station?" cousin Bessie interrupted eagerly. "Well, you are not the only one who thinks that, but it never shall. We have seen such a possible danger ahead and have laboured to avert it I have done my utmost all their lives to bring them up to frugal habits. We have taught them to live sparingly in every way; to shun those people and places that tempt one to idle amusements and questionable pastimes, and never to seek the society of such persons as are brought up to pity or ridicule poverty and struggling gentility. They are fond of one another, and in their mutual companionship do not miss the intercourse which is denied them with the outside world. I have explained to Zita that the saint whose name she bears was a poor servant-maid, who was looked down upon and ignored by those who were better favored by the world; and that like her, she must be poor and humble in spirit, satisfied to be a little nobody here if she can be happy hereafter. Louis learned the story of his royal patron saint when he was a lisping baby at my knee, and understands now, I think, how secondary material prosperity is to the advancement of the moral man. I am almost sure he could wear a crown and rule a nation, and yet look upon such glories as mere accidents of existence, that must be subject to higher aims and occupations."

"Then you are happy in the possession of very exceptional children, Cousin Bessie," said I, shaking my towel and hanging it up to dry. My task was finished, and I sat down beside my industrious cousin who was now up to her elbows in a basin of flour.

"They are my chief comfort, to tell you the truth," she answered, as if in soliloquy, while she sifted handfuls of the white powder through her busy fingers, "and I thank God for this great compensation that has survived all my other pleasures. There is no wretchedness, I think, like that which must fill the heart of a mother whose children have strayed away from her loving, clinging solicitude into the by-ways of folly or vice. It is a dark blight upon the most buoyant heart that ever swelled with maternal devotion. I sometimes think I would rather have never existed, that I could forfeit all the grand privileges of a created being destined for a noble end, rather than have become the mother of impious and vicious children."

"Then it is well you have saved yours from such a common fate," I put in warmly, "for I think in the world's present stage, young people have a monopoly of all the evil tendencies to which our flesh is prone."

"You are right there Amey, and more's the pity," cousin Bessie answered, leaning her white palms on the sides of the dish and looking out of the kitchen window away over the steeples of the distant church, as if her glance fell upon the whole wicked world at once.

"There is hardly a channel of sin and guilt that has not been explored by these young persons, who should not even know of the existence of such dangers. So much fine manhood is wasted in folly and dissipation; so many noble energies devoted to degrading causes, so much mental greatness given to solving the mysteries of villainy and roguery. Oh! it is written on the brow of modern youth, in flaming characters," she exclaimed, closing her fingers tightly over the edges of the dish, upon which her hands still rested. "When I pass along the busy streets of the town, I see the wickedness of the world on many a fair young face, and my heart swells with a great desire to know whose life is being saddened by their extravagances. 'They are dear to someone, surely,' I say to myself, 'there must be some one from whom they are trying to hide their deeds of darkness,' and I could almost stop to plead in favor of that lingering love, that they turn back from the beck and call of temptation to that other wholesome course which yields reward both here and hereafter. I cannot help this strong sentiment that stirs within my breast. I love the beauty of blooming human nature; I like to see the glow of physical and moral health upon its beaming countenance, and the stimulus to noble purposes in its restless heart, but it seems as if this never can be again with the majority."

"It is a sad outlook, Cousin Bessie, but there must be a remedy somewhere," I suggested, full of the enthusiasm which had characterized her remarks.

"Remedy? Yes, of course there's a remedy," she retorted emphatically, "but the world's votaries have elbowed it out. What can one expect from a baby girl who has been brought up for the world, but that she shall be of the world? Little misses who can waltz before they know the 'Our Father,' who are taught manners before morals, and are given for their absolute standard 'what others will say.' Can they become good women? It would be a paradox to suppose so. And our boys in knickerbockers who smoke cigars and buy ten cent novels, who speculate in the market of experience with ill-gotten gain, who form opinions of life from dime shows and contact with veterans in vice; can they grow in virtue and integrity after such an initiation as this? It would be nothing less than a moral phenomenon if they did. Yes there is a remedy, and its application is needed at the very root of the evil. Let fathers and mothers look abroad over the heads of their prattling offspring, and realize the fate that is awaiting them if they do not take proper and timely precautions. I attribute much blame to them because I have seen results of their carelessness grow and magnify under my own eyes."

Here the door-bell rang violently, and interrupted cousin Bessie's wholesome homily on the social irregularities of the day. As her hands were still buried in flour I started to my feet and answered the hasty summons. A man in ragged attire stood leaning against the outer post of the doorway. His soft hat was slouched over one eye, and his turned-up faded coat-collar but half-concealed the fragments of a soiled shirt front that lay open on his breast inside. When I confronted him, he advanced a step and said, with his eyes directed towards his boots,

"Will you give me a little help, miss, for God's sake. I am starving and can get no work."

Cousin Bessie from her place by the window could hear his words, and

coming to the door, she looked at him from head to foot. He was young and stalwart, though so destitute.

"I will give you some work and pay you well for it" she said. "Come, you are a strapping young fellow and won't find it hard to do."

He was silent for a moment and still kept looking at his dilapidated boots.

"I will give you the price of an honest, independent supper" she continued, "that is better than begging it. You will relish it, I know."

"It's done ma'am" said he, kicking his dusty toes against the step where he stood. "Show me the work."

Cousin Bessie looked significantly at me and led him out to where his occupation lay. As she turned to leave him, with a strict injunction to do it well, he raised his hat from his head and turned reverently towards her.

"I'll do it as well as mortal hands can do it ma'am" he said with a tremor in his hoarse husky voice. "You're the first woman as has spoken a kind word to me since--since--I buried the one that 'ud have made my life different if she'd lived."

"Your mother?" Asked Cousin Bessie gently.

"No, ma'am, she was more, she was my wife, but only for a year. When I lost her I lost my luck and my courage, and everything. I've hardly done a day's good since."

He drew the back of one brawny, dirty hand across his eyes and turned away his head. Cousin Bessie was looking at him with a great pity in her countenance.

"Have you a child?" she next asked.

"One, ma'am, a little girl, but not like the mother."

"Where is she?"

"On the streets, like myself, begging her bread and going to ruin," he answered in dogged despair.

"How old is she?" cousin Bessie asked, with renewed interest.

"Maybe thirteen or thereabout, ma'am, poor, small thing," he replied with a dash of fatherly love.

"Can she read or write?" was cousin Bessie's next query.

"I couldn't say, ma'am. I never taught her. I've been a heartless wretch and didn't mind about her much."

"I am afraid you have done her a great injustice," said cousin Bessie, turning to re-enter the house. "I hope you will try to make some amends. Begin your work, like a good fellow, and I will see you again before you go."

She came back to her duties in the kitchen with a thoughtful face and a slow, measured step.

"Is your hero in rags at his work?" I asked playfully, when she had closed the door behind her.

"Yes, I am glad to say," she answered, "manual labor is what these fellows want. I shall keep him busy until evening, now that he has started, it will only cost me a few pence, and it will keep him out of so much harm."

There was a pause of a few moments after this. Cousin Bessie then looked up and said, half regretfully:

"I wish I had a few spare dollars now. I could, perhaps do some good with them."

"What is your latest freak?" asked I, returning her steady glance.

"I would like to send for his little girl," said she, "the winter is coming on, and there will be extra work to do, in consequence. She may be smart enough to clean our windows and wash the wainscoting. She could run errands and answer the door for a trifle, and we might teach her her prayers and her catechism and send her to church on Sunday, which is never done for her now."

"But you do not know who or what she may be," I argued dissuasively.

"That is nothing," she persisted. "She is only a child, and our house is so small that no harm can be done in it unknown to me. I think it would do her good if she came. You and Zita might take an interest in her and make something respectable of her poor, empty life."

"Perhaps you are right, Cousin Bessie," I conceded, "let us send for her, I can easily afford to clothe her, it will be such a pleasure to me to contribute towards the success of one of your good works."

And so we sent for her. Next day she arrived, carrying a miniature wooden box in one hand and a little old faded umbrella in the other. She was small and dark, with sharp, black eyes and pale features. Her short hair clustered thickly around her brow and over her ears, from which hung suspended a pair of long brass ear-rings. A ring of the same valuable material was conspicuous on one small finger. She was very ragged and careless-looking, but had an intelligent sparkle in her quick glance that diverted one's attention from her appearance.

"What is your name?" asked Cousin Bessie, admitting her into the hall.

"Snip, ma'am," she answered, sweeping a glance from the ceiling to the floor.

"Snip!" we both exclaimed.

"Well, that's what the Grimes and the Dwyers and all them calls me, anyhow," she argued, with a perfectly placid countenance.

"What does your father call you?" cousin Bessie asked.

"Sometimes he says 'little 'un,' and more times it's 'girly.' I ain't particular about names, ma'am, suit yourself," she said, without a change of expression, which was one of stolid earnestness.

"Well, then, we'll call you 'Girly' for the time being," cousin Bessie interposed, smiling and directing a glance of sly amusement at me.

"I hope you will be a very good little girl while you are in my house and we shall all be very good to you," Cousin Bessie began in a premonitory tone. "You must give up your old friends now and listen to us instead and--" here she paused, as if the next sacrifice had to be delicately proposed. "I don't like to see those ear-rings nor that ring with you, they are not becoming to a poor little girl."

Up went the two small hands to the ear-rings, which were hurriedly dragged out, she pulled the tight brass ring from her finger, revealing a dark blue circle where it had lain, and gathering them together in her little palm she looked us straight in the face and said with great earnestness

"D'ye suppose I care a continental for finery?" Then curling her red lips as if she had discovered that we so misjudged her, she shook her bushy head sideways with an emphatic gesture and said with a fiery indignation, which amused us intensely

"Not !! I hate it! I wore it for spite. I'll give this to either of you ladies now, and I'll never ask to lay eyes on it again."

Cousin Bessie took them from her saying,

"You look better without them, Girly," then changing her tone to one of gentle, solicitous enquiry, she asked the pert little stranger,

"Do you ever go to church, Girly, or say any prayers?"

The child's face became shadowed for a moment and her lips quivered. When she spoke, her voice had lost its bright carelessness, it was low and broken.

"I'll tell you the truth ma'am, if I died for it. P'raps you'll think me awful wicked but I'll tell you, now you asked me. One Sunday morning I was walking past the big church in the far end of the town, an' the bells began to ring and ring, an' says I, 'I think I'll just go in an' watch them prayin' but when I peeped in no one was inside. I turned to the man that pulled the ropes an' asked him when it 'ud begin. 'In fifteen minutes' says he, like a growl, 'this is the first bell.' So I ran back to our house, for father and I had a room then with the Grimes, an' I got some water in the little basin an' washed my face an' hands good an' clean. I brushed my hair down an' took out my green shawl that I keep clean an' whole for sometimes, an' put it on. I got back in lots of time to the church an' crep' into one of the big seats, waitin' for the music to begin. In a few minutes, along came a grand little lady, all dressed in velvet, with yellow hair and a big bonnet, an' a gentleman with her, an' she stood at the door of the pew an' beckoned me out. 'There's room enough for us all, Miss,' I whispered, pushing farther down the seat, but here the gentleman rapped his stick on the wood an' said so cross 'Hurry out, hurry out there.'"

Here her voice broke into a sob which, however, she swallowed bravely, and went on after a moment's pause "So I went then to another, a little one with no cushionings on it, 'cause I thought grand people didn't own that, but I was only there a little while when a fat woman came rollin' up to me an' catchin' me by the arm said, 'Here, I am not payin' for this pew for other people to sit in, this is my pew.' I was mad then, I knew she wasn't a lady, an' I made a face when I was gettin' out, an' says I, 'Oh, dear' Missis Porpoise, who said it wasn't your pew, you want a whole pew to yourself anyhow.' The aisles was all wet, for 'twas a rainy mornin', an' I wasn't goin' to kneel there with my green shawl on, so I made a bold stroke and darted into another pew. This time 'twas alright: this was a kept one for strangers, an' I had it all to myself. The music began, an' oh! it was so nice! I was quite gettin' over all my temper when such a swell of a lady came up the aisle with such a swell of a gentleman, an' landed in beside me. They didn't turn me out, 'cause they'd no right to, but they did worse. She looked at me an' turned such a mouth on her, then gathered up her fine flounces as if I was goin' to eat 'em, an' looked at the gentleman so complainin'-like. Then she pulled out a little bit of a red and white handkerchief, an' hides her nose in it. I knew well enough what she was up to, an' didn't mind her at first, but it ain't pleasant havin' people makin' faces an' stuffin' their noses before you, an' so I got up an' asked 'em to let me out. When I was passin' her I gathered in my rags tight an' held my shawl up to my nose just like she had done, an' says I, in a whisper, as if to myself, 'oh, you dirty beggars, let me get away from you.' The people in the next pew looked back an' laughed, an' I saw the color risin' up in her face as I turned away. I left the church after that, an' says I, 'there's no room for the poor to be good, I guess I won't try it again; an' you can bet I didn't," she added, with an emphatic nod of her bushy head, and a sparkling wrath in her black eyes.

"But that wasn't right, Girly," said cousin Bessie, "it is not that way in every church, nor is everybody like those three persons you happened to come across."

"It's equal to me, ma'am; I got enough of it," she retorted, quickly, "when its fine on a Sunday now, I go to the grave-yard, my mother is there an' it's a big place, there's room for all kinds in it. I sit down an' cry a bit, an' ask her to pray for the poor, for they have a hard time of it here, but I don't think she can hear me, for I'm not much the better of my prayers."

Cousin Bessie and I here exchanged glances again. Such a hardened little heart as this was in one so young. We did not remonstrate with her then, but attended to her more immediate physical wants, there was something worth caring for in the little waif, and we determined to do it slowly and surely.

Before the week expired we had initiated her into the ways of the house, and transformed her exterior, to begin with, into that of a civilized and respectable member of the great human family.

CHAPTER XIII.

The winter was coming on, as Cousin Bessie had said every leaf was blown from its bough, and the Autumn sky was grayer and cloudier than ever.

It was a lonely season, especially for one with such a heart full of memories as mine, the wind spoke to me in the most plaintive of whispers, now with the voice of one absent friend, now with that of another. I had no definite grief at this period under the safe protecting roof of my good, kind relatives, only that there was an emptiness about my comfort, which made it incomplete and not quite as satisfactory as it should have been.

Something was stirring in my breast as if with fluttering wings against these fetters of the flesh! Something was always asking, always wishing, always urging me, to do I knew not what ' _ Taedium vitae _ .' It is the merciless enemy of mortal man! the robber of our peace, the skeleton in the closet, the dreg in our pleasure-cup, the ruthless spoiler of our fancy-woven webs! It is the separate sorrow of men and women, and is the summing up of the stones of all human lives.

Some have grown weary of idleness, pleasure and wealth, and some are more weary of cold and starvation, and toil, the student is weary of study, and the artist is weary of art, the vicious grow weary of vice, and great men grow weary of fame; old men grow tired on their journey, and children get tired at their play, it is one of those "touches of nature" that makes our world become "kin." For a sigh is a whisper of sorrow, no matter what breast may have heaved it, and pain is a pall, thick and heavy, laid over hopes that are dead.

Some of us have strange lives! secrets, known only to ourselves, that change the face of all nature before our eyes, we are sent adrift on every passing current, to explore the truths of experience for ourselves, and sad lessons some of them are, which we read through our gathering tears, and learn with a beating heart!

As the autumn months drifted on towards a bleak November, I became more and more absorbed, looking wistfully out of the windows, or sitting dreamily before the fire. I often thought of that better land, whither my angel-mother had flown years ago, my father had gone there now, too. Would it not be well if I were with them? Only one more little mound of earth, rising beside theirs, one solitary little mortal falling back from the weary pilgrimage, and lying down to rest by the roadside, one heavy heart less among that throbbing multitude, one faint toiler more, borne from the crowded vineyard.

With my elbows resting on my knees and my face buried in my palms, I sat and thought of all such weird possibilities, as I looked vacantly into the fire. There are times when the world, with its exuberance of pleasure and wealth, is powerless to tempt or cheer us, when its most splendid pageantry is vapid and shallow to our tired gaze, when its laughter and song are a noisy discord, that deafens and distracts us! when its pledges and promises are instruments of selfish purposes and hidden cunning, and its policy, the exponent of a rabid and far-reaching materialism. These are moments, when our passions are at high tide, with our conscience riding on the topmost surface-waves, they are propitious intervals, if we choose to make the best of them, or they may only be fitful breaks in the glad monotony of our sensual,

easy-going lives--breaks, that our evil tendencies most often survive, seeing them rise, and surge, and ebb, in fearless defiance, and then quietly resuming their old sway, when the moral struggle has subsided!

One afternoon, I made an effort to rouse myself from this growing lethargy, which had begun to undermine the whole tenor of my character. Zita and Louis were away, at their schools, and cousin Bessie was busy as usual over household duties, Girly was frying meat in the kitchen, and the frizzling, seething noises had almost sent me to sleep in my chair, where I sat sewing. It wanted a half hour yet of dinner-time, so I put on my hat and jacket and sauntered out into the open air.

It was a bracing November day, the dead leaves lay crisp and trodden by the roadside, and the gray clouds flitted in their solemn silence across the low-leadened sky, a light wind swayed the naked tree-tops, and tinged the beaming faces of pedestrians with a healthy roseate hue. This was a happy contrast to my cheerless mood, and with a quickened step, I overtook the stream of gayer people that thronged the lively thoroughfare, and gave myself wholly up to every passing distraction.

I had no particular business to discharge, except to run away from myself, and therefore every little peculiarity, every minute feature of men, women, or things, that suggested themselves to my aimless scrutiny were carefully reviewed and criticized. I went placidly on now casting a passing glance on exhibitions of stale confectionery, now on a display of attractive millinery, again it was a "ten cent" establishment, offering such bargains as might puzzle the most economical house-wife, and finally my attention was caught by a succession of dazzling windows, with their bewildering panorama of Japanese figures and coloured _bric-a-brac_, windows crowded with fans and parasols, and variegated lamp-shades, oriental trays and glove-boxes, pieces of ware, from whose dirty green surface emptily peered the pale faces of native Japanese, there were whisk-holders, and wall-baskets, and all sorts of ornaments trimmed in Japanese fabrics, looking coaxingly out at the public.

Scrolls and mats, panels and firescreens, whereon the hand of art had caused to spring and flourish these slender Eastern stalks, which sprout in drooping foliage, at the summit of their lanky height. There was an endless variety gathered into this limited space, it was a scene which should provoke a regretful tear, for memory's sake, from the patriotic oblong eye of any exiled Japanese.

My eyes still wandered over these many-hued trifles, and my mind was still busy with its vagrant reflections, when a gruff voice said in my ear:

"Move on there--do you hear."

I started, and saw Zita on one side and Louis on the other; they were returning from their day's mental toil, and had spied me loitering by the shop windows. I joined them, and in happy, careless concourse, we trod our way towards our home. When we reached the house the lamps had been lighted and the curtains drawn, dinner steamed upon the table.

Feeling better for my walk, I sat down with rosy cheeks and sharpened appetite to my evening meal. As I was about to begin Mr. Nyle handed me

a letter, which had arrived during my absence. I took it up and looked at it curiously, a smile broke over my countenance as I did so, for I recognized Hortense's delicate handwriting.

All during dinner this welcome little letter lay in my lap. Every now and then I touched it caressingly, as if trying to read it with my finger-tips, and wondered how long it would be before cousin Bessie would move her chair away from the table, that I might retire and gratify myself with its contents.

So much for human foresight and wisdom! We hold our misery in our own hand, and we do not know it, we look with impatient smiles and longing, upon that whose fruit is sorrow for our hearts, and we cannot see it or realize it.

Dinner was over at last, and I glided away from the happy circle to the quietude of my own quarters I lit the lamp, and seating myself comfortably in a rocking chair, tore open my friend's letter, and read as follows:

"My dearest Amey

"I have looked forward with such impatient eagerness to this pleasure of answering your last dear letter, and now that an opportunity occurs, I hardly know what to say to you.

"Perhaps it is because there is so much I _might_ tell, if it were only time, when the time comes you, and only you, shall know all, you must not blame me for my present reserve, for at best, I could but half tell it now, any way.

"It is something that has lain on my heart, day and night, for some years, and that is likely at last to make me happier than I have been for many a day. You will be glad of it, because it will have made your poor Hortense so happy. It concerns some one else, about whom, you must have made many strange conjectures, since your recent visit to me, I was doubtful then, or I would have told you a little, but now I feel more sure, and see my way better.

"However, I must not bewilder you with words in the beginning. I shall only repeat that I see much happiness in the near distance for Hortense de Beaumont. Heaven grant that nothing shall now come between me and this long-looked for realization. Mamma sends you her fondest love, and so does your own HORTENSE."

"_You will be glad, because it will have made your poor Hortense so happy_" These words seemed to stand out from all the rest, and attract my attention more forcibly. "_Some one about whom you must have made many strange conjectures since your recent visit to me._" Ah! it was clear enough to me now. She may as well have written her story through; but, was it not what I had expected? What I had prepared for? Why should the announcement of its accomplishment shock or surprise me now? He was nothing to _me_,--but a friend! as friends we had parted, and if we ever met again, it should only be as friends--perhaps not even as the friends we were then, if he were Hortense de Beaumont's husband.

I folded her letter slowly and quietly, and put it safely away; I wanted never to see it, or read it again, it was the story of my dear

friend's happiness, and it should not bring sorrow, or disappointment to me, so long as I professed to love her, or sympathize with her. So kind, so thoughtful, so affectionate a little creature as she had ever shown herself to me. How many of her heart's treasures she had freely lavished upon me during the course of our eventful friendship!

If she had had the better fortune of the two, it was her luck, and she deserved it. "_Heaven grant that nothing now shall come between me and this long-looked for realization_"! Poor child! how fond she was of him, could any one cast an impediment between such loves as these?

I turned down the light, and left the room: there were laughter and merry-making below, perhaps they would help me to forget these gloomy thoughts. I stepped lightly down the narrow stairway, and entered the cosy sitting room, where the family were assembled, with a pleasant, careless countenance.

They were engaged in a lively discussion when I came into the room; cousin Bessie had just conveyed the tidings, that an invitation had been left that afternoon for "Zita and Amey" from Mrs. Wayland Rutherby, asking them to go in on the following day, as Pansy and Lulu Rutherby had a young lady staying with them, and would like to introduce her to their friends. "Louis and Papa and myself" she was just adding, "are expected to drop in after dinner, when there will be music and a little dancing."

"Did you say we would go, Cousin, Bessie?" I put in, coming towards her and drawing up a seat beside hers.

"Of course, you will go," she answered emphatically. "Sophie Rutherby is my old school-friend, and we never refuse her."

"But I prefer not to go Cousin Bessie, I have not been out anywhere since--my father's death."

"Nonsense child! you are not going to mope away your young life like this," she broke in indignantly, "however, if you have any scruples, you can come away after dinner, before the active pleasures begin--there will be no one there in the afternoon but you and Zita. Surely you cannot object to that."

So it was settled, that we were to go to Mrs. Rutherby's, and the eventful afternoon came in due time. Zita was a little longer than usual before her looking-glass on that occasion, and was as pretty and fresh as a mountain daisy, when she came down at last to join me below.

We were received with gushing, girlish enthusiasm, by Pansy and Lulu Rutherby, in their rare and expensive toilets, they were both pretty and lively, and we talked and laughed during our first half-hour together, as though we had been old friends all our lives. Pansy and Lulu took poor Zita by storm, they showed their latest programmes of dances, and repeated for her benefit the newest compliments which had been paid to them by their respective admirers, since they had last entertained her.

Mrs. Rutherby and her senior guest, the mother of the younger lady, sat side by side on a remote sofa exchanging confidential whispers about their daughters. Miss Longfield, the Rutherby's "girl friend,"

and I, of necessity found ourselves thrown together, a little way from the rest. She was a tall, pale girl with a very high _chignon_, a very stiff satin dress, and very queer little shoes with very pronounced heels.

"You belong to Canada, I suppose?" she began looking at me speculatively from head to foot.

"Yes, I have always lived here," I answered, returning the speculative glance and concluding that Miss Longfield's complexion was decidedly sallow.

"Then you've been to Court, I guess?" she next asked.

"To Court," I exclaimed, raising my voice and my eyebrows.

"Why, yes" she retorted somewhat indignantly, "you've got Royalty over here, haven't you?"

"Oh! now I understand," said I with a covert smile, "you mean, have I been presented to Her Royal Highness?"

She nodded her _chignon_ affirmatively with a satisfied air, and began biting her under lip, which operation, however, was immediately interrupted by an expressive--"It must be awfully nice."

I took the trouble to give my American friend a lengthy description of our drawing-room receptions, in which she became ardently interested, never interrupting me until I had come to the end. She then surprised me with the question.

"Don't you have any refreshments?" put in a high key.

"Not until we get home," said I laughing. "The ceremony is virtually over when the people have been presented."

This rather disappointed her, I am afraid, but what could I do? She dismissed the subject summarily by touching upon another new one--that of our winter sports. I had to describe the tobogganing costumes, their effect at night when bonfires were burning in the vicinity of the hills, the sensation of going down, and the excitement of trudging back again to the top. She listened admirably and seemed thoroughly appreciative of my generous effort to entertain her. When I had finished, she remarked very quietly.

"It must be real nice, and ever such good fun, but I could never try it. It would smother me right there--I'm always under doctors' orders, you know," she added in a subdued, confidential whisper, "I've got seven diseases?"

"Have you indeed?" I exclaimed in genuine consternation. "You don't look as if you had," I continued by way of encouragement, but without effect, for she interrupted me, fretfully saying:

"Oh, yes I do! Anyone would know I had anaemia, I am so pale, and dyspepsia, for I eat so few things, and such a little at a time; then there's dyscrasia, comes from poverty of the blood, and my palpitations, that prevent me from having any pleasures worth calling so, besides these," she added, putting her reckoning finger upon her

thumb, "I suffer from neuralgia, and acute rheumatism, and," (on the second finger of the other, hand, which represented seven) "an inflammation of the spine. So now, what do you think of that?"

"Well, really I am very sorry for you, poor Miss Longfield" I said with an effort to let my sympathy overcome my burning desire to laugh outright; "you have been very unfortunate indeed, to have contracted so many diseases at once."

"Oh my constitution has always been weak," she sighed; "I take some twenty different medicines, I believe," she added, as if she were trying to frighten me out of the room, "you'd hardly believe it, I know, you are so healthy."

Here we were interrupted by Mrs. Longfield's plaintive voice reminding her invalid daughter that she had been sitting "to one side too long," and would "excite her spinal inflammation" if she did not "straighten up against the cushions of her chair."

Miss Longfield sighed peevishly, as she fell back in languid obedience to this solicitous injunction; she was constantly exposing herself thus rashly to the mercy of her chronic complaints. Shortly after this, dinner was announced, and we were mutually delighted, I expect, to find the latest turn of our conversation, which threatened to be flat and uninteresting, thus brought to a happy, though abrupt termination.

As soon after dinner as manners would allow me to leave, I bade good evening to my amiable hostesses, who were profuse in their regrets and expressions of disappointment at my early departure, and I sauntered quietly back to cousin Bessie's house.

It was not yet dark, though the moon was visible in the clear sky, and relieved, to find myself once more alone, I walked with purposely slow and leisure steps towards my home, rehearsing in my mind, with much genuine amusement, my recent brilliant and highly intellectual conversation with Miss Longfield.

As I drew near the Nyles' gate, its familiar squeak and the accompanying clash of its iron latches, broke upon my ear. I started, and peering through the gathering dusk, I saw the figure of a man turn into the street and stride rapidly away in the opposite direction from the one I was then pursuing. My heart gave a great leap, I hardly knew why, and the blood rushed into my face, something caught in my throat and I gave a short, hysterical cough. I had reached the gate, and the air around it was yet laden with the scent of a rich cigar, though the figure had passed into the distant gloom.

I pushed it open nervously, and it fell to with the same squeak and clash as before. I stopped for a moment, and leaning over the low railing I looked eagerly up and down the silent street. The moon struggled through a feathery cloud at this instant, and flooded the scene before me with its gentle light; I saw a figure again, beyond the shadows of the tall, bare trees that lay upon the white moonlit walk, it stopped, and turned sharply around, a little red light was moving with it, back towards where I was standing.

My heart beat loud and fast, as the footsteps drew nearer and nearer. I recoiled impulsively behind the projecting post beside me: I was a

coward at the last moment, the scent of the cigar became stronger and stronger, the ring of advancing footsteps quicker and louder--they had reached the gate and paused--there was only the post between us now. I held my breath, and did not dare to move while this suspense lasted. Would he never move on? I asked myself. How foolish I was to have waited there at all? I felt tempted to make one bound and spring up the garden-steps, but I had not courage enough even for this.

While I was busy with these thoughts, the interesting figure receded to the outer end of the sidewalk and scanned the upper portion of the house eagerly. I then heard him mutter an impatient "Pshaw!" under his breath, and he turned to walk away.

All my deserted courage rushed back to me the instant I saw him moving from me. I sprang from my hiding-place, and leaning my arms upon the bars of the gate as before, I said timidly:

"Who is that?"

The figure halted suddenly and turned around. In a moment he was standing beside me with his hat in one hand, the other extended towards me.

"Why, Dr Campbell, can this be _you_?" I cried in slow bewilderment.

"Yes, Miss Hampden, it is I" he answered nervously, "Are you glad to see me?"

"Glad" I repeated, half reproachfully, "why should I not be glad? I am delighted to see you. Won't you come in" I asked, making a movement to open the gate.

"I have just been to the house, asking for you," he said. "They told me you had gone out to dine, and they could not say exactly when you would come back. I have only to-day to spend in the town, and was feeling quite disappointed at not finding you at home, when the clashing of the gate arrested my attention. But tell me," he interrupted gently, "How are you, how have you been since I saw you last?"

"Oh, I have been well enough, thank you. Cousin Bessie is the very personification of kindness, and gives me every comfort. I only hope you have been as well treated as I have," I returned, with an effort at ordinary civility.

He did not answer immediately; he looked away from me and then said slowly.

"I have been pretty well--but not well enough. I have been studying and working very hard."

"What, _you_?" escaped me before I could control it. He laughed an odd little laugh and added: "Yes--_me_, I have not gone out to a dance or pleasure party of any kind since--since you left. I have lived with my books, day and night"

"You must have had some ominous vision in your sleep, Dr. Campbell," I said with unrestrained surprise, "to have become converted to such sedentary habits in so short a time."

"Yes, you are right," he answered curtly and somewhat eagerly, "I had a strange, beautiful vision that showed me the folly and emptiness of my life more plainly than anything else could ever have done, and I thank that vision that I have been able to make amends in time for the omissions and transgressions of the past."

I was half frightened at his earnest voice and serious expression, I hardly knew what to answer him. When I did speak, I was conscious of a tremor in my voice that must have betrayed something of the suspicion his words had awakened in me.

"Your better life is worthier of you, Dr Campbell," I managed to reply. "You were disposed, I must admit, to make too little of your energies, which are above the ordinary level."

"It was hardly my fault," he said sadly, "I was in a sort of stupor, I believe. I rejected the light of faith and morals from my life, and tried to imagine myself above it. What else could I expect but the result which followed?"

He was terribly in earnest, his brow was deeply contracted and his face was whiter than the pale moonlight.

"Then you are a better man for it in every way, I perceive," was my timid rejoinder.

"I hope so, Amey, I have tried hard to be."

I was startled by the mention of my own name in such a solemn tone, but my heart was swelling with a rushing tide of sympathy for the man who had so pronounced it.

"Then you will not regret it, believe me," I said, infusing a buoyant encouragement into my voice.

"No, I will not, I feel sure," he answered, disengaging his hands and leaning one elbow on the bar to support his face in his palm. We stood for a few seconds in silence, during which I looked abstractedly into the space before me. I knew that his eyes were turned upon me, although I could not see them. Suddenly he said in a low tone, almost in a whisper.

"I wish I could read your thoughts, Amey?"

I looked at him quickly, and laughed. Before I had time to make any reply, the door of the house was opened wide, and cousin Bessie accompanied by her husband and Louis, stepped out upon the platform. A beam of lamplight fell full upon Arthur Campbell's face, which was stern and white, he gave me his unsteady hand, and said brusquely:

"Good-night! I will come and see you to-morrow if you will let me?"

He raised his hat, and bowing with a touch of his old grace and gallantry, he strode away.

"Well, well Amey!" said Mr. Nyle, in a teasing voice as I turned and confronted the family trio. "I never would have thought this of you! you might have told us something about it, I'm sure--eh Bessie?"

"Oh we have no right to know her little secrets" cousin Bessie gently answered, while she drew on one glove. "Amey is sure not to do anything foolish, I feel certain of that. Is that the gentleman who called to see you a little while ago, Amey?" she asked, with a very discreet curiosity.

"Yes, Cousin Bessie, it is Dr. Campbell, he attended my father in his last illness, you know, I told you about him," I explained very earnestly.

"Oh yes, dear I remember! he seems to be a very nice person: I hope he will come again to see you before he goes."

"He asked leave to come to-morrow!" I answered "I suppose you don't mind?"

"Not in the least, child, why should I?" she put in, somewhat playfully. "Come Robert! come Louis!" she added, as she descended the steps leading to the gate. "We are not over early. I hope you won't be lonesome, Amey," she said, turning back, with one hand on the open gate.

"Not she," Mr. Nyle broke in, with mischief in his tone, "she'll keep herself busy with such pleasant thoughts that she will never miss us--go on."

He held the gate open until Cousin Bessie and Louis had passed out. I was standing on the topmost step waiting to see them off, and Mr. Nyle, looking at me to attract my attention, struck an attitude exactly like that in which they had surprised Dr. Campbell, leaning just as languidly upon the bars.

"How silver-sweet sound lovers tongues by night, Like softest music to attending ears!"

He exclaimed, in such a ridiculously sentimental tone, that we all laughed outright, and cousin Bessie pulling him forcibly away by the coat-sleeve, looked over his shoulder at me and said consolingly:

"Never mind, Amey, he can't throw stones from a glass house, he did this kind of thing many a time in his own day--you know you did," she added, linking her arm within his, and turning her eyes upon his beaming face with a dash of revived tenderness and old love. I caught his answering glance, with its accompanying smile so full of a deep meaning, and the tears came into my eyes. I bade them good-night and went quietly into the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

Next day Arthur Campbell came to see me, as he had said, and in Cousin Bessie's humble little parlor, by the cheerful glowing embers, asked me to become his wife. I might have known it--perhaps I did know it,

in spite of my wilful perverseness in denying it to myself, but I had not imagined it to be like this. There was no thrill or joy for me in the sound of his earnest voice, no definite sensation of that happiness which is said to attend this circumstance, no prospect of golden pleasures in the near future, that would find us united in these holy bonds.

It was a simple proposal of marriage from the lips of a man I respected and liked; a man of talent, and wealth and position, who flattered me by so generous an offer of his love. There was a glow of fire about his sentiment, mine had none, and yet I could not have given him up at that moment for all the world. I liked him, and I wanted to teach myself to like him still more. He had given up the attractions of worldly life on my account, and had gone back to the simple faith of his boyhood, he said my memory had been his only safe-guard where he had hitherto known no law, that I had "started up in the darkness of his life" like a steady and hopeful beacon-light that beckoned him on to better purposes.

"Whether you consent to marry me, or not" said he "I shall always be the better of having known and loved you, and, if you cannot love me in return, it will satisfy you perhaps to know that you have done me a great good otherwise."

I sat in silence for a moment, listening to the deep vibrations of his solemn voice, ringing through the quiet little room, the hand that supported my thoughtful face had grown cold and clammy, something weighed upon my heart, like an unfolded mystery, pregnant with sorrow or joy, I knew not which. He stood beside me, leaning one elbow against the broad, old fashioned mantel, and looking into the fire--at length I raised my eyes, and said with a timid voice.

"I do not deserve your love, Arthur--though I would now, if I could, if it were in my power."

"What do you mean Amey?" he interrupted with solemn enquiry.

I fidgeted with the folds of my drapery, for another few seconds, and then answered nervously:

"I hardly know, myself," then lifting up my eyes to his serious face again, I said as frankly as I knew how. "You have not asked me, Arthur, whether I have ever loved any one else before?"

He kept on, looking steadily at me, until his blue eyes seemed to have penetrated the very farthest depths of my soul; then, he answered, slowly, and with thrilling emphasis.

"You have loved Ernest Dalton, I know. Is there any one else?"

I dropped my lids instantly, and folded my hands tightly together, his words went through and through me. I hardly knew what to say next, but feeling that it was urgent upon me to speak in some way, I asked in a subdued tone, with my eyes still lowered upon my folded hands,

"How do you know I loved Ernest Dalton?"

He laughed, not gaily, nor carelessly, and taking a stride across the room, turned and said, "It is enough, that I know it, Amey. I don't

ask you to confide your past secrets to me--neither do I blame you for having been attached to Dalton, he is a good fellow, and though I am not half as worthy as he is, I presume to covet the same prize that he does--our luck is in your hands!"

"Ernest Dalton has never spoken to me, of love or marriage," I put in hastily.

"And Arthur Campbell has" said he, pausing in his rapid strides again, and standing close beside me--"that should make some difference?"

"So it does, and I give him the preference!" I said, rising from my seat, and extending my cold, nervous fingers towards him. "It is true that I have dwelt upon Ernest Dalton's memory with a glowing, girlish enthusiasm. I have thought of him by day and by night. I have fancied my love returned, and imagined how happy we could be together. I have watched him with jealous eyes as he came and went, in and out of our circles at home. I have wished him near me, when I was desolate and miserable, and could endure no one else--but now, I would not have things different from what they are: all that can be a finished, sealed irrevocable past to you and me. I will marry you, if you are satisfied with my disposition; I will devote my whole life to your happiness, Arthur, and if I can help it you shall never have cause to reproach me, or regret the step you have taken. If you love me, you will not find it hard to trust me enough, even for this!"

"Amey, that is all I want to hear--you have spoken openly and honourably, you have done me the fullest justice I could ask. I believe your simple, earnest promises, I could not do otherwise, it would kill me to doubt you now. I shall go back to my toil with a lighter heart than I have had for many a day."

He left for home on the following morning, and as he rolled out of the depot of our little town I sat alone by the fireside, where, yesterday, I had pledged myself to him, twisting and turning a sparkling diamond upon my finger. It was a handsome seal of our plighted loves; inside, on the smooth round gold, the words "Arthur and Amey" with the date of the month and year were neatly inscribed.

CHAPTER XV.

Alice Merivale came home for Christmas, that is, in the early part of December. She had been announced for weeks before, and her immediate circle were considerably agitated over the welcome tidings, and in quite a flutter of conjecture and expectation concerning the result of her extended trip.

Two days after her arrival I received a hasty little note from her, in which she insisted upon my going to spend the holidays with her, as she had thousands of topics to discuss with me, and was longing to lay eyes on me again after so protracted an interval of separation.

The prospect was a pleasant one to me; that interval to which she

alluded had brought me many a reason for wishing to return to my old home, for a little sojourn among those friends and scenes that had special claims upon my memory and affections. I submitted her kind offer to cousin Bessie for a decision, and was of course, encouraged to accept it, on the grounds that I had never taken a day of real recreation since I had come to live with her.

The day before I left was snowy and windy, and cold; it was my birthday. Cousin Bessie took me by the hand, and leading me into the sitting-room after luncheon, said:

"Sit there, Amey," motioning me to a low rocker that stood on one side of the fire, while she drew up an easy chair for herself on the other, "I want to talk to you."

With wondering surprise I threw myself into my seat and looked at her with eager impatience, waiting for her to begin. She did not lose much time, only while she picked up her knitting from a work-basket on the table beside her. When she had put her needle safely through the first stitch she turned her eyes kindly upon me and began:

"So this is your birthday, Amey? Poor Amey; I remember the day you were born, well. I never thought at that time the world would be such a see-saw as it has since shown itself to be. I never expected I would be called upon to offer you the shelter of my humble roof."

I rocked myself slowly to and fro, and with a sigh answered:

"What would I have done without you, Cousin Bessie?"

This brought a sudden thought into my mind, it was so strange that it should never have crossed my mind before, I looked up quickly into cousin Bessie's face and asked with a puzzled and eager curiosity:

"How did you come to know I wanted a home, Cousin Bessie. Who told you of my father's death?"

She laughed a quiet, suspicious little laugh and then replied:

"I have been waiting for this question ever since you came, and it has been a continual wonder to me that you have not asked it. However, I will tell you all about it to-day, and it is a long, long story from the beginning," said she, laying her knitting down upon her lap and taking off her glasses, which she wore only while working.

"Your mother and I, as I told you already, were brought up together in her father's house. She was as like you, my child, as your image in the glass, and on this account I have felt that ever since you have been with me, I have been living my young days over again with my poor, dead Amelia, that was as dear as life to my heart. I have told you about our school days and earlier experiences. I will now tell you the strange sequel, for I think it is time you knew it.

"When your mother was in her eighteenth year she went to visit a widowed aunt of hers who was very wealthy, and whose entire fortune was supposed to be accumulating for your mother's ultimate inheritance. While she was there she met a young student who fell violently in love with her, and whose regard she fully reciprocated. They were both young, and handsome and ardent; both well educated and

highly accomplished, and both devotedly attached to each other. When your mother came back he nearly died of loneliness and grief, and she was little better, moping around the house in quiet corners, brooding over the fire and losing interest in her former occupations. Her father noticed the change and suspecting the truth, discountenanced it from the very first. He did not say much to Amey herself, but I saw that he was resolved to throw impediments in the way of their love's progress. He called it 'stuff' and in his desire to suppress and condemn it, he was warmly supported by his maiden sister, who had long ago decided that Amey's husband should be entirely of her choosing, and should be one whose social position would restore to the Hartney family some of the _prestige_ which they had lost through reverses.

"Amey's mother was dead at this time, which accounts for the domestic reins being altogether in the severe Miss Hartney's hands. For awhile, however, all bade fair to progress favorably between the young people, some letters even had been exchanged between them, when one day Miss Hartney came sailing into the library with a covert light of triumph in her little piercing eyes, with the announcement to your mother, her father and myself, who were seated around the table with our different occupations, that she was 'going off for a few days, to Aunt Liddy's,' and wanted to know whether we had 'any messages to send?'

"The color rushed into your poor mother's cheeks. She bowed her head very low over her papers and muttered.

"Oh yes, give Aunt Liddy my fondest love and tell her I am making all haste with the screen I have promised her. I shall send it to her in less than three weeks,' she added, daring now to look up when her agitation had subsided.

"Perhaps you would rather take it up yourself, eh?" said her aunt, pinching her ears in malicious playfulness. 'I guess I know something about this screen for Aunt Liddy, it is a screen in more ways than one--ha-ha,' she exclaimed in taunting mockery, but still with an effort to keep up a simpering pretence to good-humor.

"Your mother was afraid to say a word, her father had brought her up to look upon this sister of his as a limb of a jealous law, that would crush or annihilate her if she slighted or disrespected her in any way. But the crimson spots came back into her cheeks, and she fell into a sullen, indignant silence, that lasted long after her contemptible relative had left us with her incisive good-byes. That was a fatal visit for your poor mother's hopes, when her aunt returned she was armed to the teeth for her combat, it began the day after her arrival; she had invited herself to come and sit with us as we busied ourselves around the table in the library, as before; she wheeled her chair towards the window, and leaning back among its cushions, she began artfully.

"Aunt Liddy was asking me what would make a nice wedding present, girls; she expects to be called upon to make one very soon;' the color crept into your mother's cheeks, and her brown hair almost touched the paper she wrote upon. 'I told her I would ask you,' Miss Hartney added, pointedly, 'as you're likely to know more about modern tastes than I.'"

"It depends on the sort of person it is intended for,' I said, very indifferently, without looking up from my work; 'no two people

appreciate the same gift in exactly the same way.'

"Well, Aunt Liddy does not know very much about the prospective bride; the groom is her friend, he is a young student of the University there,' your mother paused, but did not raise her eyes. 'His name is--Dalton,' Miss Hartney went on with an insinuation of malicious triumph.

"Cousin Bessie!" I cried, leaning forward with quick eagerness and interrupting her story, "_Dalton_, did you say?"

"Yes, Ernest Dalton," she answered me quietly. "Ernest Dalton whom you now know, and who is the cause of your being with me to-day."

I looked at her vacantly for a moment, and falling back languidly in my seat, muttered faintly, "Go on."

"Where was I?" she resumed, looking wistfully into the space between us; "Oh, yes--where Miss Hartney pronounced Ernest Dalton's name so flourishingly--your mother looked up at her with a blanched face when she said this, and asked:

"Do you know for certain that what you say is true?"

"Oh! my dear Amey--really--you frighten me,' her aunt exclaimed, with dilated eyes and recoiling gesture, 'I am sure I can't say whether it is Gospel truth or not, I only know what I heard and what I saw!'

"What you _saw_?' your mother interrupted, huskily. 'What did you _see_, Aunt Winnie?"

"I saw this Mr. Dalton paying such attentions to a young lady while I was there as would convince anyone of the truth of the rumours that are afloat about him,' she simpered out, half-defiantly.

"His sister, perhaps' your mother muttered, knocking her ivory pen-handle nervously against her white teeth.

"No, indeed--nor his cousin neither,' Miss Hartney retorted, with a covert little sneer. 'What is it to you any way, child, who she is, or what he does?' she then asked with cruel mischief.

"It is all the world to me, Aunt Winnie,' your mother made answer, rising up in solemn dignity, with a white face and quivering lips, 'It is my life to me, for I love this man.'

"Whatever are you talking of, child!' her aunt screamed, leaning her thin hands on the arms of her chair, and bending towards her niece in furious consternation. 'Pretty work this is; how will your father like it, I wonder,' she gasped, sinking back again among her cushions in a dry rage.

"I don't care how anyone likes it,' said your mother quietly and sadly. 'I am old enough now to know my own duty. I shall love, and marry whoever I please.'

"Well! upon my word--you don't mean to say so--do you, Queen Amelia?' Miss Hartney returned in cold irony. 'Well then, my dear, you had better be wider awake to your own interests,' she went on, 'for your

first attempt is going sadly against you already, poor child. I'm glad your choice pleases you, you are not fastidious--but to all appearances your regard is not reciprocated very warmly. May be, he is only amusing himself during your absence, I can't say. He would be a great fool not to take you when you are so willing, and aunt Liddy is so fond of you, and getting old now--but it is evident that he enjoys the society of the other girl. Aunt Liddy herself, with all her partiality for you, confessed that Ernest Dalton's manner is much more distant and reserved with you, than with this Inez Campuzano, with her Spanish beauty, enough to intoxicate any silly, sentimental youth.'

"Go on, aunt Winnie, said your suffering mother,' looking up at her tormentor, with a glance of reproachful sarcasm. 'Go on, this is very comforting, and you seem to relish it. What else?'

"What else?' Miss Hartney repeated, with all the dainty sarcasm of a disappointed old maid. 'Well! since you will know, child, I may as well tell you--the brave Mr. Dalton is not alone in the field; he has a powerful rival; one of those dark, heroic-looking Frenchmen of high birth and fierce tempers. He swears he will have Mlle. Campuzano's hand, or Ernest Dalton's heart-blood--at least this is the story I have heard; she, in all her rich southern foreign loveliness, plays a becomingly passive part, and is wooed, they say, first by one and then by the other. If I were you, Amelia, I would never marry any one who was not more faithful to me, than this, there will be little happiness in store for you, if you do; he has plainly slighted you, in giving cause for such vile rumours while I was in the town, and could hear of his unbecoming behaviour--give him up child, he is altogether unworthy of you.' Miss Hartney added, infusing something of a would-be sympathy and solicitude unto her shrill accents.

"Your mother stood for a moment toying nervously with her white, trembling fingers. She was so proud. My poor, dear Amelia, and this taunting intelligence smote her to her heart's core. She swallowed a great choking sob, and drove the blinding tears that lay upon the surface of her large sad eyes back into the deep caverns from whence they had sprung. She then sat quietly down, and resumed her writing. In a month from that date, my dear Amey," cousin Bessie added in a low hushed voice, "she was married to your father, Alfred Hampden, who had wooed her in the meantime."

The hot tears were rolling down my cheeks during this latter part of my mother's love-story, and when cousin Bessie looked and saw them, she buried her own face in her hands, and wept silently for few moments.

"And how did it end?" I asked through my sobs, impatient to know every detail.

"Sadly enough," said cousin Bessie, wiping her eyes with a little linen handkerchief, and folding her hands on her knees. "The truth came out when it was too late. Young Dalton's actions had been misconstrued by a malicious rumor, as many a good person's are. He had interested himself somewhat in Mlle. Campuzano at the request of the very man who, it was said, had determined to murder him, being a devoted and earnest friend to him all along. He waited patiently for a little while, thinking it would all come right in time; at length, he wrote such a pleading letter to your mother, urging her to renew her old trust in him, and to do him the justice, if not the kindness, of

believing his solemn assurances, before the careless gossip of their mutual enemies. This letter reached our house on her wedding-day after she had left for her honey-moon trip.

"Shortly after her return, her aunt Liddy died, and as she was left sole heiress to the money and property, she was obliged to go to the funeral: there, she met Ernest Dalton once again. I believe their interview was heart-rending. She had her dignity as the wife of another man to sustain, and he had that dignity to respect, but he cleared himself in her eyes, and they bade one another a long farewell in the stillness of the death-chamber, with only the peaceful slumberer, who lay with the eternal sleep upon her cold drooped lids, as their witness and their safe-guard.

"Your poor mother was never the same again, and succumbed to the very first trial that beset her after this. She died, while you were yet struggling into existence. Heaven had pity upon her blighted life, and called her from the world of shadows and sighs that encompassed her round about. They repented--all of them--when repentance was only remorse, and kissed her dead lips with a passionate pleading for pardon, that was terrible to see.

"They christened you, calling you by her name, and Ernest Dalton was asked to be your god-father: these were the only amends they were ever able to make. I hope Heaven was merciful to them all, for they are dead and gone now," Cousin Bessie added, wiping fresh tears of bitter sadness from her eyes, "but it was a cruel wrong they did her--a cruel, cruel wrong," she repeated, swaying herself to and fro, and looking vacantly into the fire.

"And Ernest Dalton is my guardian, my god-father?" I said in a husky whisper, leaning towards her.

"Yes dear, did he never tell you? He couldn't speak of your mother, I suppose," she answered when I had shaken my head in a mute reply to her question; "he couldn't, God help him. I heard he carries her picture and his to this day, in a little locket on his watch-chain, and that he lives in voluntary singleness, determined that no one shall ever replace her in his love."

The tears were swimming in my eyes again: something throbbed and burned within my head, and my heart lay full and heavy in my breast. I remembered the little locket I had found, and saw Hortense's and my mistake about it now; but I would not speak of it then, I could not. I thought of Hortense's mysterious letter, and puzzled over it in painful confusion, but I would not mention that either, until it had shown me its meaning more definitely. One thing I did ask, with a trembling, unsteady voice:

"What became of this Miss Campuzano, did you hear, Cousin Bessie?"

"She married the Frenchman, dear, as she intended from the first. She liked the name and the prospect altogether of becoming his wife."

"What was his name?"

"Bayard de Beaumont, a good one it is I believe."

"Bayard de Beaumont!" I fairly screamed after her. "Oh, Cousin

Bessie," I cried--"how very strange all this is, my nerves are on fire with agitation. I know him. I have met him, he is the brother of my little friend Hortense, whose family name I never happened to tell you."

"Well! that is the man, and a poor prize he had in his Spanish beauty," cousin Bessie went on. "She was as dazzling as the sunlight, and as beautiful as the richest exotic, but she was as heartless as a stone. He was the maddest man in love, they said, that ever lived. He made an idol of that woman and simply worshipped her, and she smiled upon him, the cold cruel traitress, as she smiled upon everybody; won his heart and his senses with her artful wiles, and in the belief that he was rich, as well as high-born, she married him."

"And they were not happy?" I put in eagerly.

"Happy!" Cousin Bessie repeated with terrible emphasis. "I don't think they were happy at the close of their wedding-day. She who had been all smiles, all sweetness before, showed herself in her true colours then. I have been told, that while they were traveling on their wedding-day, she coolly remarked to him that, 'there was no reason now why she should take the trouble to be always in a stupid good-humour, that he had taken her 'for better, for worse,' and if it was 'for worse' she couldn't help it.'"

"You can imagine how broken-hearted he became," Cousin Bessie proceeded, seeing how impatient I was to learn the whole story. "He grew morbid and gloomy at first, now appealing to her with the remnant of his former passionate love for her, now indulging her every caprice, thus hoping to guard against occasions that might provoke her quick and cutting sarcasm; but he was always coldly and cruelly baffled; he had married beauty and grace, and external loveliness in the height of its perfection, but oh! what a soul was coupled with all this!" Cousin Bessie exclaimed, shrinking into herself. "She was the most eminently and systematically selfish woman that ever lived, and she lived to weep and regret it. When she saw that her shameful behaviour alienated her from the love her husband had once cherished and professed for her, she declared herself injured and deceived, and determined to revenge herself. This she did, at the risk of her very soul."

"What did she do?" I asked in breathless enquiry.

"Had recourse to opium" said Cousin Bessie with a curl of her lip, and a shrug of her honest shoulders. "And kept at it" she continued, "until she brought herself to where she is to day!"

"Where?" I asked again, in a hushed whisper.

"To the mad-house, for she has become a raving maniac. Her last subterfuge was too much for her, and I only hope it may not have compromised her eternal happiness, in vainly striving to gratify a fiendish, unreasonable wrath, and avenge imaginary wrongs. Poor thing, her beauty was a fatal gift to her!"

With the other strange features of cousin Bessie's story still uppermost in my mind, it is little wonder that I sank back dumfounded and dazed, into my chair, as these final words resounded in my ears. I could see Bayard de Beaumont, with his grave, solemn face standing

under a shadow of sorrow and gloom before me. What an infinite sadness, his seemed to me now, when I knew all! And my dream! How strange, how true it was. How well I knew that there was danger in that handsome face, with its intriguing loveliness, and its mock sincerity!

The outer door closed, while I sat silently thinking, and Louis and Zita came in with happy, beaming faces, and their school-books piled upon their arms. Cousin Bessie rose up, with a warning look at me, and kissed them both, tenderly, in her usual way.

The subject of our afternoon chat was hushed in a moment, and we gave our attention to the simple discussion of domestic topics, but it seems to me, if Zita or Louis had been in the least suspicious they could easily have detected the strained, unnatural efforts which cousin Bessie and I both made to appear disinterested and free from distractions, during the rest of that evening.

CHAPTER XVI.

By noon, next day, I had reached my old home, and was folded in Alice Merivale's warm embrace. How beautiful she looked, standing on the platform of the depot as we steamed in? So tall, and graceful, and lady-like, so handsomely dressed, so striking in every particular!

I was proud to be claimed by her, when I came out, and be led enthusiastically away by her, into their comfortable sleigh, among their rich and luxurious robes: in twenty minutes we were at the house, where a cordial reception greeted me on every side.

The news of my engagement had got ahead of me; there is no bridling intelligences of this nature, whether they go up with the smoke out of our chimneys, or creep through the key-holes of our doors, it is hard to say, but get abroad, they must, and do.

They are served up at the recherche repasts of fashionable families, and keep time with the stitches of gossip-loving milliners and dress-makers, they are the great prevailing attraction at tea-socials, sewing societies and bazaars, and are not unfrequently discussed over the genial "rosy" or behind a flavoured cigar. Rumour is the worst epidemic that has ever visited humanity.

But as there is nothing to be ashamed of, in half of what Rumour says about us, we may as well meet it with a friendly face, and this I did, when my old friends teased or congratulated me in their peculiar way. I shall not dwell at length upon the details of my first visit to my old home: those persons and circumstances that may interest the reader, more particularly, shall alone claim my attention. Ernest Dalton was not in town, he had left some days before my arrival, and had given no definite promise to return at a late or early date. I only learned, that he had "gone away."

Arthur Campbell, I do not count, of course, for I saw him every day at

least, sometimes twice and oftener, in the twenty-four hours; and Alice Merivale? She had her own story, which I may as well finish for the reader, as I pass by.

She had been home, about three weeks, when a dashing young Englishman took the Capital by storm. One of those tall, lean, wiry-looking fellows with clothes so well-fitting that a pocket-full of bank-notes would have utterly destroyed the desired effect. He wore very long and very pointed shoes, and a peculiar little hat, made of hideous tweed, with flaps tied over the low crown with fluttering ribbons. He carried a tall, lean, wiry-looking stick, not a bad counterpart of himself, if it had only had a tweed cap on one end, and a pair of tooth-pick shoes on the other, with here and there a little slit for a silk handkerchief, or a reserved cigar. His drawl was perfect, and his eye-glass as bright--as his wits.

In his outer pocket, he carried a little plush card-case, stuffed with little printed visiting cards, on whose immaculate surface, the name--Mr. Sylvester Davenport Clyde--lay in conscious dignity and beauty. Away down in the left hand corner, like a parenthetical guarantee of Mr. Clyde's imposing social standing, was neatly inscribed--Portland Place, London, England.

Mr. Sylvester Davenport Clyde, of Portland Place, London, England, a pleasure tourist in Canada, with a (figurative) mortgage on every town he visited, and a claim on the hand of one of Canada's fairest daughters.

It would be too hazardous of me, perhaps to declare that he had no claim upon her heart, but with the most perfect sanction of the most scrupulous discretion, I can safely avow, that she never loved him, for she owed to me, she did not. She laughed most boisterously at him, when he took his maiden snow-shoe tramp, and actually displeased him with her ridicule, when he came up the toboggan hill after an unfortunate slide, making strenuous efforts to shake the wet snow from under his stiff, linen cuffs; his yellow gloves were sadly spoiled, and his eye-glass broken; his hat was injured by being blown off in the descent, and there were other still more grievous consequences which need not be mentioned, since the mercy of the darkness kept them from the general view.

She married him, however, before he returned to Portland Place. Her father and mother shouldered the responsibility of paraphrasing his genteel pretensions by enumerating, for the gratification or envy of other Canadian husband-seekers, the many titled connections and immediate relatives of their prospective son-in-law.

If all they said were true he must have been related to half the landed aristocracy of that world-famed metropolis. What surprised me, above and beyond all comprehension, was, that Mrs. Merivale, for a lady who had completely forgotten that "prepositions govern the objective case," could remember with such accurate fidelity the endless syllables of these high-sounding titles, and the intricate channels and by-ways through which the original blue blood came down the stream of vanished generations into the narrow vessels that made Mr. Sylvester Davenport Clyde's humanity sacred and precious to fashionable eyes.

There was not much mention of whose son he was, his social prestige

had a more remote source than his immediate parentage. He was greater as a grandson, immortal as a nephew, a very idol on fashion's shrine when his relations by marriage were taken into account. He had endless cousins of high-bred notoriety, who had again married into still greater and grander families, all of whom Mrs. Merivale now reckoned as easily at her fingers' ends, as she could the days of the week, or seasons of the year. In this brainless boy who was, and ever must be an alien to the finer susceptibilities and nobler aspirations of true and sturdy manhood, the Merivales were pleased to see, a full and happy realization of all their fondest hopes. Alice would be courted and flattered in the highest circles; was not that what their dream had been from the first?

And Alice herself was seemingly satisfied. Her better nature had been crushed out entirely by her frivolous pastimes and pursuits. There was no re-action now, no leaping up of the old flame which cast great ugly shadows over her other life. She had stifled her struggling conscience, had laughed its keen remonstrances to scorn, and now she was free. Nothing now would do her but a ceaseless round of pleasures and gay distractions. Nothing but feasting, and merry-making and song. There must be no lull in the din of glad confusion, no pause in the ring of that restless mirth--that mock pacifier of human scruples that stirs and stimulates us to-day, but that to-morrow drives our deepest misery to remorse.

They were married after Easter, and such a wedding as it was! Half the merchants of the town might have retired upon their profits when it was over if they had had any hankering after good society, which they did not happen to have. Her bridal equipage, of course, came from England and was chosen by the Dowager Lady Trebleston, a great-aunt of the groom, who was not at all distinguished for any particular ability to choose a wedding outfit with extraordinary taste or economy, but whose name lent a flavour to the choice, as "Dresden" does to china, or "Cambridge" to sausages.

It was quite disappointing to Mrs. Merivale if any of her visitors had heard of Lady Trebleston's name, in connection with the bridal array, before she had had the opportunity and exquisite pleasure of imparting it. Still, she had many such disappointments, for the news had spread like wild-fire at its first mention, and floated through the town on every lip, regardless of discrimination.

The wedding-presents were marvels of beauty and wealth, and such an array as there was. Alice contemplated them with many a sweeping glance of open admiration, which was generally followed by the dancing of a light pirouette around the room, and an exulting cry of "Who wouldn't get married after that, eh, Miss Hampden?"

As this was not the time for remonstrance of any sort, on my part, I remained utterly passive throughout, watching the proceedings in their origin and progress with a curious and puzzling eye. Alice was full of the occasion; she danced and sang, and skipped about the house, in the maddest manner possible, hugging us all around whenever some new addition arrived to her already magnificent collection of gifts.

Such a trying on of dresses, and mantles and hats. Such endless speculations about the ultimate crisis of the whole affair, and how it would all come off. What the papers would say, and what people would think. Such an arranging of after-sports, travels, and elaborate

receptions. I expected the hair, of not only the men, women, and children, but of all the fur-bearing animals of the town, whether alive, or in door mats, to stand rigidly on end with consternation at sight of such realizations, and the teeth of all the combs and saws in the country, to water with envy when the great climax would have arrived.

No one spoke of her marriage as a great and solemn change coming into her life. No one foresaw cheerful glimpses of a happy, domestic life, presided over by a steady sustaining unity of loves. No pictures were drawn of quiet, fireside pleasures, in their future home, no praises uttered of a woman's hallowed power to make life's burdens easy for him whose happiness she is free to make or mar.

Every one said how bright a star this dazzling bride would be; the comet of many seasons, the cynosure of many jealous and many admiring eyes. No one said: "how loving, how devoted she will be, a model wife, a patient helpmate, the joy and comfort of her husband's days." This was a minor consideration. I suppose, the world knows nothing of these stay-at-home little housewives, the angels of many a happy hearth, whose busy fingers, beaming smiles and gentle accents are the rest and refuge of many a toil-worn weaver at life's heavy loom. To lay aside the world's distressing cares at sunset, to wipe his moistened brow, and "homeward plod his weary way" to his cabin small and lowly, where glows this cheerful love in one dear breast, in one sweet face, is to the uncouth "ploughman" a joy, a comfort, which many a prince doth envy.

It is not I who say it, but our century has proven beyond a question, unfortunately, that the full Christian interpretation of the Divine ordination concerning those "whom God hath joined together" has, like many other principles of rigid morality, become for the most part dependant upon that honest, toiling, sterling mass of humanity upon which society looks down with a haughty forbearance or condescending patronage. When we want a type of genuine manhood, let us leave the lighted hall, where gilded folly revels, let us leave the solemn chamber of science and of art, men have chilled it with the foul and withering breath of infidelity and materialism, let us leave the busy arena of commerce, men are gloating over gain and gold in their hidden corners; let us rest with that sturdy, active, middle-class, where the mechanic's ingenious conceptions puzzle and captivate the most listless observer; let us watch the busy minds and busier fingers of those men, so fascinated by their daily toil, that all the world outside their own great pursuits has become a power beyond them, which they neither flatter, nor defy. If the labour of the right hand be the touchstone of men's inward morality, then how conclusively my theory is sanctioned by the black and brawny fingers of the human industry, whose praises I could sing forever; there is no treacherous ambush in such natures, as I speak of now; no hidden recesses, where the animal man may lay in wait to assault or overcome the spiritual man. Every lurking tendency to evil is easily blighted by that stimulating activity which brings moisture to the furrowed brow, which strengthens the sinewy arm, and stamps its wholesome seal upon the broad and hardened hand!

It seems odd enough, to say, that among such are found the greatest and noblest phases of humanity, and yet, is it not so? Is not that man great and noble, whose honest path lies straight within the precincts of righteousness? who has lifted himself above the power of sordid

influences, who looks upon mortal throes as the stepping-stones to immortal joys? that man to whose watchful eyes the shallow side of nature is ever uppermost, he who serves but one master, whose only policy is honesty, whose only stimulus is the ever-abiding promise of a blissful hereafter, and whose attitude towards his fellow-creatures is one of charity and kind forbearance?

I have wandered a little, while noting down the details of Alice Merivale's fashionable wedding, and though I feel that it is doing Mr. Sylvester Davenport Clyde a cruel injustice to bring him to the front again, beside such pictures of exalted humanity as we have just been contemplating, I owe it, in amendment, for my trespass upon the reader's patience, to proceed with the interrupted thread of my story, and can therefore only trust to the generosity of his disposition not to dwell at any length upon the compromising nature of the contrast, but to remember Mr. Clyde, in his more interesting character of bridegroom, at a very showy and stylish wedding ceremony.

When the great event had come and gone, no one could tell exactly whether half his or her sanguine expectations had been fulfilled or not. I had an uneasy suspicion, at the time, that the soundness of the family's mental organization had become temporarily suspended, from Mrs. Merivale down--they seemed to have gone stark mad.

It was six weeks after the ceremony of pelting a glittering carriage with white slippers and rice, as it rolled away from their festive-looking mansion, that Mrs. Merivale dropped down into an easy-chair one afternoon with the greatest languor and physical depression, and declaring that "those fashionable weddings were enough to knock a body up for a month," quietly fell asleep among her comfortable cushions.

CHAPTER XVII.

There is only a little more labor for my long-used wheel, and the threads of my uneven life will have run on to the crisis. I cannot console myself with the thought that it has been watched through its tedious progress, by loving or partial glances: the bobbin was faulty and stiff at times, and the worker grew pensive and weary. Sometimes, the sunlight broke over my toil, and I sang to the wheel as it was rolling; but sometimes again there were shadows, and the wheel was then heavy and slower. Sometimes, the threads grew so tangled, that I sighed with impatience and worry, the weft bears the marks in the weaving--they are plain, in unwinding the pirns--and still, 'twas a labor of love, this patchwork of sunlight and shadow, this discord of sorrow and song.

"The fragment of a life, however typical, is not the sample of an even web" said George Eliot, and who knew the nature of the warp and weft of our human fabric better than she! We pass from our joy to our sorrow, as the night passes into the day, it is part and parcel of the mechanism of our daily lives, smiling and sighing, we spin and we weave till the twilight's gray dusk overtakes us--then our tired hands

are folded together, and the Master takes care of the rest.

From Alice Merivale's wedding, I was called to Hortense de Beaumont's bedside. In the comparatively short interval of our separation, she had wasted almost beyond recognition. We were mistaken when we persuaded ourselves, that she had baffled her former attack, she had never quite rallied, and when the March winds began to blow, her frail constitution gave way anew. She drooped so quickly, that it was too late when real danger was apprehended, to take her to a warmer refuge. Madame de Beaumont looked little better than her invalid daughter from weeping and worrying, when I arrived.

On the second day, only, was I allowed to see Hortense, and what a change I saw! There was death in every feature, every curve of her once beautiful face. She revived as usual, when I was announced, and wanted to sit up and talk a great deal more than the attending physician would allow, or than she was really able to do. They took advantage of this desire of hers, to coax her to nourish herself more than she was wont.

"If you take your prescriptions and obey orders, I shall let you have a half-hour's conversation with your friend every day," said the doctor one morning, in a bargaining tone; "if not" he added, pausing, and looking at her seriously--after which he shook his head slowly and emphatically, and said no more.

"Very well then, I will try to take them doubled if you like" she answered faintly, directing a playful glance towards me, and breaking into one of her old smiles. "I must talk to her!"

She could not "take them doubled," poor child, but she made heroic efforts to swallow them as prescribed, in order that she might have her talk with me. My poor Hortense! She never had but the one half-hour's conversation with me, for she passed into a better world, before the birds had learned their summer songs.

"Put away that book, and come here, my Amey" she said faintly one afternoon, as I sat by her bedside watching with her. I closed the volume and going nearer to her, sat on the margin of her bed, and took her delicate hands in mine.

"I have something to tell you now--my big secret--that I wrote you about, you know."

She began in broken sentences, her breath was weak and short, and her voice like an echo.

"It would not be so long if you knew about--about Bayard, poor--Bayard, and that dreadful--" she stopped, and a crimson spot appeared on each pallid cheek. I leaned over her gently, and said in a soothing whisper:

"May be I do know it, my little woman. Is it about Bayard's unfortunate marriage? If so, they have told me the whole sad story."

She bowed her head, in answer to my question and muttered feebly:

"I am so glad because I hate to speak of it, but my secret is not that. Do you know where Inez is now?"

I nodded affirmatively. "Well, first when she went there, Bayard had a dreadful sickness, and he wanted to die--called out to death at every moment to come and rescue him, though he was not prepared; he would not hear of forgiving Inez, he declared he hated her, and was glad of her affliction, and still, with these sentiments he wanted to die! Oh, how I prayed against his prayer!" she exclaimed, with an effort of enthusiasm, "how I begged of God, to turn a deaf ear to his mad supplication, and lend a willing one to mine. I suffered an agony of suspense, and at last, the crisis came, he struggled with it, conquered it, and got better. So far my prayer was heard, but my trouble was not over, he regained his health and his strength, but he was a changed man otherwise. He hated his past life and the woman who was so intimately associated with it; he became gloomy and reckless, gave up his religion with all its practices of piety, and abandoned himself to books of science, such as are the ruin of human souls all over the world. I remonstrated with him hourly, but without avail--" a slight coughing interrupted her here, I gave her a drink and shook up her pillows, and feeling somewhat refreshed, she lay back again and continued:

"Mamma thought that his solitude was perhaps his great enemy and wrote to his college chum, Mr. Dalton, to come and visit us for a little while." At the mention of Ernest Dalton's name a faint pink colour rose steadily into her face. "He came and spent three months with us, but did little good in the way we had hoped he could, but he was kind and consoling in another way. He gave poor mamma great comfort while he remained; when he left they sent me to Notre Dame, I don't know why, although it proved a great blessing in the end.

"My mother used to write me about Bayard's moods, which were now often worse, and never better. Ah! no one knew what a burden of grief I carried to and from the class-room of Notre Dame Abbey. Sometimes I felt that only for my mother, death would be a merciful relief, which is a sad conviction for one so young. One day," she said, lowering her voice almost to a whisper and folding her thin hands over the white counter-pane "I was praying in the chapel and I began to think seriously of all my troubles, how dark and gloomy they looked and how weak and cowardly I seemed! Suddenly a little voice within me began to ask: 'Why don't you make some desperate effort to save those whose misfortunes are making you so miserable? Why would you not try some daring sacrifice for instance, so that your brother be set free and the ultimate recovery and conversion of his wife be obtained?' I hesitated and looked through my gathering tears at the flickering lamp in the sanctuary. What sacrifice could I make? _I_ had no pleasures, no real comforts in life--nor the prospect of any--except one, and even that was only a shadowy, misty hope, the merest uncertainty; but it was my dearest, best-loved fancy, and I could not do more than resign it, so I knelt down, Amey, where you and I knelt side by side a few nights later before you went away, and--" a sob came into her throat and tears dimmed her eyes; my own were moist in expectation of what was coming. She rested a little, and allowing her tears to fall unwiped upon her cheeks, she took up the broken thread and added:

"I pledged myself to Our Blessed Lady, in soul and body for all the days of my life, if, by her holy intercession the double conversions of Bayard and Inez might be accomplished before I died."

"You mean that you promised--"

"Never to marry," she added eagerly "although at that time, only Heaven knew how I had grown to love Ernest Dalton. I did not know he was _your_ friend then, Amey. I fancied he had spoken in a particularly kind way to me and he could not but see how fondly I cherished his every word and look--but I gave him up--the only sacrifice I had to lay upon that altar of supplication. Afterwards I saw that what I had done out of solicitude for the welfare of those who are nearest and dearest to me on earth would, perhaps, have been exacted of me by the cruel irony of fate. Ernest Dalton loved you all along, I suspected it on that day when we examined his locket together, and your strange, conscious look when I spoke of him convinced me of it easily."

"Poor Hortense," I muttered in a half sob.--"He is my guardian, my god-father, and the picture in his locket is not mine at all, it is my mother's."

"Amey! Your mother's?"

"Yes, he loved her years ago before she married my father. There was some misunderstanding between them and they drifted apart, but he has always been faithful to her memory up to this. They say I am very like her," I added slowly, folding my hands and looking away towards the distant gray clouds outside.

"Her living image," said Hortense, wistfully, "if I may judge by that little picture, but you--didn't you love him too, Amey?" she asked with an eager look, stroking my hand gently with her own delicate palm.

"It is a time for confessions, Hortense," I answered timidly, "or I should never tell you this, however, we may as well be frank with one another now. I thought I did, until I had reason to suspect that you loved him also, from that moment I resigned him to you and refused to think of him ever again, except as an old, esteemed and devoted friend. I did not know at that time that he had ever known my mother, nor did I suspect the existence of the close ties that bind us to one another in a different way. I only knew that in encouraging my regard for him, I might be trespassing upon the peace and happiness of your life and that is something that Amey Hampden never would or could do to Hortense de Beaumont above all other living creatures."

"You thought he would return my love in time and that we would ultimately be happy together, and with this hope you made your sacrifice did you?" she questioned eagerly.

"I did, my darling little friend! I would not come between you and your life's projects, for all the world," I answered, clasping her wasted form in my strong, loving embrace. "I would have been well repaid, when I saw you happy with my help."

She leaned her head upon my shoulder and wept in silence for a moment. I would have checked her, but there were sobs in my own voice, and water in my eyes. At last when I had calmed myself a little, I stroked her hair kindly and consolingly, entreating her to be quiet and composed. "You shall harm yourself, with crying, and they will blame me" I urged, "so cheer up like a good little woman, and be yourself again."

She looked up quickly, as I spoke, the fresh tears trembled on her lids, like dew upon the petals of some woodland flower, but a smile, as bright as the sun-ray that dispels the dew-drop broke over her wan and wasted countenance, as she answered:

"Blame _you_! Oh Amey I have never been so happy, as with you. You have been more than a sister to me, you have done for me what no one else in the world would have thought of doing for another but Amey Hampden!"

"It has brought you no benefit, my little woman" I said regretfully, "although I believed your happiness was partly in my hands at the time."

"It has brought me more than you can ever realize, Amey," she interrupted, falling back among her pillows, tired from her exertion. "It has held the cup of a soothing friendship to my parched and fevered lip whose draught has dispelled every sorrow that lay hopeless and heavy upon my heart. If life could tempt me, now, to return to my former vigour and strength, it need only hold up to my dying eyes the picture of your unselfish heroism. When one has a friend, such as you have been, the pleasures of the world have a double sweetness; in a little while" she added, lowering her voice, and looking away towards the western horizon, into which the setting sun had begun to dip his yellow rays, "I will have left all these things behind me; the joys and sorrows of my young life will recede together into the mists of time, as I go on to my eternity--but, I know there will be some remaining who will carry my memory, the memory of my little life, that was not more than half spent, through all the years of her own happy one, someone to pray for me, to commune with me in spirit, even when I have passed into that shadow-land. And that will be you, my Amey. Perhaps it will comfort you then, to remember that I died in peace and contentment after all--for my poor prayer has been heard in heaven. When I wrote you that last letter, about my dawning compensation, I could see that I had not made my sacrifice in vain, Bayard was changing, every one saw it, resolving himself into the better man, he has since become, and more than that, Amey--oh, how it thrills me to think of it!" she exclaimed with reverent ardour "a change has taken place elsewhere! We received a letter from the superintendent of the asylum where poor Inez is confined, telling us that she had many lucid moments of late, and that her attendants had frequently found her upon her knees, with streaming eyes and trembling hands, imploring forgiveness for her past follies. This was soon followed by a second one, which urged Bayard to go to her: her health and strength were failing, it said, and there were great hopes of her recovering her senses before death. His name, it further stated, was ever on her lips.

"Bayard had a terrible struggle with his pride and his passions. He walked the room through the whole of one livelong night, sighing and moaning, and talking to himself in muttered syllables--mamma and I could hear him, and he prayed unceasingly, again and again. I renewed my promises and my life oblation. Towards morning Bayard grew calmer and when the sun rose he unlocked his door and came to seek us in our seclusion. How pale his handsome face had grown! How wild and dishevelled his wavy hair! How marked were the lines of misery and care around his mouth and eyes! He came to my bed and leaned tenderly over me, I could see the traces of his recent conflict so plainly

then."

"Good-bye, little sister,' he said, 'I am going away for a few days, take care of yourself during my absence,--and pray for me.' He kissed me with his cold, dry lips and turned away. When he came back a week later there was a peaceful sadness where his misery had been. He had seen Inez again; had sat by her death-bed and held her dying hand in generous forgiveness. He believed her then that she sorely repented of her past. Her dark hair had turned almost white, and where rich curves of beauty had marked the outlines of her face and form there were hollows and angles of emaciation and suffering. She died with a pleading for pardon and mercy upon her lips, and Bayard came back a better man. He says he will devote the remainder of his life to an atonement for his past, and this is what I have been waiting to hear before I could die in peace. I cannot presume to say," Hortense added humbly, "that my poor prayers alone could have brought about these wonderful conversions, but I suppose they have helped, the good sisters at Notre Dame always told us to 'ask and we should receive,' and I believe them now. What is the pledge I have made to the fruit it has yielded? The happiness which the world affords is well lost in such a cause as this. Is it not, my Amey?"

"Indeed it is," I answered earnestly, "but all the same I think you have done the most noble and heroic of Christian actions in enlisting against your own earthly happiness to favor such a cause however worthy it may be."

"I do not regret it now, Amey," she said with a sweet, sad smile; "when we look back upon our lives from the watch-tower of a dawning eternity we are glad to see some noble effort standing out in relief from all the daily transgressions that confront us. I wish now there were more such purposes in my empty life."

"This one comprised all others, it seems to me," I put in, earnestly, "you renounced even the possible and uncertain joys of the world. You lived under the yoke of this voluntary self-sacrifice, which was bringing you nearer and nearer every day to your reward."

"I have been well repaid," she answered faintly, closing her tired lids wearily, and folding her hands; after a pause she opened them and continued:

"When they saw how ill I was they sent for Mr. Dalton again, and he came to see me. He told me you were on your way to visit Miss Merivale, who was to be married in a little while, and that you were said to be engaged to Doctor Campbell, which was puzzling news to me at that time. He spoke sympathetically but not regretfully, I thought, of your engagement, and I wondered more than ever what relationship existed between Ernest Dalton and you. He praised Doctor Campbell in the highest terms and said that you had 'made a man of him' for life. Bayard was glad to have Mr. Dalton with us and kept him for several weeks. He left with a promise to return soon again, I suppose he likes to comfort Bayard while his sorrows are fresh," she added, closing her eyes languidly and sighing faintly.

Just then Mdme. de Beaumont came in on tip-toe with some tempting morsel for her little invalid. This broke the strain of confidence, and as Hortense showed symptoms of exhaustion and drowsiness, after taking her nourishment, we lowered the blinds and stole from the room.

In a few moments she was fast asleep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

By degrees Hortense succumbed to her disease. There were no happy revivals of her old mood now; no flickering of the old vitality that had brightened other lives besides her own.

She dozed nearly all day long, speaking very little and hardly heeding the questions that were breathed into her ears. The April thaw had set in and the air was moist and chilly. There was something cloudy and oppressive in the very atmosphere one breathed, but as the days wore on the sunshine grew warmer and brighter, and the birds hopping from twig to twig cleared their little throats and sang forth a merry greeting to the advancing summer-time.

The sunshine that flooded the world without grew warmer and brighter, it is true, but the sunshine of hope that gladdens sorrow-stricken human hearts in hours of wearisome suspense became colder and dimmer as each new day confirmed the painful fears of Hortense's friends concerning her ultimate recovery.

The time had at last arrived when death's dreadful warning rested on every feature of her wasted countenance. We no longer exchanged cheerful glances of mutual encouragement as we glided in and out of her chamber. All was solemn and silent as the awful visitor whose advent was now unmistakably and hopelessly announced.

There were tears, and sobs, and aching hearts that could not plead to Hope now, for Hope had grown powerless and passive; and so we waited in sorrow and suspense for the dismal day that was so surely at hand, praying and watching with our loved one while the flame faintly flickered with a dying effort within her soul.

May came--the bright, golden month of song and sunshine--and still the faint flame flickered, leaping up at times with a delusive strength and activity, then sinking down again until it almost expired forever. One afternoon I returned late. I had gone out into the fields in search of a handful of Mayflowers. I thought they might bring a smile to my darling's lips, and for hours I had wandered about the open country searching amid the tender early blades for violets--white or blue.

I was coming back as, the sun began to set, feeling tired and low-spirited. I had found but a few little flowers, for the season was late, and I was eager to reach my destination with them while the freshness of their beauty glowed on their tiny leaves. When I stole to her room, however, the door was partly closed, and Bayard was walking slowly up and down the corridor outside.

"You cannot go in now," he said in a whisper, laying one hand tenderly upon my shoulder, "Father Douglas is with her. Go and wait in the little front room," he added "I will call you when she is alone

again."

I turned softly around, and crept on tip-toe to the sitting-room, at the end of the passage; the door was partly open, and I glided in noiselessly. In an easy chair, by the open window, with his back towards me, sat Ernest Dalton, alone.

He did not hear me, and I stood with my hand upon the casement, wondering what I had better do: it was only for a moment, however. He was not the same man to me now, with whom I had parted so strangely, after my father's death; he was neither Hortense's lover nor mine, but a good friend to us both; he was my guardian, and the only father I had left.

It seemed strange to me, at that instant, that I ever should have looked upon him differently, I, who had sat upon his knee in my childhood, and cried myself to sleep within his arms, why should I shrink from him now, when his shoulders were bending with their burden of sorrow, and his hair growing silver, with the bitter touches of time?

By right, he should have been my father! My poor mother had loved him so! perhaps he was thinking of her, as he sat there, looking vacantly out towards the west. I stole my hand from the casement, and crept towards him slowly and gently. Still he did not heed me, he was sunk in a reverie too profound; a little footstool lay on the floor at his feet, I dropped myself quietly upon it, and looked up with a smile into his face.

"Mr. Dalton!" was all I could say at the moment.

He started, as if from sleep, and turned his sad blue eyes upon me, with a quiet wonder.

"It is you little Amey, is it?" he said, at length, taking both my hands and bending down towards me. "How are you, little one; are you well and happy?"

"I am not little Amey any more, Mr. Dalton," I answered, with my hands still in his, and my eyes turned up to his good, honest face. "I have grown into a great woman since I saw you last; I have learned many things--sorrowful things; they have told me the story of my mother's life, and it has changed the whole nature of my own."

"They have told you?--did they tell you all?" he asked in a low, tremulous voice.

"Yes, everything," I answered warmly; "Mrs. Nyle has given me every detail."

He looked at me steadily for a moment in silence, and the tears gathered in his blue eyes--but they did not fall. When they had gone back again he drew the footstool nearer, and began to stroke my hair with one gentle hand.

"Amey," he said, "I have been waiting for this day through many a long and lonely year. I might have hastened it, I suppose, but I could not--however, perhaps it is time enough now. You know, now," he continued, taking my hands in his again and holding them firmly

together, "why I have watched you, and followed your progress through childhood and girlhood, into your blooming womanhood. You know why I shared your little joys and sorrows in your youth; why I persuaded your father to send you to Notre Dame, when I saw how miserable your life was at home. During your absence I managed to find out the only surviving relative I knew you had. I feared a day might come when you would find yourself in need of such a friend, and indeed such came to pass. When you returned from school I met you in the Hartmanns' ball room; I had come in late on the evening train, and found an invitation among my letters; I knew you had come home, and expected to find you there, so I hastened thither, and saw you, as you know, first when you were dancing, and next in the conservatory. I shall never forget how you looked that night, Amey; it was as if time had rolled its iron portals back, and that forth from the buried past came the dearest and holiest associations of my life. I saw in you, as plainly as if the 'loved and lost' one her self had stood before me, the image proud and beautiful, of my first and only love."

"My mother?" I faltered.

"Your mother," he repeated.

"I remember now," I said, with slow, sad emphasis, "that papa looked strangely at me that night too, and did what he had not done for years before, he kissed me kindly and tenderly, and muttered something about my being the 'image of his happy past,' and of his never having seen 'such a likeness before.'"

"It is little wonder, child," Mr. Dalton answered, looking wistfully into the space between us. "He loved her, too, poor Hampden--every one did--but I loved her first, and best--yes, I know I loved her best. How I watched your every look and tone and gesture at this time, Amey," he exclaimed eagerly, "they were constantly bringing back my vanished youth, and casting fitful gleams of sunshine across my wintry track. And you took to me. I could see the reflection of the old love-light, faint though it was, in the eyes that were only like hers, and not really hers--yes it was a living pledge of her early love each time you watched for me, and welcomed me, or singled me out in a crowded room from all the rest. It was her inheritance, that she left you, wherewith to gladden the life that Fate had urged her to darken,--and you did it, my little one, though it could never be quite the same."

"I loved you, and watched you jealously, God knows I did, but it was not with that other dead love, which shall never be revived on earth. In the sight of heaven we belonged to one another, a pledge is a pledge, in spite of all the subterfuges and impediments of destiny, and we were pledged to one another. Therefore do I weep my widowed love, as if men had called her mine, as well as heaven."

"You were the only living reminder of my past to me, and as such I cherished and guarded you. One day I almost forgot that you were only what you are to me--it was the anniversary of that betrothal day, and though the winter wind blew cold and fierce without, something of the old fire glowed anew within my breast. I said to myself as I sauntered along the quiet street, 'I will go and see my _other_ Amey, in commemoration of this eventful day, perhaps she will smile a familiar smile and speak words of kindness, like those my heart remembers, of long ago.'"

"I went up to the house and asked, as usual, for your father," he said, breaking into a sad smile. "They told me he was in his library, and with the privileges of an old friend I walked unceremoniously in. It was nearly dark there, and the fire was smouldering quietly among the gathering ashes, there was a lounge drawn up before it, on which my 'other' Amey lay sleeping. My coming in did not disturb her; she never moved, one hand was thrown carelessly over her shapely head, the other hung down beside her, a rich red glow was on each pretty cheek and the shadow of a smile upon the lips so like those silent sealed ones that twenty odd years before had spoken their love into my listening ear.

"I looked down upon her, scarcely daring to breathe, lest the spell be broken. We were alone in the room--we two, and it was a day pregnant with stirring remembrances for me. Even supposing the spirit of my loved and lost one kept guard beside her sleeping child, would she check the honest impulse that seized me at that moment? Would she cover the unconscious lips, that in deepest reverence and most hallowed and respectful love I stooped and kissed? Would she, Amey--tell me do you think she would?" he pleaded, with a wistful sadness.

"I don't think so, Mr. Dalton," I replied in solemn earnest. "If things had been otherwise, no one would have had a better right to do so than you. Even as it is, your faithful, I may say religious, love for my poor angel-mother recommends you before all others to my everlasting esteem and affection. Besides--" I added a little playfully--"I am your god-child, you know!"

"I have not forgotten it, bless you "" he answered. "You have her spirit in you," he then muttered, as if in soliloquy, and then went on to say--

"It was on that day, that I lost this little amulet of mine--this priceless treasure, with the image of her beauty within, I have worn it for twenty years and more, I shall wear it until I die! I knew I lost it in that library, and used to assure myself that it was safe, though I would not mention it to any one. At last, you returned it to me, and I restored it to its accustomed place. It is all I will have, in a little while, when Arthur Campbell has taken you away from me."

I have never been able to say very much in the trying moments of my life, and so when Mr. Dalton's story was ended, I only looked out of the window upon the gathering twilight, listening to the echo of his plaintive accents, as they settled down upon my heart forever. After a pause, he spoke again:--"You have promised to marry Campbell, have you not?" he asked.

"Yes Mr. Dalton, I think he is a worthy fellow, don't you?" I replied.

"He is Amey, he is. I trust you will both be happy," was the distracted rejoinder, and then Bayard knocked timidly at the door; I knew what the summons meant and starting to my feet at once, I went and obeyed it.

CHAPTER XIX.

It was my last vigil by Hortense's bed-side--for, when morning came with its glad sun-beams, her spirit had passed away--there was no struggle, no pain, only a sinking to rest, a falling to sleep; a quiet transit from life's worrying turmoil, into the hallowed peace of death!

With a handful of fresh violets, and a cross upon her breast, a lily, white and newly-gathered, in her hand, the emblem of that purity in which her eternal sleep had overtaken her, she lay within the quiet precincts of her little room.

Many tears were shed, and many sighs were heaved about her! So young, so fresh a flower in life's great garden, lying before us with its broken stem!

We bade her our last farewell, and resigned her to the grave; I, who had loved her with all the intimate intensity of a glowing friendship, kissed her cold lips again and again, and turned away from her, forever. Mr. Dalton wiped the moisture from his eyes, as he stooped over the coffin lid, and touched her brow, fondly but reverently, with his trembling lips, Mdme. de Beaumont fell upon the prostrate figure of her darling, and in their last mortal embrace, swooned away! Bayard leaning slowly over her, with a face almost as pallid as her own, muttered in feeble sobs--"My angel! my guardian angel!" and with one long, lingering kiss, the last he could ever give her, he turned from her, baptized anew in her self-abnegating love, a conscious and contrite penitent.

When the funeral was over and peace and quiet were in a measure restored to the agitated hearts of her mother and Bayard, I made my silent preparations to depart. Mr. Dalton had left before me. Madame de Beaumont parted from me with the greatest reluctance, and indeed, I was not over anxious to leave her so soon after her severe bereavement, but my duty now lay elsewhere.

It was with the greatest profusion of gratitude and expressions of the deepest appreciation and regard, that Bayard and his mother bade me their last farewells. We went together to Hortense's grave in the morning, and prayed awhile; I plucked one little sprig of early clover that had struggled into bloom above her, and carried it away with me as the last parting souvenir of my deeply lamented friend.

When I returned to the comfort and quiet of Cousin Bessie's home, from which I had been estranged for many months, I began to feel the re-action of all my recent exertions setting in. I struggled against it with all the violence of a perverse inclination to combat it, but I was baffled; I grew weaker day by day, and at length succumbed to the depressing influence of a slow fever.

How good, and generous and thoughtful, dear Cousin Bessie proved herself a thousand times over during my tedious illness. Never complaining, never impatient, though at times I was so peevish and trying, night after night she tended me with her own loving hands, cheering me up when I was disposed to be gloomy, with the happiest of

predictions about my near recovery. At last, I began to show the effects of her careful nursing, and was well enough to be helped downstairs by Girly, or Zita or some one of that loving household--and even here their untiring solicitude pursued me; there was no end to the diversity of the distractions they provided for me, foremost among which was an invitation written by Louis urging Arthur Campbell to come and spend a few weeks at the house.

Cousin Bessie has most seriously maintained to this day that we treated her very shabbily on this occasion; she declares she shall never forgive Arthur, but she says it so good-humouredly that I am tempted to suspect her sincerity.

That she should have brought us together in the fulness and generosity of her heart, and that we should have taken advantage of the opportunity she afforded us of enjoying one another's company from morning until night, to plot and plan a speedy escape from her immediate guardianship, seemed to her a selfish and ungrateful return for so great a favour.

But she was too kind-hearted to wear her pleasant scowl very long. Mr. Nyle would talk of a time when "somebody" that he "had since had reason to know very well had committed just such an appalling offence, herself and," he argued, very suggestively, "unless that 'somebody' has had reason to regret and repent of her own rash ingratitude," he "could not see why she should interfere with other people, who were tempted to follow in her footsteps."

Zita and Louis laughed merrily at such allusions from their father, whose own eyes sparkled with the "light of other days," as he spoke them, and Cousin Bessie either bowed her head much lower than usual over her knitting as she heard them, or looked playfully up at her husband with a quick revival of the old time love in her pleasant, earnest features, and entreated him to "have sense, for mercy's sake and not have the children laughing at him."

In the first week of June, while the young summer sunshine was bright and pleasant, Arthur and I were married, Zita was my pretty bridesmaid and Louis our gallant groomsman; our only guests were the Rutherbys and Mr. Dalton.

Cousin Bessie gave us a cosy wedding breakfast, and it was amid riotous merry-making and boisterous good wishes for a long and happy future we drove away from the little gate, where some months before that we had begun the chapter whose joyful sequel was now in progress.

The rest is an old story, familiar to many homes and hearts, the story of that wedded happiness which is the outgrowth of two steady, abiding, enduring loves. I have been happier as Arthur Campbell's wife than I could ever have been as Ernest Dalton's, and I shall state why:

When we are young, we develop a tendency to exalt and idealize the common-place phases of life beyond all limits of reason or possibility. We flatter our buoyant expectations with the conviction that there is honey in the heart of every trifling flower we must gather by life's dusty roadside, and that it needs but the magic touch of our own hand to have it brought to the surface. This is a pleasant delusion, which, however, is susceptible of being rudely and roughly dispelled by an impartial experience as we grow older, when this

exaggerated tendency creeps into our loves, and it is there it holds the fullest sway, and does the maddest mischief, the danger of a disenchanting awakening is still greater and more hazardous. For when we love in an abstract sense we exclusively, love in utter oblivion of the exactions of real life; we never stop to consider that that love which purposes to endure and strengthen with time must be coupled with a broad, impartial view of the stubborn circumstances, which are the facts of existence. A love that is all poetry and moonshine dies a sudden death in the face of practical dilemmas.

I have become convinced of this many a time, though my experience of wedded life is necessarily limited. Arthur and I have counted the grocer's bills, and made out the wash account, with the pleasantest smiles and most playful manner possible; and I have felt as I leaned upon his shoulder and scanned the items before us, that he was the dearest and best of husbands, whereas--Mr. Dalton, oh shades of poetry and song! imagine Ernest Dalton poring over a soapy wash account. I mention it, and Arthur joins me in the merry laugh the bare thought of it provokes.

Mr. Dalton, however, was always our good, kind friend, while he remained in our town. To the spirit of emigration that pervaded our cities some years later we owe his loss. He stole away without letting any one know of his definite purpose, and buried himself in the solitude of the North-West prairies.

For a time he was a punctual correspondent, but there came a breach and a pause, during which we learned of his serious illness, and subsequently of his death. To the end he had remembered us, and no one grieved for him more earnestly, more deeply than Arthur and I.

Some weeks after the announcement of his death had been made known to us, I received a little box which had been found among his personal belongings, addressed to me. It contained the identical locket which had been in my possession once before, and which was now bequeathed to me with injunctions to wear it faithfully, in memory of the two departed ones, whose time-worn pictures lay safely stowed away within.

His money and other properties he bequeathed to the little fair-haired prattler now playing at my knee. We have called him Ernest Dalton Campbell, but Arthur says we must keep that until he is big, and in the meantime has christened him "Toddles," which is very absurd to my thinking, but to which, with all the edifying obedience of a Christian wife I am bound to submit now, as well as in every matter of greater or less moment.

I thought I had finished my story when I laid down my pen, a few months ago, and gave a long-drawn sigh of infinite relief. Time has, however, hastened the development of a few more items, that may be of more or less interest to those readers who have kindly followed the _dramatis personae_, that have been flitting through these chapters, with a partial attention.

As I write the closing words my _dramatis personae_ come trooping to the front, to group themselves for the final tableau--Cousin Bessie and her faithful husband are the central and leading figures; her hands are folded, and a happy, peaceful smile plays around the corners of her good-humoured face.

On one side of her stands Zita, a pretty, blushing bride, leaning on Philip Rutherby's arm; so ardent is the young bridegroom in his admiration that he threatens to spoil the whole effect, if we keep him before the public eye for very long. Louis is not with them, he has been sent away to college.

On the other side of the leading figures, Dr. and Mrs. Campbell, with a roguish gray-eyed darling, are grouped affectionately together; they all look very happy, but I think Mrs. Campbell is the most so of any. At a little distance from this last small circle stands our old friend, Girly, now grown beyond all recognition into a pleasing and promising womanhood; and away in the misty background a long-forgotten trio loom out in sombre sullenness; they are Mrs. Hampden, and Fred and the 'solicitous brother.' Fred is a hopeless dyspeptic, who can give his mind to nothing else but his digestion, which unfortunate circumstance frets his new disenchanted parent and provokes his no longer solicitous uncle.

They are all in apparent ill-humour, so we will screen them off from our laughing, happy band, as we rise to make our final curtsy and retire behind the curtain of our private, domestic lives.

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