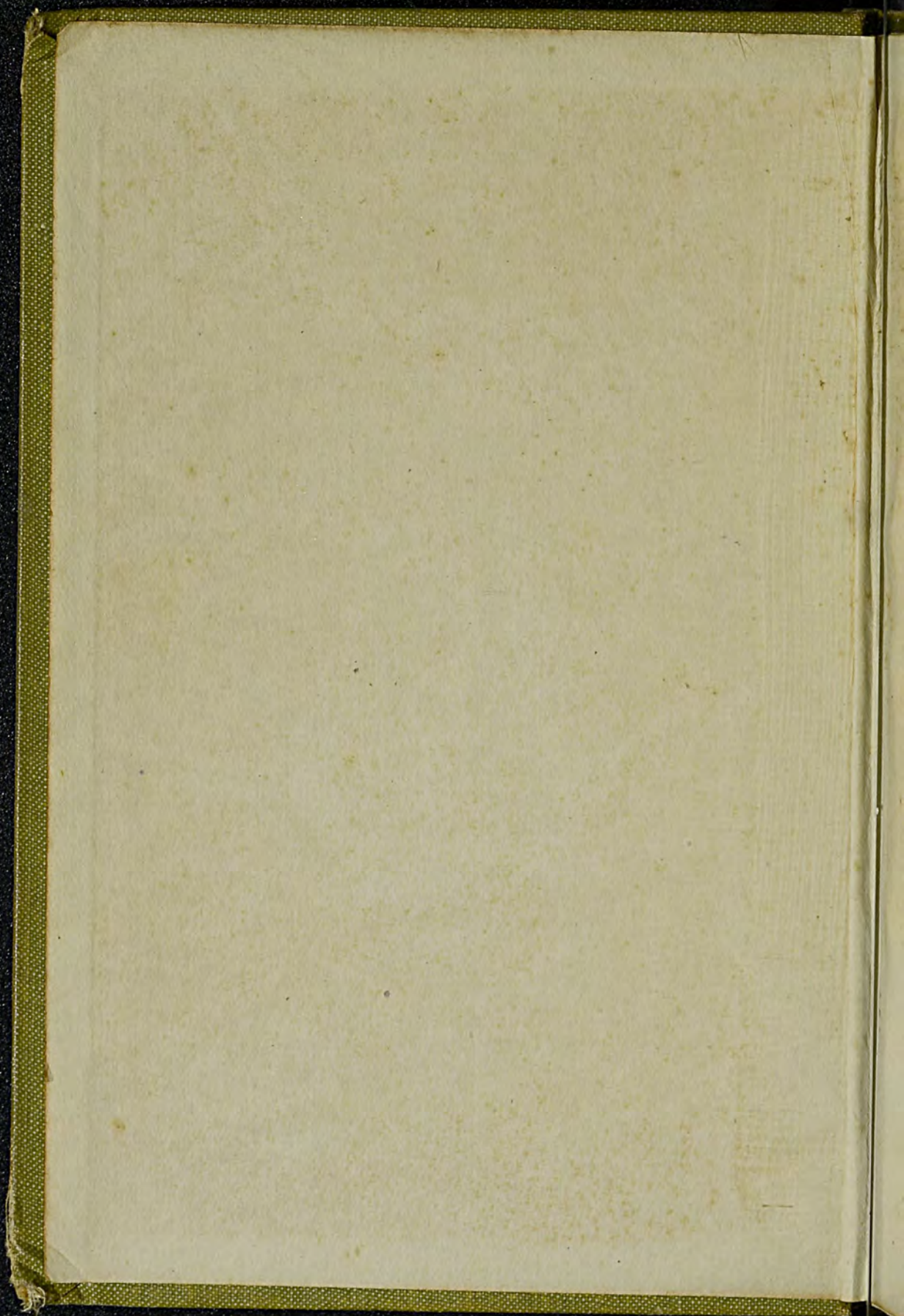
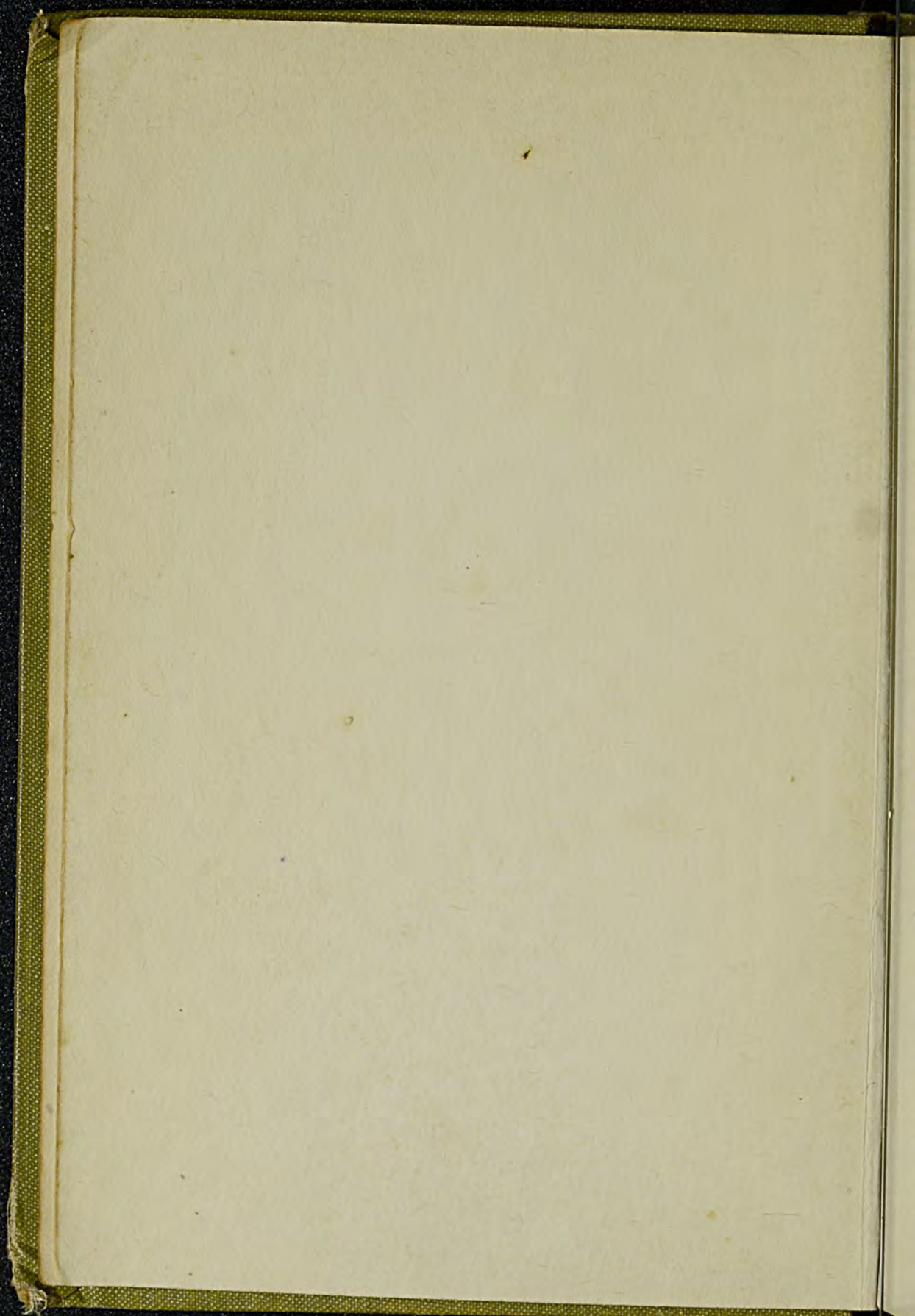


**STORIES OF THE
SEEN AND UNSEEN**

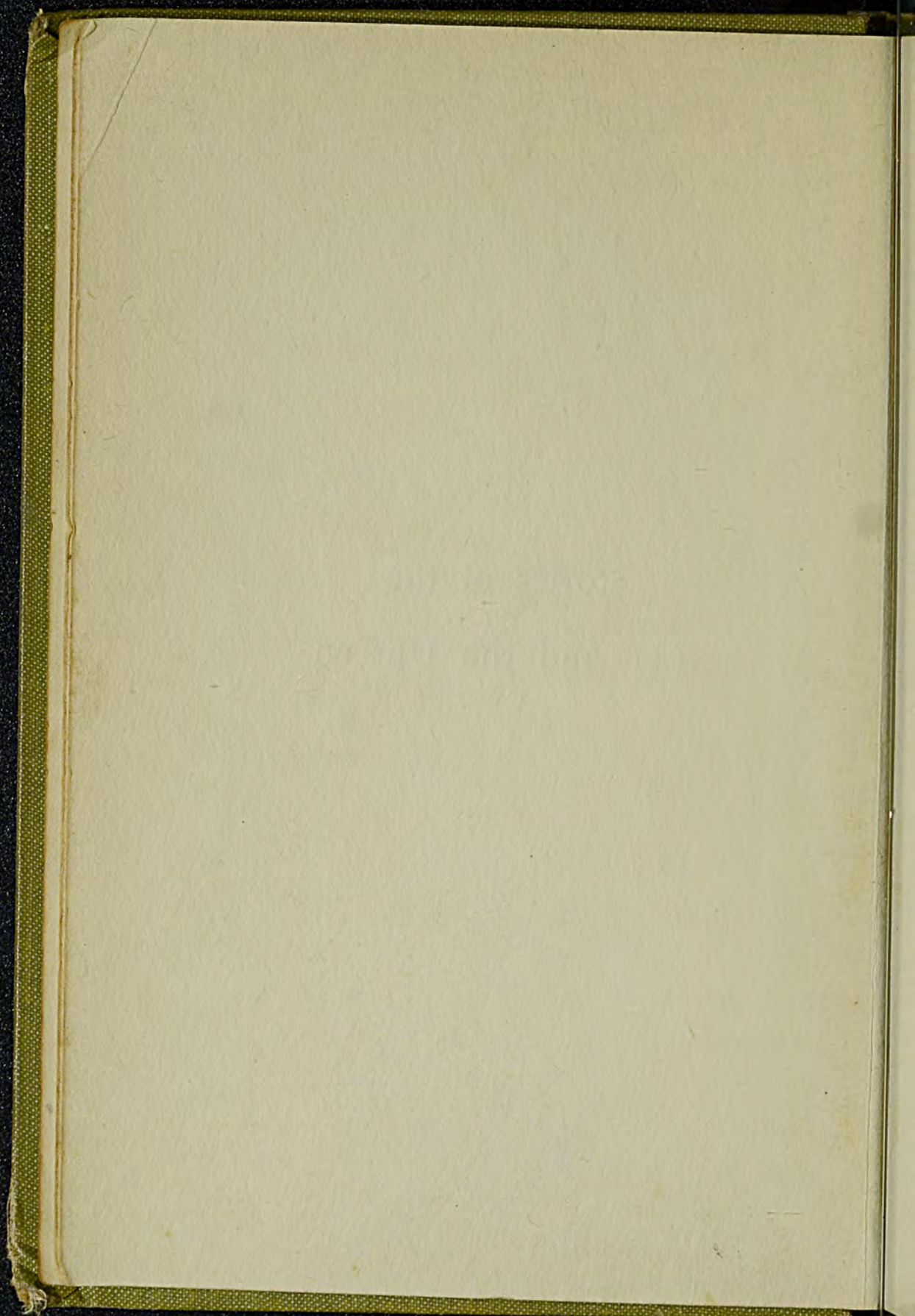
MRS. OLIPHANT



6



Stories of the
Seen and the Unseen



Stories of the
Seen and the Unseen

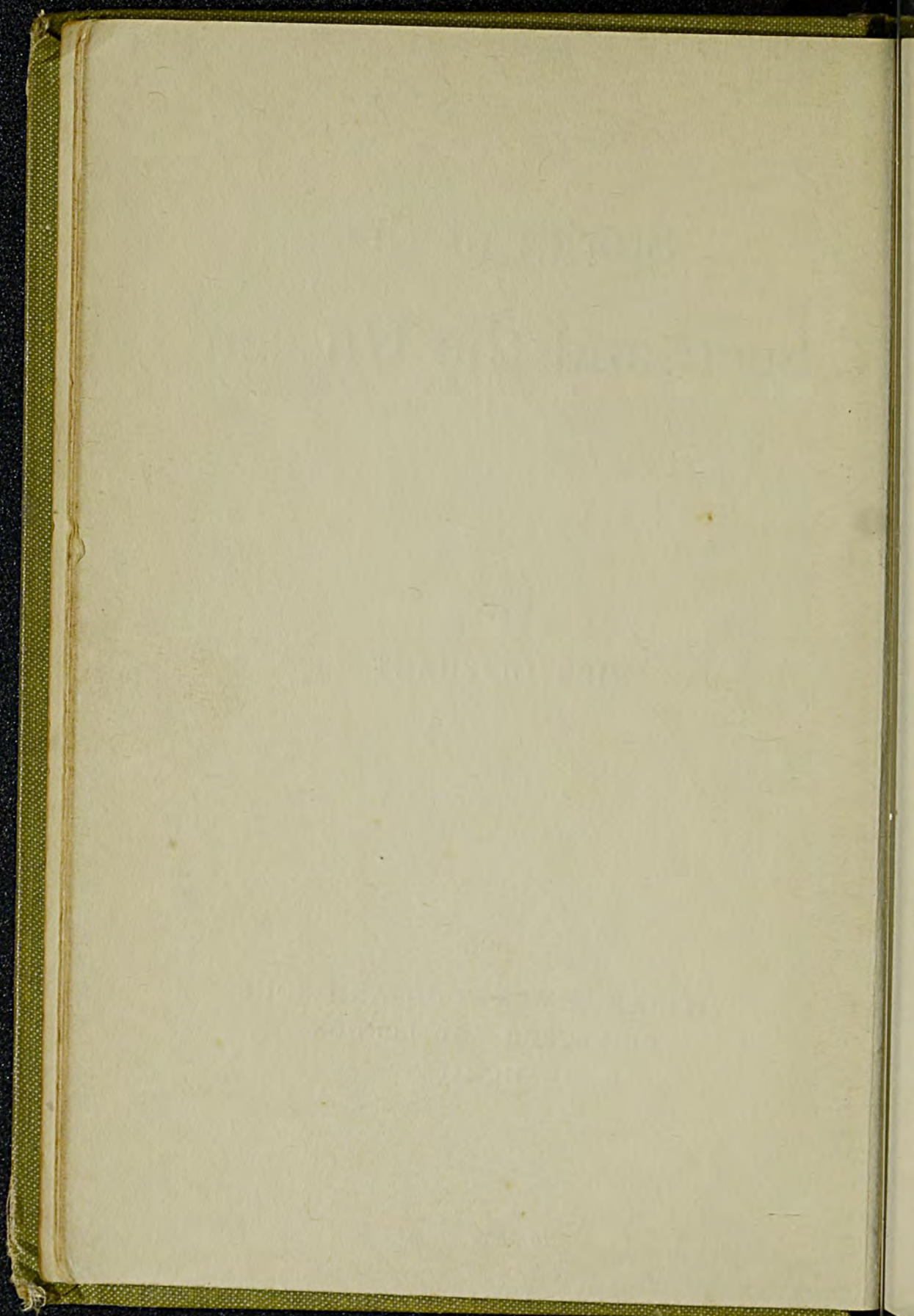
BY

MRS OLIPHANT

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

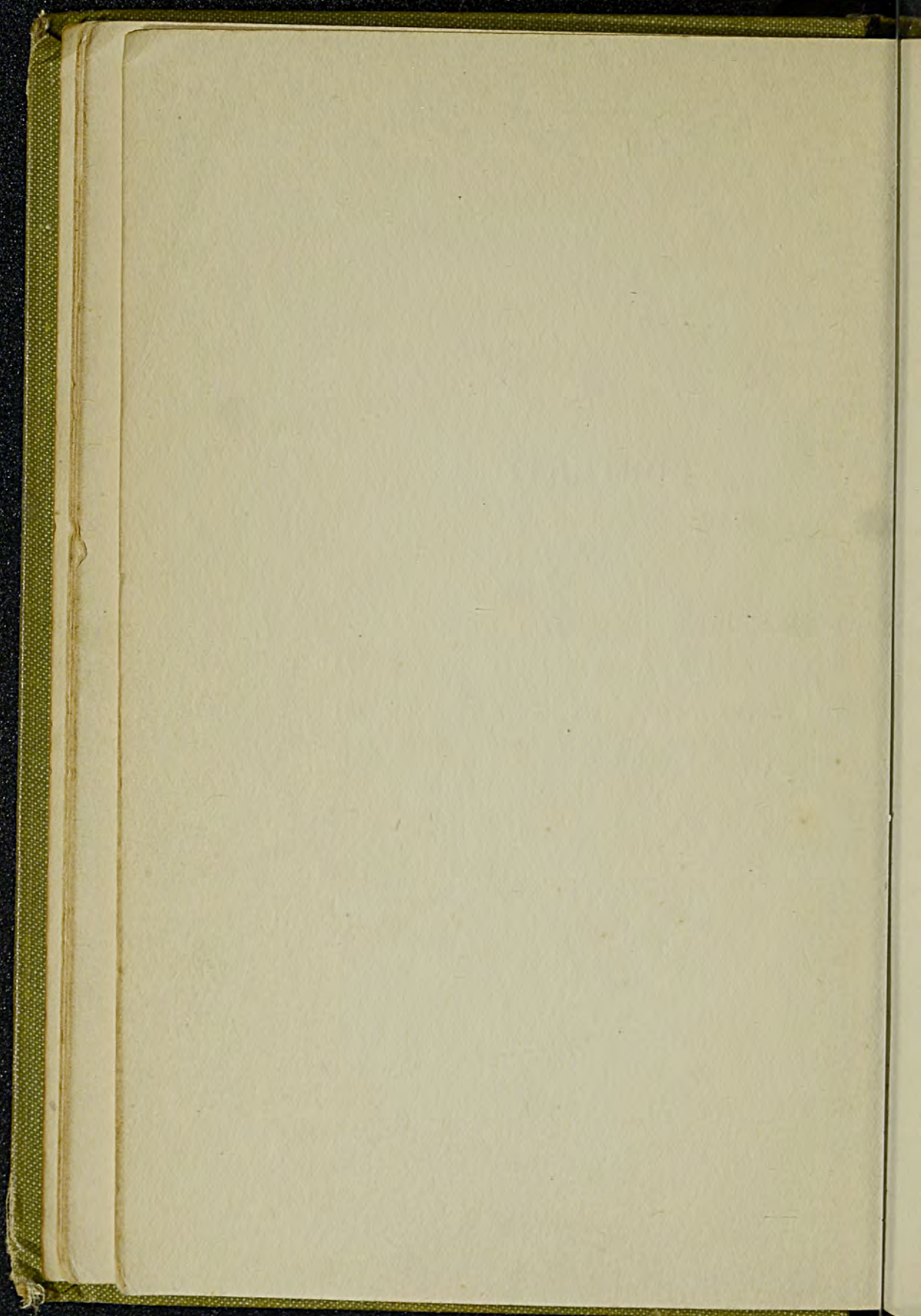
MCMII

All Rights reserved



CONTENTS.

	PAGE
THE OPEN DOOR	I
OLD LADY MARY	73
THE PORTRAIT	181
THE LIBRARY WINDOW	247



THE OPEN DOOR

INSCRIBED
TO
A DEAR AND HAPPY MEMORY
E. B. 1881

THE OPEN DOOR.

I TOOK the house of Brentwood on my return from India in 18—, for the temporary accommodation of my family, until I could find a permanent home for them. It had many advantages which made it peculiarly appropriate. It was within reach of Edinburgh, and my boy Roland, whose education had been considerably neglected, could go in and out to school, which was thought to be better for him than either leaving home altogether or staying there always with a tutor. The first of these expedients would have seemed preferable to me, the second commended itself to his mother. The doctor, like a judicious man, took the midway between. "Put him on his pony, and let him ride into the High School every morning; it will do him all the good in the world," Dr Simson said; "and when it is bad weather there is the train." His mother accepted this solution of the difficulty more easily than I could have hoped; and our pale-faced boy, who had never known anything more invigorating

than Simla, began to encounter the brisk breezes of the North in the subdued severity of the month of May. Before the time of the vacation in July we had the satisfaction of seeing him begin to acquire something of the brown and ruddy complexion of his school-fellows. The English system did not commend itself to Scotland in these days. There was no little Eton at Fettes; nor do I think, if there had been, that a genteel exotic of that class would have tempted either my wife or me. The lad was doubly precious to us, being the only one left us of many; and he was fragile in body, we believed, and deeply sensitive in mind. To keep him at home, and yet to send him to school—to combine the advantages of the two systems—seemed to be everything that could be desired. The two girls also found at Brentwood everything they wanted. They were near enough to Edinburgh to have masters and lessons as many as they required for completing that never-ending education which the young people seem to require nowadays. Their mother married me when she was younger than Agatha, and I should like to see them improve upon their mother! I myself was then no more than twenty-five—an age at which I see the young fellows now groping about them, with no notion what they are going to do with their lives. However, I suppose every generation has a conceit of itself which elevates it, in its own opinion, above that which comes after it.

Brentwood stands on that fine and wealthy slope of country, one of the richest in Scotland, which lies between the Pentland Hills and the Firth. In clear weather you could see the blue gleam—like a bent bow, embracing the wealthy fields and scattered houses—of the great estuary on one side of you; and on the other the blue heights, not gigantic like those we had been used to, but just high enough for all the glories of the atmosphere, the play of clouds, and sweet reflections, which give to a hilly country an interest and a charm which nothing else can emulate. Edinburgh, with its two lesser heights—the Castle and the Calton Hill—its spires and towers piercing through the smoke, and Arthur's Seat, lying crouched behind, like a guardian no longer very needful, taking his repose beside the well-beloved charge, which is now, so to speak, able to take care of itself without him—lay at our right hand. From the lawn and drawing-room windows we could see all these varieties of landscape. The colour was sometimes a little chilly, but sometimes, also, as animated and full of vicissitude as a drama. I was never tired of it. Its colour and freshness revived the eyes which had grown weary of arid plains and blazing skies. It was always cheery, and fresh, and full of repose.

The village of Brentwood lay almost under the house, on the other side of the deep little ravine, down which a stream—which ought to have been a lovely, wild, and frolicsome little

river—flowed between its rocks and trees. The river, like so many in that district, had, however, in its earlier life been sacrificed to trade, and was grimy with paper-making. But this did not affect our pleasure in it so much as I have known it to affect other streams. Perhaps our water was more rapid—perhaps less clogged with dirt and refuse. Our side of the dell was charmingly *accidenté*, and clothed with fine trees, through which various paths wound down to the river-side and to the village bridge which crossed the stream. The village lay in the hollow, and climbed, with very prosaic houses, the other side. Village architecture does not flourish in Scotland. The blue slates and the grey stone are sworn foes to the picturesque; and though I do not, for my own part, dislike the interior of an old-fashioned pewed and galleried church, with its little family settlements on all sides, the square box outside, with its bit of a spire like a handle to lift it by, is not an improvement to the landscape. Still a cluster of houses on differing elevations—with scraps of garden coming in between, a hedgerow with clothes laid out to dry, the opening of a street with its rural sociability, the women at their doors, the slow waggon lumbering along—gives a centre to the landscape. It was cheerful to look at, and convenient in a hundred ways. Within ourselves we had walks in plenty, the glen being always beautiful in all its phases, whether the woods were green in the spring or ruddy in the

autumn. In the park which surrounded the house were the ruins of the former mansion of Brentwood, a much smaller and less important house than the solid Georgian edifice which we inhabited. The ruins were picturesque, however, and gave importance to the place. Even we, who were but temporary tenants, felt a vague pride in them, as if they somehow reflected a certain consequence upon ourselves. The old building had the remains of a tower, an indistinguishable mass of mason-work, overgrown with ivy, and the shells of walls attached to this were half filled up with soil. I had never examined it closely, I am ashamed to say. There was a large room, or what had been a large room, with the lower part of the windows still existing, on the principal floor, and underneath other windows, which were perfect, though half filled up with fallen soil, and waving with a wild growth of brambles and chance growths of all kinds. This was the oldest part of all. At a little distance were some very commonplace and disjointed fragments of building, one of them suggesting a certain pathos by its very commonness and the complete wreck which it showed. This was the end of a low gable, a bit of grey wall, all encrusted with lichens, in which was a common doorway. Probably it had been a servants' entrance, a back-door, or opening into what are called "the offices" in Scotland. No offices remained to be entered—pantry and kitchen had all been swept out of being; but

there stood the doorway open and vacant, free to all the winds, to the rabbits, and every wild creature. It struck my eye, the first time I went to Brentwood, like a melancholy comment upon a life that was over. A door that led to nothing—closed once, perhaps, with anxious care, bolted and guarded, now void of any meaning. It impressed me, I remember, from the first; so perhaps it may be said that my mind was prepared to attach to it an importance which nothing justified.

The summer was a very happy period of repose for us all. The warmth of Indian suns was still in our veins. It seemed to us that we could never have enough of the greenness, the dewiness, the freshness of the northern landscape. Even its mists were pleasant to us, taking all the fever out of us, and pouring in vigour and refreshment. In autumn we followed the fashion of the time, and went away for change which we did not in the least require. It was when the family had settled down for the winter, when the days were short and dark, and the rigorous reign of frost upon us, that the incidents occurred which alone could justify me in intruding upon the world my private affairs. These incidents were, however, of so curious a character, that I hope my inevitable references to my own family and pressing personal interests will meet with a general pardon.

I was absent in London when these events began. In London an old Indian plunges

back into the interests with which all his previous life has been associated, and meets old friends at every step. I had been circulating among some half-dozen of these—enjoying the return to my former life in shadow, though I had been so thankful in substance to throw it aside—and had missed some of my home letters, what with going down from Friday to Monday to old Benbow's place in the country, and stopping on the way back to dine and sleep at Sellar's and to take a look into Cross's stables, which occupied another day. It is never safe to miss one's letters. In this transitory life, as the Prayer-book says, how can one ever be certain what is going to happen? All was well at home. I knew exactly (I thought) what they would have to say to me: "The weather has been so fine, that Roland has not once gone by train, and he enjoys the ride beyond anything." "Dear papa, be sure that you don't forget anything, but bring us so-and-so, and so-and-so"—a list as long as my arm. Dear girls and dearer mother! I would not for the world have forgotten their commissions, or lost their little letters, for all the Benbows and Crosses in the world.

But I was confident in my home-comfort and peacefulness. When I got back to my club, however, three or four letters were lying for me, upon some of which I noticed the "immediate," "urgent," which old-fashioned people and anxious people still believe will influence the post-office and quicken the speed of the

mails. I was about to open one of these, when the club porter brought me two telegrams, one of which, he said, had arrived the night before. I opened, as was to be expected, the last first, and this was what I read: "Why don't you come or answer? For God's sake, come. He is much worse." This was a thunderbolt to fall upon a man's head who had one only son, and he the light of his eyes! The other telegram, which I opened with hands trembling so much that I lost time by my haste, was to much the same purport: "No better; doctor afraid of brain-fever. Calls for you day and night. Let nothing detain you." The first thing I did was to look up the time-tables to see if there was any way of getting off sooner than by the night train, though I knew well enough there was not; and then I read the letters, which furnished, alas! too clearly, all the details. They told me that the boy had been pale for some time, with a scared look. His mother had noticed it before I left home, but would not say anything to alarm me. This look had increased day by day; and soon it was observed that Roland came home at a wild gallop through the park, his pony panting and in foam, himself "as white as a sheet," but with the perspiration streaming from his forehead. For a long time he had resisted all questioning, but at length had developed such strange changes of mood, showing a reluctance to go to school, a desire to be fetched in the carriage at night—which was a ridiculous

piece of luxury—an unwillingness to go out into the grounds, and nervous start at every sound, that his mother had insisted upon an explanation. When the boy—our boy Roland, who had never known what fear was—began to talk to her of voices he had heard in the park, and shadows that had appeared to him among the ruins, my wife promptly put him to bed and sent for Dr Simson—which, of course, was the only thing to do.

I hurried off that evening, as may be supposed, with an anxious heart. How I got through the hours before the starting of the train, I cannot tell. We must all be thankful for the quickness of the railway when in anxiety; but to have thrown myself into a post-chaise as soon as horses could be put to, would have been a relief. I got to Edinburgh very early in the blackness of the winter morning, and scarcely dared look the man in the face, at whom I gasped "What news?" My wife had sent the brougham for me, which I concluded, before the man spoke, was a bad sign. His answer was that stereotyped answer which leaves the imagination so wildly free—"Just the same." Just the same! What might that mean? The horses seemed to me to creep along the long dark country road. As we dashed through the park, I thought I heard some one moaning among the trees, and clenched my fist at him (whoever he might be) with fury. Why had the fool of a woman at the gate allowed any one to come in to disturb the quiet of the

place? If I had not been in such hot haste to get home, I think I should have stopped the carriage and got out to see what tramp it was that had made an entrance, and chosen my grounds, of all places in the world,—when my boy was ill!—to grumble and groan in. But I had no reason to complain of our slow pace here. The horses flew like lightning along the intervening path, and drew up at the door all panting, as if they had run a race. My wife stood waiting to receive me with a pale face, and a candle in her hand, which made her look paler still as the wind blew the flame about. “He is sleeping,” she said in a whisper, as if her voice might wake him. And I replied, when I could find my voice, also in a whisper, as though the jingling of the horses’ furniture and the sound of their hoofs must not have been more dangerous. I stood on the steps with her a moment, almost afraid to go in, now that I was here; and it seemed to me that I saw without observing, if I may say so, that the horses were unwilling to turn round, though their stables lay that way, or that the men were unwilling. These things occurred to me afterwards, though at the moment I was not capable of anything but to ask questions and to hear of the condition of the boy.

I looked at him from the door of his room, for we were afraid to go near, lest we should disturb that blessed sleep. It looked like actual sleep—not the lethargy into which my wife told me he would sometimes fall. She told me

everything in the next room, which communicated with his, rising now and then and going to the door of communication; and in this there was much that was very startling and confusing to the mind. It appeared that ever since the winter began, since it was early dark, and night had fallen before his return from school, he had been hearing voices among the ruins—at first only a groaning, he said, at which his pony was as much alarmed as he was, but by degrees a voice. The tears ran down my wife's cheeks as she described to me how he would start up in the night and cry out, "Oh, mother, let me in! oh, mother, let me in!" with a pathos which rent her heart. And she sitting there all the time, only longing to do everything his heart could desire! But though she would try to soothe him, crying, "You are at home, my darling. I am here. Don't you know me? Your mother is here!" he would only stare at her, and after a while spring up again with the same cry. At other times he would be quite reasonable, she said, asking eagerly when I was coming, but declaring that he must go with me as soon as I did so, "to let them in." "The doctor thinks his nervous system must have received a shock," my wife said. "Oh, Henry, can it be that we have pushed him on too much with his work—a delicate boy like Roland?—and what is his work in comparison with his health? Even you would think little of honours or prizes if it hurt the boy's health." Even I! as if I were an

inhuman father sacrificing my child to my ambition. But I would not increase her trouble by taking any notice. After a while they persuaded me to lie down, to rest, and to eat—none of which things had been possible since I received their letters. The mere fact of being on the spot, of course, in itself was a great thing; and when I knew that I could be called in a moment, as soon as he was awake and wanted me, I felt capable, even in the dark, chill morning twilight, to snatch an hour or two's sleep. As it happened, I was so worn out with the strain of anxiety, and he so quieted and consoled by knowing I had come, that I was not disturbed till the afternoon, when the twilight had again settled down. There was just daylight enough to see his face when I went to him; and what a change in a fortnight! He was paler and more worn, I thought, than even in those dreadful days in the plains before we left India. His hair seemed to me to have grown long and lank; his eyes were like blazing lights projecting out of his white face. He got hold of my hand in a cold and tremulous clutch, and waved to everybody to go away. "Go away—even mother," he said,—“go away.” This went to her heart, for she did not like that even I should have more of the boy's confidence than herself; but my wife has never been a woman to think of herself, and she left us alone. "Are they all gone?" he said, eagerly. "They would not let me speak. The doctor treated

me as if I were a fool. You know I am not a fool, papa."

"Yes, yes, my boy, I know; but you are ill, and quiet is so necessary. You are not only not a fool, Roland, but you are reasonable and understand. When you are ill you must deny yourself; you must not do everything that you might do being well."

He waved his thin hand with a sort of indignation. "Then, father, I am not ill," he cried. "Oh, I thought when you came you would not stop me,—you would see the sense of it! What do you think is the matter with me, all of you? Simson is well enough, but he is only a doctor. What do you think is the matter with me? I am no more ill than you are. A doctor, of course, he thinks you are ill the moment he looks at you—that's what he's there for—and claps you into bed."

"Which is the best place for you at present, my dear boy."

"I made up my mind," cried the little fellow, "that I would stand it till you came home. I said to myself, I won't frighten mother and the girls. But now, father," he cried, half jumping out of bed, "it's not illness,—it's a secret."

His eyes shone so wildly, his face was so swept with strong feeling, that my heart sank within me. It could be nothing but fever that did it, and fever had been so fatal. I got him into my arms to put him back into bed. "Roland," I said, humouring the poor child,

which I knew was the only way, "if you are going to tell me this secret to do any good, you know you must be quite quiet, and not excite yourself. If you excite yourself, I must not let you speak."

"Yes, father," said the boy. He was quiet directly, like a man, as if he quite understood. When I had laid him back on his pillow, he looked up at me with that grateful sweet look with which children, when they are ill, break one's heart, the water coming into his eyes in his weakness. "I was sure as soon as you were here you would know what to do," he said.

"To be sure, my boy. Now keep quiet, and tell it all out like a man." To think I was telling lies to my own child! for I did it only to humour him, thinking, poor little fellow, his brain was wrong.

"Yes, father. Father, there is some one in the park,—some one that has been badly used."

"Hush, my dear; you remember, there is to be no excitement. Well, who is this somebody, and who has been ill-using him? We will soon put a stop to that."

"Ah," cried Roland, "but it is not so easy as you think. I don't know who it is. It is just a cry. Oh, if you could hear it! It gets into my head in my sleep. I heard it as clear—as clear;—and they think that I am dreaming—or raving perhaps," the boy said, with a sort of disdainful smile.

This look of his perplexed me; it was less

like fever than I thought. "Are you quite sure you have not dreamt it, Roland?" I said.

"Dreamt?—that!" He was springing up again when he suddenly bethought himself, and lay down flat with the same sort of smile on his face. "The pony heard it too," he said. "She jumped as if she had been shot. If I had not grasped at the reins,—for I was frightened, father——"

"No shame to you, my boy," said I, though I scarcely knew why.

"If I hadn't held to her like a leech, she'd have pitched me over her head, and never drew breath till we were at the door. Did the pony dream it?" he said, with a soft disdain, yet indulgence for my foolishness. Then he added slowly: "It was only a cry the first time, and all the time before you went away. I wouldn't tell you, for it was so wretched to be frightened. I thought it might be a hare or a rabbit snared, and I went in the morning and looked, but there was nothing. It was after you went I heard it really first, and this is what he says." He raised himself on his elbow close to me, and looked me in the face. "'Oh, mother, let me in! oh, mother, let me in!'" As he said the words a mist came over his face, the mouth quivered, the soft features all melted and changed, and when he had ended these pitiful words, dissolved in a shower of heavy tears.

Was it a hallucination? Was it the fever of the brain? Was it the disordered fancy

caused by great bodily weakness? How could I tell? I thought it wisest to accept it as if it were all true.

"This is very touching, Roland," I said.

"Oh, if you had just heard it, father! I said to myself, if father heard it he would do something; but mamma, you know, she's given over to Simson, and that fellow's a doctor, and never thinks of anything but clapping you into bed."

"We must not blame Simson for being a doctor, Roland."

"No, no," said my boy, with delightful toleration and indulgence; "oh no; that's the good of him—that's what he's for; I know that. But you—you are different; you are just father: and you'll do something,—directly, papa, directly,—this very night."

"Surely," I said. "No doubt it is some little lost child."

He gave me a sudden, swift look, investigating my face as though to see whether, after all, this was everything my eminence as "father" came to,—no more than that? Then he got hold of my shoulder, clutching it with his thin hand: "Look here," he said, with a quiver in his voice; "suppose it wasn't—living at all!"

"My dear boy, how then could you have heard it?" I said.

He turned away from me with a pettish exclamation—"As if you didn't know better than that!"

"Do you want to tell me it is a ghost?" I said.

Roland withdrew his hand; his countenance assumed an aspect of great dignity and gravity; a slight quiver remained about his lips. "Whatever it was—you always said we were not to call names. It was something—in trouble. Oh, father, in terrible trouble!"

"But, my boy," I said—I was at my wits' end—"if it was a child that was lost, or any poor human creature—but, Roland, what do you want me to do?"

"I should know if I was you," said the child, eagerly. "That is what I always said to myself—Father will know. Oh, papa, papa, to have to face it night after night, in such terrible, terrible trouble! and never to be able to do it any good. I don't want to cry; it's like a baby, I know; but what can I do else?—out there all by itself in the ruin, and nobody to help it. I can't bear it, I can't bear it!" cried my generous boy. And in his weakness he burst out, after many attempts to restrain it, into a great childish fit of sobbing and tears.

I do not know that I ever was in a greater perplexity in my life; and afterwards, when I thought of it, there was something comic in it too. It is bad enough to find your child's mind possessed with the conviction that he has seen—or heard—a ghost. But that he should require you to go instantly and help that ghost, was the most bewildering experience

that had ever come my way. I am a sober man myself, and not superstitious—at least any more than everybody is superstitious. Of course I do not believe in ghosts; but I don't deny, any more than other people, that there are stories, which I cannot pretend to understand. My blood got a sort of chill in my veins at the idea that Roland should be a ghost-seer; for that generally means a hysterical temperament and weak health, and all that men most hate and fear for their children. But that I should take up his ghost and right its wrongs, and save it from its trouble, was such a mission as was enough to confuse any man. I did my best to console my boy without giving any promise of this astonishing kind; but he was too sharp for me. He would have none of my caresses. With sobs breaking in at intervals upon his voice, and the rain-drops hanging on his eyelids, he yet returned to the charge.

"It will be there now—it will be there all the night. Oh think, papa, think, if it was me! I can't rest for thinking of it. Don't!" he cried, putting away my hand—"don't! You go and help it, and mother can take care of me."

"But, Roland, what can I do?"

My boy opened his eyes, which were large with weakness and fever, and gave me a smile such, I think, as sick children only know the secret of. "I was sure you would know as soon as you came. I always said—Father will

know : and mother," he cried, with a softening of repose upon his face, his limbs relaxing, his form sinking with a luxurious ease in his bed—"mother can come and take care of me."

I called her, and saw him turn to her with the complete dependence of a child, and then I went away and left them, as perplexed a man as any in Scotland. I must say, however, I had this consolation, that my mind was greatly eased about Roland. He might be under a hallucination, but his head was clear enough, and I did not think him so ill as everybody else did. The girls were astonished even at the ease with which I took it. "How do you think he is?" they said in a breath, coming round me, laying hold of me. "Not half so ill as I expected," I said; "not very bad at all." "Oh, papa, you are a darling!" cried Agatha, kissing me, and crying upon my shoulder; while little Jeanie, who was as pale as Roland, clasped both her arms round mine, and could not speak at all. I knew nothing about it, not half so much as Simson: but they believed in me; they had a feeling that all would go right now. God is very good to you when your children look to you like that. It makes one humble, not proud. I was not worthy of it; and then I recollected that I had to act the part of a father to Roland's ghost, which made me almost laugh, though I might just as well have cried. It was the strangest mission that ever was intrusted to mortal man.

It was then I remembered suddenly the looks of the men when they turned to take the brougham to the stables in the dark that morning: they had not liked it, and the horses had not liked it. I remembered that even in my anxiety about Roland I had heard them tearing along the avenue back to the stables, and had made a memorandum mentally that I must speak of it. It seemed to me that the best thing I could do was to go to the stables now and make a few inquiries. It is impossible to fathom the minds of rustics; there might be some devilry of practical joking, for anything I knew; or they might have some interest in getting up a bad reputation for the Brentwood avenue. It was getting dark by the time I went out, and nobody who knows the country will need to be told how black is the darkness of a November night under high laurel-bushes and yew-trees. I walked into the heart of the shrubberies two or three times, not seeing a step before me, till I came out upon the broader carriage-road, where the trees opened a little, and there was a faint grey glimmer of sky visible, under which the great limes and elms stood darkling like ghosts; but it grew black again as I approached the corner where the ruins lay. Both eyes and ears were on the alert, as may be supposed; but I could see nothing in the absolute gloom, and, so far as I can recollect, I heard nothing. Nevertheless there came a strong impression upon me that somebody was there. It is a sensation

which most people have felt. I have seen when it has been strong enough to awake me out of sleep, the sense of some one looking at me. I suppose my imagination had been affected by Roland's story; and the mystery of the darkness is always full of suggestions. I stamped my feet violently on the gravel to rouse myself, and called out sharply, "Who's there?" Nobody answered, nor did I expect any one to answer, but the impression had been made. I was so foolish that I did not like to look back, but went sideways, keeping an eye on the gloom behind. It was with great relief that I spied the light in the stables, making a sort of oasis in the darkness. I walked very quickly into the midst of that lighted and cheerful place, and thought the clank of the groom's pail one of the pleasantest sounds I had ever heard. The coachman was the head of this little colony, and it was to his house I went to pursue my investigations. He was a native of the district, and had taken care of the place in the absence of the family for years; it was impossible but that he must know everything that was going on, and all the traditions of the place. The men, I could see, eyed me anxiously when I thus appeared at such an hour among them, and followed me with their eyes to Jarvis's house, where he lived alone with his old wife, their children being all married and out in the world. Mrs Jarvis met me with anxious questions. How was the poor young gentleman? but the others

knew, I could see by their faces, that not even this was the foremost thing in my mind.

"Noises?—ou ay, there'll be noises—the wind in the trees, and the water souging down the glen. As for tramps, Cornel, no, there's little o' that kind o' cattle about here; and Merran at the gate's a careful body." Jarvis moved about with some embarrassment from one leg to another as he spoke. He kept in the shade, and did not look at me more than he could help. Evidently his mind was perturbed, and he had reasons for keeping his own counsel. His wife sat by, giving him a quick look now and then, but saying nothing. The kitchen was very snug, and warm, and bright—as different as could be from the chill and mystery of the night outside.

"I think you are trifling with me, Jarvis," I said.

"Triflin', Cornel? no me. What would I trifle for? If the deevil himsel was in the auld hoose, I have no interest in't one way or another——"

"Sandy, hold your peace!" cried his wife, imperatively.

"And what am I to hold my peace for, wi' the Cornel standing there asking a' thae questions? I'm saying, if the deevil himsel——"

"And I'm telling ye hold your peace!" cried the woman, in great excitement. "Dark

November weather and lang nichts, and us that ken a' we ken. How daur ye name—a name that shouldna be spoken?" She threw down her stocking and got up, also in great agitation. "I tell't ye you never could keep it. It's no a thing that will hide; and the haill toun kens as weel as you or me. Tell the Cornel straight out—or see, I'll do it. I dinna hold wi' your secrets: and a secret that the haill toun kens!" She snapped her fingers with an air of large disdain. As for Jarvis, ruddy and big as he was, he shrank to nothing before this decided woman. He repeated to her two or three times her own adjuration, "Hold your peace!" then, suddenly changing his tone, cried out, "Tell him then, confound ye! I'll wash my hands o't. If a' the ghosts in Scotland were in the auld hoose, is that ony concern o' mine?"

After this I elicited without much difficulty the whole story. In the opinion of the Jarvises, and of everybody about, the certainty that the place was haunted was beyond all doubt. As Sandy and his wife warmed to the tale, one tripping up another in their eagerness to tell everything, it gradually developed as distinct a superstition as I ever heard, and not without poetry and pathos. How long it was since the voice had been heard first, nobody could tell with certainty. Jarvis's opinion was that his father, who had been coachman at Brentwood before him, had never heard anything about it, and that the whole thing had

arisen within the last ten years, since the complete dismantling of the old house: which was a wonderfully modern date for a tale so well authenticated. According to these witnesses, and to several whom I questioned afterwards, and who were all in perfect agreement, it was only in the months of November and December that "the visitation" occurred. During these months, the darkest of the year, scarcely a night passed without the recurrence of these inexplicable cries. Nothing, it was said, had ever been seen—at least nothing that could be identified. Some people, bolder or more imaginative than the others, had seen the darkness moving, Mrs Jarvis said, with unconscious poetry. It began when night fell, and continued, at intervals, till day broke. Very often it was only an inarticulate cry and moaning, but sometimes the words which had taken possession of my poor boy's fancy had been distinctly audible—"Oh, mother, let me in!" The Jarvises were not aware that there had ever been any investigation into it. The estate of Brentwood had lapsed into the hands of a distant branch of the family, who had lived but little there; and of the many people who had taken it, as I had done, few had remained through two Decembers. And nobody had taken the trouble to make a very close examination into the facts. "No, no," Jarvis said, shaking his head, "No, no, Cornel. Wha wad set themsels up for a laughin'-stock to a' the country-side, making a wark about a ghost?

Naebody believes in ghosts. It bid to be the wind in the trees, the last gentleman said, or some effec' o' the water wastlin' among the rocks. He said it was a' quite easy explained: but he gave up the hoose. And when you cam, Cornel, we were awfu' anxious you should never hear. What for should I have spoiled the bargain and hairmed the property for no-thing?"

"Do you call my child's life nothing?" I said in the trouble of the moment, unable to restrain myself. "And instead of telling this all to me, you have told it to him—to a delicate boy, a child unable to sift evidence, or judge for himself, a tender-hearted young creature——"

I was walking about the room with an anger all the hotter that I felt it to be most likely quite unjust. My heart was full of bitterness against the stolid retainers of a family who were content to risk other people's children and comfort rather than let a house lie empty. If I had been warned I might have taken precautions, or left the place, or sent Roland away, a hundred things which now I could not do; and here I was with my boy in a brain-fever, and his life, the most precious life on earth, hanging in the balance, dependent on whether or not I could get to the reason of a commonplace ghost-story! I paced about in high wrath, not seeing what I was to do; for, to take Roland away, even if he were able to travel, would not settle his agitated mind; and I feared even that a scientific explanation of

refracted sound, or reverberation, or any other of the easy certainties with which we elder men are silenced, would have very little effect upon the boy.

"Cornel," said Jarvis, solemnly, "and *she'll* bear me witness—the young gentleman never heard a word from me—no, nor from either groom or gardener; I'll gie ye my word for that. In the first place, he's no a lad that invites ye to talk. There are some that are, and some that arena. Some will draw ye on, till ye've tellt them a' the clatter of the toun, and a' ye ken, and whiles mair. But Maister Roland, his mind's fu' of his books. He's aye civil and kind, and a fine lad; but no that sort. And ye see it's for a' our interest, Cornel, that you should stay at Brentwood. I took it upon me mysel to pass the word—'No a syllable to Maister Roland, nor to the young leddies—no a syllable.' The women-servants, that have little reason to be out at night, ken little or nothing about it. And some think it grand to have a ghost so long as they're no in the way of coming across it. If you had been tellt the story to begin with maybe ye would have thought so yourself."

This was true enough, though it did not throw any light upon my perplexity. If we had heard of it to start with, it is possible that all the family would have considered the possession of a ghost a distinct advantage. It is the fashion of the times. We never think what a risk it is to play with young imaginations,

but cry out, in the fashionable jargon, "A ghost!—nothing else was wanted to make it perfect." I should not have been above this myself. I should have smiled, of course, at the idea of the ghost at all, but then to feel that it was mine would have pleased my vanity. Oh yes, I claim no exemption. The girls would have been delighted. I could fancy their eagerness, their interest, and excitement. No; if we had been told, it would have done no good—we should have made the bargain all the more eagerly, the fools that we are. "And there has been no attempt to investigate it," I said, "to see what it really is?"

"Eh, Cornel," said the coachman's wife, "wha would investigate, as ye call it, a thing that nobody believes in? Ye would be the laughin'-stock of a' the country-side, as my man says."

"But you believe in it," I said, turning upon her hastily. The woman was taken by surprise. She made a step backward out of my way.

"Lord, Cornel, how ye frichten a body! Me!—there's awfu' strange things in this world. An unlearned person doesna ken what to think. But the minister and the gentry they just laugh in your face. Inquire into the thing that is not! Na, na, we just let it be."

"Come with me, Jarvis," I said, hastily, "and we'll make an attempt at least. Say nothing to the men or to anybody. I'll come back after dinner, and we'll make a serious attempt to see what it is, if it is anything. If

I hear it—which I doubt—you may be sure I shall never rest till I make it out. Be ready for me about ten o'clock."

"Me, Cornel!" Jarvis said, in a faint voice. I had not been looking at him in my own pre-occupation, but when I did so, I found that the greatest change had come over the fat and ruddy coachman. "Me, Cornel!" he repeated, wiping the perspiration from his brow. His ruddy face hung in flabby folds, his knees knocked together, his voice seemed half extinguished in his throat. Then he began to rub his hands and smile upon me in a deprecating, imbecile way. "There's nothing I wouldna do to pleasure ye, Cornel," taking a step further back. "I'm sure, *she* kens I've aye said I never had to do with a mair fair, weel-spoken gentleman——" Here Jarvis came to a pause, again looking at me, rubbing his hands.

"Well?" I said.

"But eh, sir!" he went on, with the same imbecile yet insinuating smile, "if ye'll reflect that I am no used to my feet. With a horse atween my legs, or the reins in my hand, I'm maybe nae worse than other men; but on fit, Cornel—— It's no the—boggles;——but I've been cavalry, ye see," with a little hoarse laugh, "a' my life. To face a thing ye didna understand'—on your feet, Cornel."

"Well, sir, if *I* do it," said I tartly, "why shouldn't you?"

"Eh, Cornel, there's an awfu' difference. In the first place, ye tramp about the haill country-

side, and think naething of it; but a walk tires me mair than a hunard miles' drive: and then ye're a gentleman, and do your ain pleasure; and you're no so auld as me; and it's for your ain bairn, ye see, Cornel; and then——"

"He believes in it, Cornel, and you dinna believe in it," the woman said.

"Will you come with me?" I said, turning to her.

She jumped back, upsetting her chair in her bewilderment. "Me!" with a scream, and then fell into a sort of hysterical laugh. "I wouldna say but what I would go; but what would the folk say to hear of Cornel Mortimer with an auld silly woman at his heels?"

The suggestion made me laugh too, though I had little inclination for it. "I'm sorry you have so little spirit, Jarvis," I said. "I must find some one else, I suppose."

Jarvis, touched by this, began to remonstrate, but I cut him short. My butler was a soldier who had been with me in India, and was not supposed to fear anything—man or devil,—certainly not the former; and I felt that I was losing time. The Jarvises were too thankful to get rid of me. They attended me to the door with the most anxious courtesies. Outside, the two grooms stood close by, a little confused by my sudden exit. I don't know if perhaps they had been listening—at least standing as near as possible, to catch any scrap of the conversation. I waved my hand to them as I went past, in answer to their salutations, and it

was very apparent to me that they also were glad to see me go.

And it will be thought very strange, but it would be weak not to add, that I myself, though bent on the investigation I have spoken of, pledged to Roland to carry it out, and feeling that my boy's health, perhaps his life, depended on the result of my inquiry,—I felt the most unaccountable reluctance to pass these ruins on my way home. My curiosity was intense; and yet it was all my mind could do to pull my body along. I daresay the scientific people would describe it the other way, and attribute my cowardice to the state of my stomach. I went on; but if I had followed my impulse, I should have turned and bolted. Everything in me seemed to cry out against it; my heart thumped, my pulses all began, like sledge-hammers, beating against my ears and every sensitive part. It was very dark, as I have said; the old house, with its shapeless tower, loomed a heavy mass through the darkness, which was only not entirely so solid as itself. On the other hand, the great dark cedars of which we were so proud seemed to fill up the night. My foot strayed out of the path in my confusion and the gloom together, and I brought myself up with a cry as I felt myself knock against something solid. What was it? The contact with hard stone and lime and prickly bramble-bushes restored me a little to myself. "Oh, it's only the old gable," I said aloud, with a little laugh to reassure my-

self. The rough feeling of the stones reconciled me. As I groped about thus, I shook off my visionary folly. What so easily explained as that I should have strayed from the path in the darkness? This brought me back to common existence, as if I had been shaken by a wise hand out of all the silliness of superstition. How silly it was, after all! What did it matter which path I took? I laughed again, this time with better heart—when suddenly, in a moment, the blood was chilled in my veins, a shiver stole along my spine, my faculties seemed to forsake me. Close by me at my side, at my feet, there was a sigh. No, not a groan, not a moaning, not anything so tangible—a perfectly soft, faint, inarticulate sigh. I sprang back, and my heart stopped beating. Mistaken! no, mistake was impossible. I heard it as clearly as I hear myself speak; a long, soft, weary sigh, as if drawn to the utmost, and emptying out a load of sadness that filled the breast. To hear this in the solitude, in the dark, in the night (though it was still early), had an effect which I cannot describe. I feel it now—something cold creeping over me, up into my hair, and down to my feet, which refused to move. I cried out, with a trembling voice, "Who is there?" as I had done before—but there was no reply.

I got home I don't quite know how; but in my mind there was no longer any indifference as to the thing, whatever it was, that haunted these ruins. My scepticism disappeared like

a mist. I was as firmly determined that there was something as Roland was. I did not for a moment pretend to myself that it was possible I could be deceived; there were movements and noises which I understood all about, cracklings of small branches in the frost, and little rolls of gravel on the path, such as have a very eerie sound sometimes, and perplex you with wonder as to who has done it, *when there is no real mystery*; but I assure you all these little movements of nature don't affect you one bit *when there is something*. I understood *them*. I did not understand the sigh. That was not simple nature; there was meaning in it—feeling, the soul of a creature invisible. This is the thing that human nature trembles at—a creature invisible, yet with sensations, feelings, a power somehow of expressing itself. I had not the same sense of unwillingness to turn my back upon the scene of the mystery which I had experienced in going to the stables; but I almost ran home, impelled by eagerness to get everything done that had to be done, in order to apply myself to finding it out. Bagley was in the hall as usual when I went in. He was always there in the afternoon, always with the appearance of perfect occupation, yet, so far as I know, never doing anything. The door was open, so that I hurried in without any pause, breathless; but the sight of his calm regard, as he came to help me off with my overcoat, subdued me in a moment. Anything out of the way, anything incomprehensible, faded

to nothing in the presence of Bagley. You saw and wondered how *he* was made: the parting of his hair, the tie of his white neckcloth, the fit of his trousers, all perfect as works of art; but you could see how they were done, which makes all the difference. I flung myself upon him, so to speak, without waiting to note the extreme unlikeness of the man to anything of the kind I meant. "Bagley," I said, "I want you to come out with me to-night to watch for——"

"Poachers, Colonel," he said, a gleam of pleasure running all over him.

"No, Bagley; a great deal worse," I cried.

"Yes, Colonel; at what hour, sir?" the man said; but then I had not told him what it was.

It was ten o'clock when we set out. All was perfectly quiet indoors. My wife was with Roland, who had been quite calm, she said, and who (though, no doubt, the fever must run its course) had been better ever since I came. I told Bagley to put on a thick greatcoat over his evening coat, and did the same myself—with strong boots; for the soil was like a sponge, or worse. Talking to him, I almost forgot what we were going to do. It was darker even than it had been before, and Bagley kept very close to me as we went along. I had a small lantern in my hand, which gave us a partial guidance. We had come to the corner where the path turns. On one side was the bowling-green, which the girls had taken possession of for their croquet-ground—a

wonderful enclosure surrounded by high hedges of holly, three hundred years old and more; on the other, the ruins. Both were black as night; but before we got so far, there was a little opening in which we could just discern the trees and the lighter line of the road. I thought it best to pause there and take breath. "Bagley," I said, "there is something about these ruins I don't understand. It is there I am going. Keep your eyes open and your wits about you. Be ready to pounce upon any stranger you see—anything, man or woman. Don't hurt, but seize—anything you see." "Colonel," said Bagley, with a little tremor in his breath, "they do say there's things there—as is neither man nor woman." There was no time for words. "Are you game to follow me, my man? that's the question," I said. Bagley fell in without a word, and saluted. I knew then I had nothing to fear.

We went, so far as I could guess, exactly as I had come, when I heard that sigh. The darkness, however, was so complete that all marks, as of trees or paths, disappeared. One moment we felt our feet on the gravel, another sinking noiselessly into the slippery grass, that was all. I had shut up my lantern, not wishing to scare any one, whoever it might be. Bagley followed, it seemed to me, exactly in my footsteps as I made my way, as I supposed, towards the mass of the ruined house. We seemed to take a long time groping along seeking this; the squash of the wet soil under our

it, sir?" he gasped. If I yielded, there was evidently an end of both of us. "I can't tell," I said, "any more than you; that's what we've got to find out: up, man, up!" I pulled him to his feet. "Will you go round and examine the other side, or will you stay here with the lantern?" Bagley gasped at me with a face of horror. "Can't we stay together, Colonel?" he said—his knees were trembling under him. I pushed him against the corner of the wall, and put the light into his hands. "Stand fast till I come back; shake yourself together, man; let nothing pass you," I said. The voice was within two or three feet of us, of that there could be no doubt.

I went myself to the other side of the wall, keeping close to it. The light shook in Bagley's hand, but, tremulous though it was, shone out through the vacant door, one oblong block of light marking all the crumbling corners and hanging masses of foliage. Was that something dark huddled in a heap by the side of it? I pushed forward across the light in the doorway, and fell upon it with my hands; but it was only a juniper-bush growing close against the wall. Meanwhile, the sight of my figure crossing the doorway had brought Bagley's nervous excitement to a height: he flew at me, gripping my shoulder. "I've got him, a Colonel! I've got him!" he cried, with a voice of sudden exultation. He thought it was a gain, and was at once relieved. But at that moment the voice burst forth again between us,

at our feet—more close to us than any separate being could be. He dropped off from me, and fell against the wall, his jaw dropping as if he were dying. I suppose, at the same moment, he saw that it was me whom he had clutched. I, for my part, had scarcely more command of myself. I snatched the light out of his hand, and flashed it all about me wildly. Nothing,—the juniper-bush which I thought I had never seen before, the heavy growth of the glistening ivy, the brambles waving. It was close to my ears now, crying, crying, pleading as if for life. Either I heard the same words Roland had heard, or else, in my excitement, his imagination got possession of mine. The voice went on, growing into distinct articulation, but wavering about, now from one point, now from another, as if the owner of it were moving slowly back and forward. “Mother! mother!” and then an outburst of wailing. As my mind steadied, getting accustomed (as one’s mind gets accustomed to anything), it seemed to me as if some uneasy, miserable creature was pacing up and down before a closed door. Sometimes—but that must have been excitement—I thought I heard a sound like knocking, and then another burst, “Oh, mother! mother!” All this close, close to the space where I was standing with my lantern—now before me, now behind me: a creature restless, unhappy, moaning, crying, before the vacant doorway, which no one could either shut or open more.

“Do you hear it, Bagley? do you hear what

it is saying?" I cried, stepping in through the doorway. He was lying against the wall—his eyes glazed, half dead with terror. He made a motion of his lips as if to answer me, but no sounds came; then lifted his hand with a curious imperative movement as if ordering me to be silent and listen. And how long I did so I cannot tell. It began to have an interest, an exciting hold upon me, which I could not describe. It seemed to call up visibly a scene any one could understand—a something shut out, restlessly wandering to and fro; sometimes the voice dropped, as if throwing itself down—sometimes wandered off a few paces, growing sharp and clear. "Oh, mother, let me in! oh, mother, mother, let me in! oh, let me in!" every word was clear to me. No wonder the boy had gone wild with pity. I tried to steady my mind upon Roland, upon his conviction that I could do something, but my head swam with the excitement, even when I partially overcame the terror. At last the words died away, and there was a sound of sobs and moaning. I cried out, "In the name of God who are you?" with a kind of feeling in my mind that to use the name of God was profane, seeing that I did not believe in ghosts or anything supernatural; but I did it all the same, and waited, my heart giving a leap of terror lest there should be a reply. Why this should have been I cannot tell, but I had a feeling that if there was an answer it would be more than I could bear. But there was no answer;

the moaning went on, and then, as if it had been real, the voice rose a little higher again, the words recommenced, "Oh, mother, let me in! oh, mother, let me in!" with an expression that was heart-breaking to hear.

As if it had been real! What do I mean by that? I suppose I got less alarmed as the thing went on. I began to recover the use of my senses—I seemed to explain it all to myself by saying that this had once happened, that it was a recollection of a real scene. Why there should have seemed something quite satisfactory and composing in this explanation I cannot tell, but so it was. I began to listen almost as if it had been a play, forgetting Bagley, who, I almost think, had fainted, leaning against the wall. I was startled out of this strange spectatorship that had fallen upon me by the sudden rush of something which made my heart jump once more, a large black figure in the doorway waving its arms. "Come in! come in! come in!" it shouted out hoarsely at the top of a deep bass voice, and then poor Bagley fell down senseless across the threshold. He was less sophisticated than I,—he had not been able to bear it any longer. I took him for something supernatural, as he took me, and it was some time before I awoke to the necessities of the moment. I remembered only after, that from the time I began to give my attention to the man, I heard the other voice no more. It was some time before I brought him to. It must have been a strange

scene: the lantern making a luminous spot in the darkness, the man's white face lying on the black earth, I over him, doing what I could for him. Probably I should have been thought to be murdering him had any one seen us. When at last I succeeded in pouring a little brandy down his throat, he sat up and looked about him wildly. "What's up?" he said; then recognising me, tried to struggle to his feet with a faint "Beg your pardon, Colonel." I got him home as best I could, making him lean upon my arm. The great fellow was as weak as a child. Fortunately he did not for some time remember what had happened. From the time Bagley fell the voice had stopped, and all was still.

"You've got an epidemic in your house, Colonel," Simson said to me next morning. "What's the meaning of it all? Here's your butler raving about a voice. This will never do, you know; and so far as I can make out, you are in it too."

"Yes, I am in it, doctor. I thought I had better speak to you. Of course you are treating Roland all right—but the boy is not raving, he is as sane as you or me. It's all true."

"As sane as—I—or you. I never thought the boy insane. He's got cerebral excitement, fever. I don't know what you've got. There's

something very queer about the look of your eyes."

"Come," said I, "you can't put us all to bed, you know. You had better listen and hear the symptoms in full."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders, but he listened to me patiently. He did not believe a word of the story, that was clear; but he heard it all from beginning to end. "My dear fellow," he said, "the boy told me just the same. It's an epidemic. When one person falls a victim to this sort of thing, it's as safe as can be—there's always two or three."

"Then how do you account for it?" I said.

"Oh, account for it!—that's a different matter; there's no accounting for the freaks our brains are subject to. If it's delusion; if it's some trick of the echoes or the winds—some phonetic disturbance or other——"

"Come with me to-night, and judge for yourself," I said.

Upon this he laughed aloud, then said, "That's not such a bad idea; but it would ruin me for ever if it were known that John Simson was ghost-hunting."

"There it is," said I; "you dart down on us who are unlearned with your phonetic disturbances, but you daren't examine what the thing really is for fear of being laughed at. That's science!"

"It's not science—it's common-sense," said the doctor. "The thing has delusion on the front of it. It is encouraging an unwholesome

tendency even to examine. What good could come of it? Even if I am convinced, I shouldn't believe."

"I should have said so yesterday; and I don't want you to be convinced or to believe," said I. "If you prove it to be a delusion, I shall be very much obliged to you for one. Come; somebody must go with me."

"You are cool," said the doctor. "You've disabled this poor fellow of yours, and made him—on that point—a lunatic for life; and now you want to disable me. But for once, I'll do it. To save appearance, if you'll give me a bed, I'll come over after my last rounds."

It was agreed that I should meet him at the gate, and that we should visit the scene of last night's occurrences before we came to the house, so that nobody might be the wiser. It was scarcely possible to hope that the cause of Bagley's sudden illness should not somehow steal into the knowledge of the servants at least, and it was better that all should be done as quietly as possible. The day seemed to me a very long one. I had to spend a certain part of it with Roland, which was a terrible ordeal for me—for what could I say to the boy? The improvement continued, but he was still in a very precarious state, and the trembling vehemence with which he turned to me when his mother left the room filled me with alarm. "Father?" he said, quietly. "Yes, my boy; I am giving my best attention to it—all is being done that I can do. I have

not come to any conclusion—yet. I am neglecting nothing you said,” I cried. What I could not do was to give his active mind any encouragement to dwell upon the mystery. It was a hard predicament, for some satisfaction had to be given him. He looked at me very wistfully, with the great blue eyes which shone so large and brilliant out of his white and worn face. “You must trust me,” I said. “Yes, father. Father understands,” he said to himself, as if to soothe some inward doubt. I left him as soon as I could. He was about the most precious thing I had on earth, and his health my first thought; but yet somehow, in the excitement of this other subject, I put that aside, and preferred not to dwell upon Roland, which was the most curious part of it all.

That night at eleven I met Simson at the gate. He had come by train, and I let him in gently myself. I had been so much absorbed in the coming experiment that I passed the ruins in going to meet him, almost without thought, if you can understand that. I had my lantern; and he showed me a coil of taper which he had ready for use. “There is nothing like light,” he said, in his scoffing tone. It was a very still night, scarcely a sound, but not so dark. We could keep the path without difficulty as we went along. As we approached the spot we could hear a low moaning, broken occasionally by a bitter cry. “Perhaps that is your voice,” said the doctor; “I thought it must be something of the kind. That’s a poor

brute caught in some of these infernal traps of yours ; you'll find it among the bushes somewhere." I said nothing. I felt no particular fear, but a triumphant satisfaction in what was to follow. I led him to the spot where Bagley and I had stood on the previous night. All was silent as a winter night could be—so silent that we heard far off the sound of the horses in the stables, the shutting of a window at the house. Simson lighted his taper and went peering about, poking into all the corners. We looked like two conspirators lying in wait for some unfortunate traveller ; but not a sound broke the quiet. The moaning had stopped before we came up ; a star or two shone over us in the sky, looking down as if surprised at our strange proceedings. Dr Simson did nothing but utter subdued laughs under his breath. "I thought as much," he said. "It is just the same with tables and all other kinds of ghostly apparatus ; a sceptic's presence stops everything. When I am present nothing ever comes off. How long do you think it will be necessary to stay here? Oh, I don't complain ; only, when *you* are satisfied, *I* am—quite."

I will not deny that I was disappointed beyond measure by this result. It made me look like a credulous fool. It gave the doctor such a pull over me as nothing else could. I should point all his morals for years to come, and his materialism, his scepticism, would be increased beyond endurance. "It seems, in-

deed," I said, "that there is to be no——"
"Manifestation," he said, laughing; "that is what all the mediums say. No manifestations, in consequence of the presence of an unbeliever." His laugh sounded very uncomfortable to me in the silence; and it was now near midnight. But that laugh seemed the signal; before it died away the moaning we had heard before was resumed. It started from some distance off, and came towards us, nearer and nearer, like some one walking along and moaning to himself. There could be no idea now that it was a hare caught in a trap. The approach was slow, like that of a weak person with little halts and pauses. We heard it coming along the grass straight towards the vacant doorway. Simson had been a little startled by the first sound. He said hastily, "That child has no business to be out so late." But he felt, as well as I, that this was no child's voice. As it came nearer, he grew silent, and, going to the doorway with his taper, stood looking out towards the sound. The taper being unprotected blew about in the night air, though there was scarcely any wind. I threw the light of my lantern steady and white across the same space. It was in a blaze of light in the midst of the blackness. A little icy thrill had gone over me at the first sound, but as it came close, I confess that my only feeling was satisfaction. The scoffer could scoff no more. The light touched his own face, and showed a very perplexed countenance. If he was afraid, he

concealed it with great success, but he was perplexed. And then all that had happened on the previous night was enacted once more. It fell strangely upon me with a sense of repetition. Every cry, every sob seemed the same as before. I listened almost without any emotion at all in my own person, thinking of its effect upon Simson. He maintained a very bold front on the whole. All that coming and going of the voice was, if our ears could be trusted, exactly in front of the vacant, blank doorway, blazing full of light, which caught and shone in the glistening leaves of the great hollies at a little distance. Not a rabbit could have crossed the turf without being seen;—but there was nothing. After a time, Simson, with a certain caution and bodily reluctance, as it seemed to me, went out with his roll of taper into this space. His figure showed against the holly in full outline. Just at this moment the voice sank, as was its custom, and seemed to fling itself down at the door. Simson recoiled violently, as if some one had come up against him, then turned, and held his taper low as if examining something. “Do you see anybody?” I cried in a whisper, feeling the chill of nervous panic steal over me at this action. “It’s nothing but a —— confounded juniper-bush,” he said. This I knew very well to be nonsense, for the juniper-bush was on the other side. He went about after this round and round, poking his taper everywhere, then returned to me on the inner side of the wall.

He scoffed no longer ; his face was contracted and pale. "How long does this go on?" he whispered to me, like a man who does not wish to interrupt some one who is speaking. I had become too much perturbed myself to remark whether the successions and changes of the voice were the same as last night. It suddenly went out in the air almost as he was speaking, with a soft reiterated sob dying away. If there had been anything to be seen, I should have said that the person was at that moment crouching on the ground close to the door.

We walked home very silent afterwards. It was only when we were in sight of the house that I said, "What do you think of it?" "I can't tell what to think of it," he said, quickly. He took—though he was a very temperate man—not the claret I was going to offer him, but some brandy from the tray, and swallowed it almost undiluted. "Mind you, I don't believe a word of it," he said, when he had lighted his candle ; "but I can't tell what to think," he turned round to add, when he was half-way upstairs.

All of this, however, did me no good with the solution of my problem. I was to help this weeping, sobbing thing, which was already to me as distinct a personality as anything I knew—or what should I say to Roland? It was on my heart that my boy would die if I could not find some way of helping this creature. You may be surprised that I should speak of it in this way. I did not know if it

was man or woman ; but I no more doubted that it was a soul in pain than I doubted my own being ; and it was my business to soothe this pain—to deliver it, if that was possible. Was ever such a task given to an anxious father trembling for his only boy ? I felt in my heart, fantastic as it may appear, that I must fulfil this somehow, or part with my child ; and you may conceive that rather than do that I was ready to die. But even my dying would not have advanced me—unless by bringing me into the same world with that seeker at the door.

Next morning Simson was out before breakfast, and came in with evident signs of the damp grass on his boots, and a look of worry and weariness, which did not say much for the night he had passed. He improved a little after breakfast, and visited his two patients, for Bagley was still an invalid. I went out with him on his way to the train, to hear what he had to say about the boy. “He is going on very well,” he said ; “there are no complications as yet. But mind you, that’s not a boy to be trifled with, Mortimer. Not a word to him about last night.” I had to tell him then of my last interview with Roland, and of the impossible demand he had made upon me—by which, though he tried to laugh, he was much discomposed, as I could see. “We must just perjure ourselves all round,” he said, “and

swear you exorcised it ;" but the man was too kind-hearted to be satisfied with that. "It's frightfully serious for you, Mortimer. I can't laugh as I should like to. I wish I saw a way out of it, for your sake. By the way," he added shortly, "didn't you notice that juniper-bush on the left-hand side?" "There was one on the right hand of the door. I noticed you made that mistake last night." "Mistake!" he cried, with a curious low laugh, pulling up the collar of his coat as though he felt the cold,—“there's no juniper there this morning, left or right. Just go and see.” As he stepped into the train a few minutes after, he looked back upon me and beckoned me for a parting word. "I'm coming back to-night," he said.

I don't think I had any feeling about this as I turned away from that common bustle of the railway which made my private preoccupations feel so strangely out of date. There had been a distinct satisfaction in my mind before that his scepticism had been so entirely defeated. But the more serious part of the matter pressed upon me now. I went straight from the railway to the manse, which stood on a little plateau on the side of the river opposite to the woods of Brentwood. The minister was one of a class which is not so common in Scotland as it used to be. He was a man of good family, well educated in the Scotch way, strong in philosophy, not so strong in Greek, strongest of all in experience,—a man who had "come across," in the course of his life, most

people of note that had ever been in Scotland—and who was said to be very sound in doctrine, without infringing the toleration with which old men, who are good men, are generally endowed. He was old-fashioned; perhaps he did not think so much about the troublous problems of theology as many of the young men, nor ask himself any hard questions about the Confession of Faith—but he understood human nature, which is perhaps better. He received me with a cordial welcome. “Come away, Colonel Mortimer,” he said; “I’m all the more glad to see you, that I feel it’s a good sign for the boy. He’s doing well?—God be praised—and the Lord bless him and keep him. He has many a poor body’s prayers—and that can do nobody harm.”

“He will need them all, Dr Moncrieff,” I said, “and your counsel too.” And I told him the story—more than I had told Simson. The old clergyman listened to me with many suppressed exclamations, and at the end the water stood in his eyes.

“That’s just beautiful,” he said. “I do not mind to have heard anything like it; it’s as fine as Burns when he wished deliverance to one—that is prayed for in no kirk. Ay, ay! so he would have you console the poor lost spirit? God bless the boy! There’s something more than common in that, Colonel Mortimer. And also the faith of him in his father!—I would like to put that into a sermon.” Then the old gentleman gave me an alarmed look,

and said, "No, no; I was not meaning a sermon; but I must write it down for the 'Children's Record.'" I saw the thought that passed through his mind. Either he thought, or he feared I would think, of a funeral sermon. You may believe this did not make me more cheerful.

I can scarcely say that Dr Moncrieff gave me any advice. How could any one advise on such a subject? But he said, "I think I'll come too. I'm an old man; I'm less liable to be frightened than those that are further off the world unseen. It behoves me to think of my own journey there. I've no cut-and-dry beliefs on the subject. I'll come too: and maybe at the moment the Lord will put into our heads what to do."

This gave me a little comfort—more than Simson had given me. To be clear about the cause of it was not my grand desire. It was another thing that was in my mind—my boy. As for the poor soul at the open door, I had no more doubt, as I have said, of its existence than I had of my own. It was no ghost to me. I knew the creature, and it was in trouble. That was my feeling about it, as it was Roland's. To hear it first was a great shock to my nerves, but not now; a man will get accustomed to anything. But to do something for it was the great problem; how was I to be serviceable to a being that was invisible, that was mortal no longer? "Maybe at the moment the Lord will put it into our

heads." This is very old-fashioned phraseology, and a week before, most likely, I should have smiled (though always with kindness) at Dr Moncrieff's credulity; but there was a great comfort, whether rational or otherwise I cannot say, in the mere sound of the words.

The road to the station and the village lay through the glen—not by the ruins; but though the sunshine and the fresh air, and the beauty of the trees, and the sound of the water were all very soothing to the spirits, my mind was so full of my own subject that I could not refrain from turning to the right hand as I got to the top of the glen, and going straight to the place which I may call the scene of all my thoughts. It was lying full in the sunshine, like all the rest of the world. The ruined gable looked due east, and in the present aspect of the sun the light streamed down through the doorway as our lantern had done, throwing a flood of light upon the damp grass beyond. There was a strange suggestion in the open door—so futile, a kind of emblem of vanity—all free around, so that you could go where you pleased, and yet that semblance of an enclosure—that way of entrance, unnecessary, leading to nothing. And why any creature should pray and weep to get in—to nothing: or be kept out—by nothing! You could not dwell upon it, or it made your brain go round. I remembered, however, what Simson said about the juniper, with a little smile on my own mind as to the

inaccuracy of recollection, which even a scientific man will be guilty of. I could see now the light of my lantern gleaming upon the wet glistening surface of the spiky leaves at the right hand—and he ready to go to the stake for it that it was the left! I went round to make sure. And then I saw what he had said. Right or left there was no juniper at all. I was confounded by this, though it was entirely a matter of detail: nothing at all: a bush of brambles waving, the grass growing up to the very walls. But after all, though it gave me a shock for a moment, what did that matter? There were marks as if a number of footsteps had been up and down in front of the door; but these might have been our steps; and all was bright, and peaceful, and still. I poked about the other ruin—the larger ruins of the old house—for some time, as I had done before. There were marks upon the grass here and there, I could not call them footsteps, all about; but that told for nothing one way or another. I had examined the ruined rooms closely the first day. They were half filled up with soil and *débris*, withered brackens and bramble—no refuge for any one there. It vexed me that Jarvis should see me coming from that spot when he came up to me for his orders. I don't know whether my nocturnal expeditions had got wind among the servants. But there was a significant look in his face. Something in it I felt was like my own sensation when

Simson in the midst of his scepticism was struck dumb. Jarvis felt satisfied that his veracity had been put beyond question. I never spoke to a servant of mine in such a peremptory tone before. I sent him away "with a flea in his lug," as the man described it afterwards. Interference of any kind was intolerable to me at such a moment.

But what was strangest of all was, that I could not face Roland. I did not go up to his room as I would have naturally done at once. This the girls could not understand. They saw there was some mystery in it. "Mother has gone to lie down," Agatha said; "he has had such a good night." "But he wants you so, papa!" cried little Jeanie, always with her two arms embracing mine in a pretty way she had. I was obliged to go at last—but what could I say? I could only kiss him, and tell him to keep still—that I was doing all I could. There is something mystical about the patience of a child. "It will come all right, won't it, father?" he said. "God grant it may! I hope so, Roland." "Oh yes, it will come all right." Perhaps he understood that in the midst of my anxiety I could not stay with him as I should have done otherwise. But the girls were more surprised than it is possible to describe. They looked at me with wondering eyes. "If I were ill, papa, and you only stayed with me a moment, I should break my heart," said Agatha. But the boy had a sympathetic feeling. He knew that of my own will I would not have done it. I shut myself up

in the library, where I could not rest, but kept pacing up and down like a caged beast. What could I do? and if I could do nothing, what would become of my boy? These were the questions that, without ceasing, pursued each other through my mind.

Simson came out to dinner, and when the house was all still, and most of the servants in bed, we went out and met Dr Moncrieff, as we had appointed, at the head of the glen. Simson, for his part, was disposed to scoff at the Doctor. "If there are to be any spells, you know, I'll cut the whole concern," he said. I did not make him any reply. I had not invited him; he could go or come as he pleased. He was very talkative, far more so than suited my humour, as we went on. "One thing is certain, you know, there must be some human agency," he said. "It is all bosh about apparitions. I never have investigated the laws of sound to any great extent, and there's a great deal in ventriloquism that we don't know much about." "If it's the same to you," I said, "I wish you'd keep all that to yourself, Simson. It doesn't suit my state of mind." "Oh, I hope I know how to respect idiosyncrasy," he said. The very tone of his voice irritated me beyond measure. These scientific fellows, I wonder people put up with them as they do, when you have no mind for their cold-blooded confidence. Dr Moncrieff met us about eleven o'clock, the same time as on the previous night. He was a large man, with a venerable countenance and white hair—

old, but in full vigour, and thinking less of a cold night walk than many a younger man. He had his lantern as I had. We were fully provided with means of lighting the place, and we were all of us resolute men. We had a rapid consultation as we went up, and the result was that we divided to different posts. Dr Moncrieff remained inside the wall—if you can call that inside where there was no wall but one. Simson placed himself on the side next the ruins, so as to intercept any communication with the old house, which was what his mind was fixed upon. I was posted on the other side. To say that nothing could come near without being seen was self-evident. It had been so also on the previous night. Now, with our three lights in the midst of the darkness, the whole place seemed illuminated. Dr Moncrieff's lantern, which was a large one, without any means of shutting up—an old-fashioned lantern with a pierced and ornamental top—shone steadily, the rays shooting out of it upward into the gloom. He placed it on the grass, where the middle of the room, if this had been a room, would have been. The usual effect of the light streaming out of the doorway was prevented by the illumination which Simson and I on either side supplied. With these differences, everything seemed as on the previous night.

And what occurred was exactly the same, with the same air of repetition, point for point, as I had formerly remarked. I declare that it

seemed to me as if I were pushed against, put aside, by the owner of the voice as he paced up and down in his trouble,—though these are perfectly futile words, seeing that the stream of light from my lantern, and that from Simson's taper, lay broad and clear, without a shadow, without the smallest break, across the entire breadth of the grass. I had ceased even to be alarmed, for my part. My heart was rent with pity and trouble—pity for the poor suffering human creature that moaned and pleaded so, and trouble for myself and my boy. God! if I could not find any help—and what help could I find?—Roland would die.

We were all perfectly still till the first outburst was exhausted, as I knew (by experience) it would be. Dr Moncrieff, to whom it was new, was quite motionless on the other side of the wall, as we were in our places. My heart had remained almost at its usual beating during the voice. I was used to it; it did not rouse all my pulses as it did at first. But just as it threw itself sobbing at the door (I cannot use other words), there suddenly came something which sent the blood coursing through my veins and my heart into my mouth. It was a voice inside the wall—the minister's well-known voice. I would have been prepared for it in any kind of adjuration, but I was not prepared for what I heard. It came out with a sort of stammering, as if too much moved for utterance. "Willie, Willie! Oh, God preserve us! is it you?"

These simple words had an effect upon me

that the voice of the invisible creature had ceased to have. I thought the old man, whom I had brought into this danger, had gone mad with terror. I made a dash round to the other side of the wall, half crazed myself with the thought. He was standing where I had left him, his shadow thrown vague and large upon the grass by the lantern which stood at his feet. I lifted my own light to see his face as I rushed forward. He was very pale, his eyes wet and glistening, his mouth quivering with parted lips. He neither saw nor heard me. We that had gone through this experience before, had crouched towards each other to get a little strength to bear it. But he was not even aware that I was there. His whole being seemed absorbed in anxiety and tenderness. He held out his hands, which trembled, but it seemed to me with eagerness, not fear. He went on speaking all the time. "Willie, if it is you—and it's you, if it is not a delusion of Satan,—Willie, lad! why come ye here frightening them that know you not? Why came ye not to me?"

He seemed to wait for an answer. When his voice ceased, his countenance, every line moving, continued to speak. Simson gave me another terrible shock, stealing into the open doorway with his light, as much awe-stricken, as wildly curious, as I. But the minister resumed, without seeing Simson, speaking to some one else. His voice took a tone of expostulation—

"Is this right to come here? Your mother's gone with your name on her lips. Do you think she would ever close her door on her own lad? Do ye think the Lord will close the door, ye faint-hearted creature? No!—I forbid ye! I forbid ye!" cried the old man. The sobbing voice had begun to resume its cries. He made a step forward, calling out the last words in a voice of command. "I forbid ye! Cry out no more to man. Go home, ye wandering spirit! go home! Do you hear me?—me that christened ye, that have struggled with ye, that have wrestled for ye with the Lord!" Here the loud tones of his voice sank into tenderness. "And her too, poor woman! poor woman! her you are calling upon. She's no here. You'll find her with the Lord. Go there and seek her, not here. Do you hear me, lad? go after her there. He'll let you in, though it's late. Man, take heart! if you will lie and sob and greet, let it be at heaven's gate, and no your poor mother's ruined door."

He stopped to get his breath: and the voice had stopped, not as it had done before, when its time was exhausted and all its repetitions said, but with a sobbing catch in the breath as if overruled. Then the minister spoke again, "Are you hearing me, Will? Oh, laddie, you've liked the beggarly elements all your days. Be done with them now. Go home to the Father—the Father! Are you hearing me?" Here the old man sank down upon

his knees, his face raised upwards, his hands held up with a tremble in them, all white in the light in the midst of the darkness. I resisted as long as I could, though I cannot tell why,—then I, too, dropped upon my knees. Simson all the time stood in the doorway, with an expression in his face such as words could not tell, his under lip dropped, his eyes wild, staring. It seemed to be to him, that image of blank ignorance and wonder, that we were praying. All the time the voice, with a low arrested sobbing, lay just where he was standing, as I thought.

“Lord,” the minister said—“Lord, take him into Thy everlasting habitations. The mother he cries to is with Thee. Who can open to him but Thee? Lord, when is it too late for Thee, or what is too hard for Thee? Lord, let that woman there draw him inower! Let her draw him inower!”

I sprang forward to catch something in my arms that flung itself wildly within the door. The illusion was so strong, that I never paused till I felt my forehead graze against the wall and my hands clutch the ground—for there was nobody there to save from falling, as in my foolishness I thought. Simson held out his hand to me to help me up. He was trembling and cold, his lower lip hanging, his speech almost inarticulate. “It’s gone,” he said, stammering,—“it’s gone!” We leant upon each other for a moment, trembling so much both of us that the whole scene trembled

as if it were going to dissolve and disappear ; and yet as long as I live I will never forget it—the shining of the strange lights, the blackness all round, the kneeling figure with all the whiteness of the light concentrated on its white venerable head and uplifted hands. A strange solemn stillness seemed to close all round us. By intervals a single syllable, “Lord ! Lord !” came from the old minister’s lips. He saw none of us, nor thought of us. I never knew how long we stood, like sentinels guarding him at his prayers, holding our lights in a confused dazed way, not knowing what we did. But at last he rose from his knees, and standing up at his full height, raised his arms, as the Scotch manner is at the end of a religious service, and solemnly gave the apostolical benediction—to what ? to the silent earth, the dark woods, the wide breathing atmosphere—for we were but spectators gasping an Amen !

It seemed to me that it must be the middle of the night, as we all walked back. It was in reality very late. Dr Moncrieff put his arm into mine. He walked slowly, with an air of exhaustion. It was as if we were coming from a deathbed. Something hushed and solemnised the very air. There was that sense of relief in it which there always is at the end of a death-struggle. And nature, persistent, never daunted, came back in all of us, as we returned into the ways of life. We said nothing to each other, indeed, for a time ; but when we got clear of the trees and reached the opening

near the house, where we could see the sky, Dr Moncrieff himself was the first to speak. "I must be going," he said; "it's very late, I'm afraid. I will go down the glen, as I came."

"But not alone. I am going with you, Doctor."

"Well, I will not oppose it. I am an old man, and agitation wearies more than work. Yes; I'll be thankful of your arm. To-night, Colonel, you've done me more good turns than one."

I pressed his hand on my arm, not feeling able to speak. But Simson, who turned with us, and who had gone along all this time with his taper flaring, in entire unconsciousness, came to himself, apparently at the sound of our voices, and put out that wild little torch with a quick movement, as if of shame. "Let me carry your lantern," he said; "it is heavy." He recovered with a spring, and in a moment, from the awe-stricken spectator he had been, became himself, sceptical and cynical. "I should like to ask you a question," he said. "Do you believe in Purgatory, Doctor? It's not in the tenets of the Church, so far as I know."

"Sir," said Dr Moncrieff, "an old man like me is sometimes not very sure what he believes. There is just one thing I am certain of—and that is the loving-kindness of God."

"But I thought that was in this life. I am no theologian——"

"Sir," said the old man again, with a tremor

in him which I could feel going over all his frame, "if I saw a friend of mine within the gates of hell, I would not despair but his Father would take him by the hand still—if he cried like *yon*."

"I allow it is very strange—very strange. I cannot see through it. That there must be human agency, I feel sure. Doctor, what made you decide upon the person and the name?"

The minister put out his hand with the impatience which a man might show if he were asked how he recognised his brother. "Tuts!" he said, in familiar speech—then more solemnly, "how should I not recognise a person that I know better—far better—than I know you?"

"Then you saw the man?"

Dr Moncrieff made no reply. He moved his hand again with a little impatient movement, and walked on, leaning heavily on my arm. And we went on for a long time without another word, threading the dark paths, which were steep and slippery with the damp of the winter. The air was very still—not more than enough to make a faint sighing in the branches, which mingled with the sound of the water to which we were descending. When we spoke again, it was about indifferent matters—about the height of the river, and the recent rains. We parted with the minister at his own door, where his old housekeeper appeared in great perturbation, waiting for him. "Eh me, min-

ister! the young gentleman will be worse?" she cried.

"Far from that—better. God bless him!" Dr Moncrieff said.

I think if Simson had begun again to me with his questions, I should have pitched him over the rocks as we returned up the glen; but he was silent, by a good inspiration. And the sky was clearer than it had been for many nights, shining high over the trees, with here and there a star faintly gleaming through the wilderness of dark and bare branches. The air, as I have said, was very soft in them, with a subdued and peaceful cadence. It was real, like every natural sound, and came to us like a hush of peace and relief. I thought there was a sound in it as of the breath of a sleeper, and it seemed clear to me that Roland must be sleeping, satisfied and calm. We went up to his room when we went in. There we found the complete hush of rest. My wife looked up out of a doze, and gave me a smile: "I think he is a great deal better; but you are very late," she said in a whisper, shading the light with her hand that the doctor might see his patient. The boy had got back something like his own colour. He woke as we stood all round his bed. His eyes had the happy half-awakened look of childhood, glad to shut again, yet pleased with the interruption and glimmer of the light. I stooped over him and kissed his forehead, which was moist and cool. "All is well, Roland," I said. He looked up at me

with a glance of pleasure, and took my hand and laid his cheek upon it, and so went to sleep.

For some nights after, I watched among the ruins, spending all the dark hours up to midnight patrolling about the bit of wall which was associated with so many emotions; but I heard nothing, and saw nothing beyond the quiet course of nature: nor so far as I am aware, has anything been heard again. Dr Moncrieff gave me the history of the youth, whom he never hesitated to name. I did not ask, as Simson did, how he recognised him. He had been a prodigal—weak, foolish, easily imposed upon, and “led away,” as people say. All that we had heard had passed actually in life, the Doctor said. The young man had come home thus a day or two after his mother died—who was no more than the housekeeper in the old house—and distracted with the news, had thrown himself down at the door and called upon her to let him in. The old man could scarcely speak of it for tears. To me it seemed as if—heaven help us, how little do we know about anything!—a scene like that might impress itself somehow upon the hidden heart of nature. I do not pretend to know how, but the repetition had struck me at the time as, in its terrible strangeness and incomprehensibility, almost mechanical—as if the unseen actor could

not exceed or vary, but was bound to re-enact the whole. One thing that struck me, however, greatly, was the likeness between the old minister and my boy in the manner of regarding these strange phenomena. Dr Moncrieff was not terrified, as I had been myself, and all the rest of us. It was no "ghost," as I fear we all vulgarly considered it, to him—but a poor creature whom he knew under these conditions, just as he had known him in the flesh, having no doubt of his identity. And to Roland it was the same. This spirit in pain—if it was a spirit—this voice out of the unseen—was a poor fellow-creature in misery, to be succoured and helped out of his trouble, to my boy. He spoke to me quite frankly about it when he got better. "I knew father would find out some way," he said. And this was when he was strong and well, and all idea that he would turn hysterical or become a seer of visions had happily passed away.

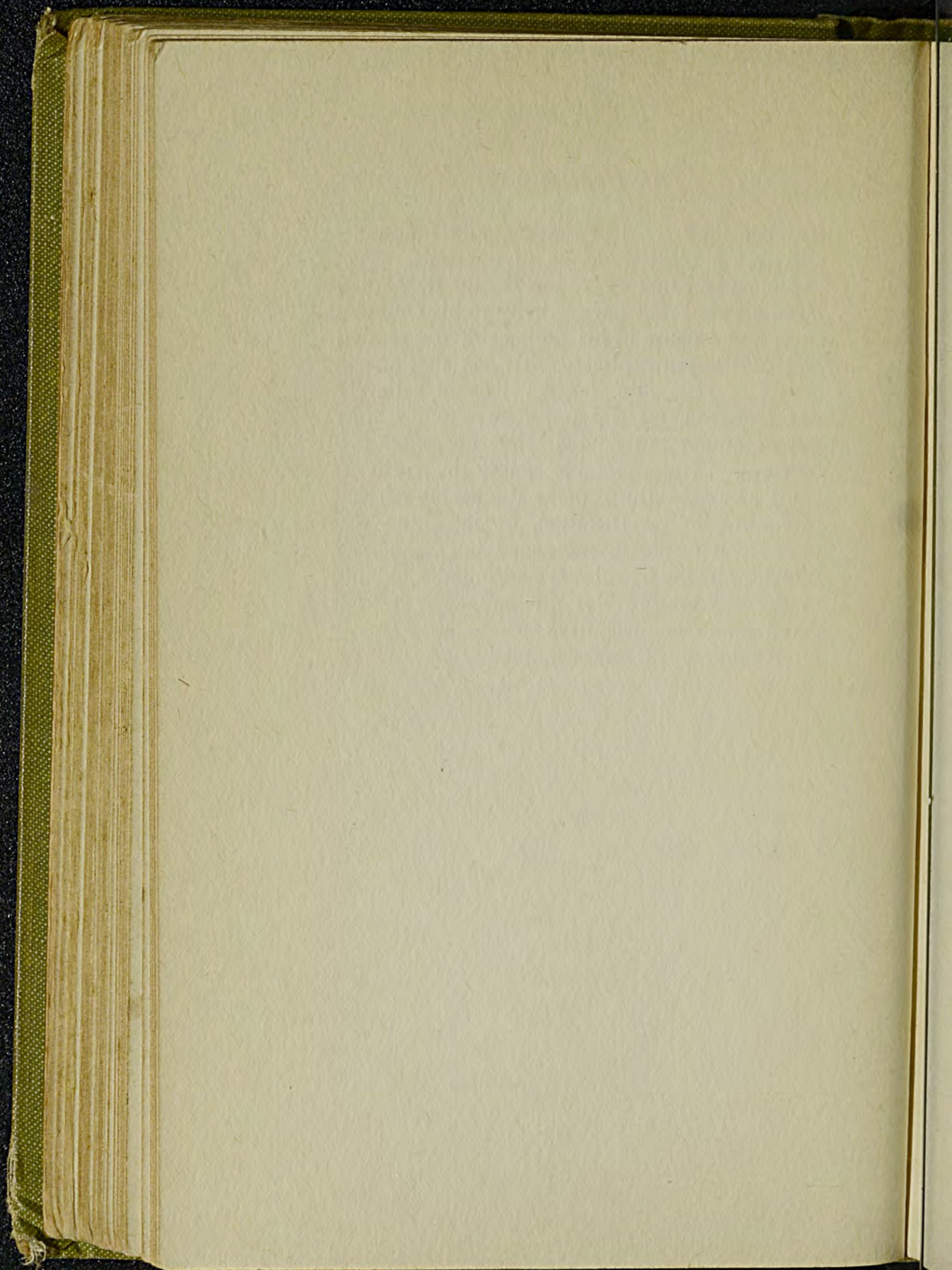
I must add one curious fact which does not seem to me to have any relation to the above, but which Simson made great use of, as the human agency which he was determined to find somehow. We had examined the ruins very closely at the time of these occurrences; but afterwards, when all was over, as we went casually about them one Sunday afternoon in the idleness of that unemployed day, Simson

with his stick penetrated an old window which had been entirely blocked up with fallen soil. He jumped down into it in great excitement, and called me to follow. There we found a little hole—for it was more a hole than a room—entirely hidden under the ivy and ruins, in which there was a quantity of straw laid in a corner, as if some one had made a bed there, and some remains of crusts about the floor. Some one had lodged there, and not very long before, he made out; and that this unknown being was the author of all the mysterious sounds we heard he is convinced. "I told you it was human agency," he said, triumphantly. He forgets, I suppose, how he and I stood with our lights seeing nothing, while the space between us was audibly traversed by something that could speak, and sob, and suffer. There is no argument with men of this kind. He is ready to get up a laugh against me on this slender ground. "I was puzzled myself—I could not make it out—but I always felt convinced human agency was at the bottom of it. And here it is—and a clever fellow he must have been," the Doctor says.

Bagley left my service as soon as he got well. He assured me it was no want of respect; but he could not stand "them kind of things," and the man was so shaken and ghastly that I was glad to give him a present and let him go. For my own part, I made a point of staying out the time, two years, for which I had taken Brentwood; but I did not renew my tenancy.

By that time we had settled, and found for ourselves a pleasant home of our own.

I must add that when the doctor defies me, I can always bring back gravity to his countenance, and a pause in his railing, when I remind him of the juniper-bush. To me that was a matter of little importance. I could believe I was mistaken. I did not care about it one way or other; but on his mind the effect was different. The miserable voice, the spirit in pain, he could think of as the result of ventriloquism, or reverberation, or—anything you please: an elaborate prolonged hoax executed somehow by the tramp that had found a lodging in the old tower. But the juniper-bush staggered him. Things have effects so different on the minds of different men.



OLD LADY MARY

TO
AN OLD LADY
EVER YOUNG,
HARRIET STEWART,
NOW GONE WHERE YOUTH AND AGE
ARE NO DISTINCTION.

1884.

OLD LADY MARY.

I.

SHE was very old, and therefore it was very hard for her to make up her mind to die.

I am aware that this is not at all the general view, but that it is believed, as old age must be near death, that it prepares the soul for that inevitable event. It is not so, however, in many cases. In youth we are still so near the unseen out of which we came, that death is rather pathetic than tragic—a thing that touches all hearts, but to which, in many cases, the young hero accommodates himself sweetly and courageously. And amid the storms and burdens of middle life there are many times when we would fain push open the door that stands ajar, and behind which there is ease for all our pains, or at least rest, if nothing more. But Age, which has gone through both these phases, is apt, out of long custom and habit, to regard the matter from a different view. All things that are violent have passed out of its life,—no more

strong emotions, such as rend the heart—no great labours, bringing after them the weariness which is unto death: but the calm of an existence which is enough for its needs, which affords the moderate amount of comfort and pleasure for which its being is now adapted, and of which there seems no reason that there should ever be any end. To passion, to joy, to anguish, an end must come; but mere gentle living, determined by a framework of gentle rules and habits—why should that ever be ended? When a soul has got to this retirement and is content in it, it becomes very hard to die: hard to accept the necessity of dying, and to accustom one's self to the idea, and still harder to consent to carry it out.

The woman who is the subject of the following narrative was in this position. She had lived through almost everything that is to be found in life. She had been beautiful in her youth, and had enjoyed all the triumphs of beauty; had been intoxicated with flattery, and triumphant in conquest, and mad with jealousy and the bitterness of defeat when it became evident that her day was over. She had never been a bad woman, or false, or unkind; but she had thrown herself with all her heart into those different stages of being, and had suffered as much as she enjoyed, according to the unfailing usage of life. Many a day during these storms and victories, when things went against her, when delights did not satisfy her, she had thrown out a cry into the wide

air of the universe and wished to die. And then she had come to the higher table-land of life, and had borne all the spites of fortune,—had been poor and rich, and happy and sorrowful; had lost and won a hundred times over; had sat at feasts and knelt by deathbeds, and followed her best-beloved to the grave, often, often crying out to God above to liberate her, to make an end of her anguish, for that her strength was exhausted and she could bear no more. But she had borne it and lived through all—and now had arrived at a time when all strong sensations are over, when the soul is no longer either triumphant or miserable, and when life itself, and comfort, and ease, and the warmth of the sun, and of the fireside, and the mild beauty of home were enough for her, and she required no more. That is, she required very little more,—a useful routine of hours and rules, a play of reflected emotion, a pleasant exercise of faculty, making her feel herself still capable of the best things in life—of interest in her fellow-creatures, kindness to them, and a little gentle intellectual occupation, with books and men around. She had not forgotten anything in her life—not the excitements and delights of her beauty, nor love, nor grief, nor the higher levels she had touched in her day. She did not forget the dark day when her first-born was laid in the grave, nor that triumphant and brilliant climax of her life when every one pointed to her as the mother of a hero. All these things were like pictures hung

in the secret chambers of her mind, to which she could go back in silent moments, in the twilight seated by the fire, or in the balmy afternoon, when langour and sweet thoughts are over the world. Sometimes at such moments there would be heard from her a faint sob, called forth, it was quite as likely, by the recollections of the triumph as by that of the deathbed. With these pictures to go back upon at her will she was never dull, but saw herself moving through the various scenes of her life with a continual sympathy, feeling for herself in all her troubles—sometimes approving, sometimes judging, that woman who had been so pretty, so happy, so miserable, and had gone through everything that life can go through. How much that is looking back upon it! passages so hard that the wonder was how she could survive them—pangs so terrible that the heart would seem at its last gasp, but yet would revive and go on.

Besides these, however, she had many mild pleasures. She had a pretty house full of things which formed a graceful *entourage*, suitable, as she felt, for such a woman as she was, and in which she took pleasure for their own beauty—soft chairs and couches, a fireplace and lights which were the perfection of tempered warmth and illumination. She had a carriage, very comfortable and easy, in which, when the weather was suitable, she went out; and a pretty garden and lawns, in which, when she preferred staying at home, she could have her little walk or sit out under the trees. She

had books in plenty, and all the newspapers, and everything that was needful to keep her within the reflection of the busy life which she no longer cared to encounter in her own person. The post rarely brought her painful letters; for all those impassioned interests which bring pain had died out, and the sorrows of others, when they were communicated to her, gave her a luxurious sense of sympathy yet exemption. She was sorry for them; but such catastrophes could touch her no more. And often she had pleasant letters, which afforded her something to talk and think about, and discuss as if it concerned her—and yet did not concern her,—business which could not hurt her if it failed, which would please her if it succeeded. Her letters, her papers, her books, each coming at its appointed time, were all instruments of pleasure. She came downstairs at a certain hour, which she kept to as if it had been of the utmost importance, although it was of no importance at all: she took just so much good wine, so many cups of tea. Her repasts were as regular as clockwork—never too late, never too early. Her whole life went on velvet, rolling smoothly along, without jar or interruption, blameless, pleasant, kind. People talked of her old age as a model of old age, with no bitterness or sourness in it. And, indeed, why should she have been sour or bitter? It suited her far better to be kind. She was in reality kind to everybody, liking to see pleasant faces about her.

The poor had no reason to complain of her; her servants were very comfortable; and the one person in her house who was nearer to her own level, who was her companion and most important minister, was very comfortable too.

This was a young woman about twenty, a very distant relation, with "no claim," everybody said, upon her kind mistress and friend—the daughter of a distant cousin. How very few think anything at all of such a tie! but Lady Mary had taken her young namesake when she was a child, and she had grown up as it were at her godmother's footstool, in the conviction that the measured existence of the old was the rule of life, and that her own trifling personality counted for nothing, or next to nothing, in its steady progress. Her name was Mary too—always called "little Mary" as having once been little, and not yet very much in the matter of size. She was one of the pleasantest things to look at of all the pretty things in Lady Mary's rooms, and she had the most sheltered, peaceful, and pleasant life that could be conceived. The only little thorn in her pillow was, that whereas in the novels, of which she read a great many, the heroines all go and pay visits and have adventures, she had none, but lived constantly at home. There was something much more serious in her life, had she known, which was that she had nothing, and no power of doing anything for herself; that she had all her life been accustomed

to a modest luxury which would make poverty very hard to her; and that Lady Mary was over eighty, and had made no will. If she did not make any will, her property would all go to her grandson, who was so rich already that her fortune would be but as a drop in the ocean to him; or to some great-grandchildren of whom she knew very little—the descendants of a daughter long ago dead who had married an Austrian, and who were foreigners both in birth and name. That she should provide for little Mary was therefore a thing which nature demanded, and which would hurt nobody. She had said so often; but she deferred the doing of it as a thing for which there was “no hurry.” For why should she die? There seemed no reason or need for it. So long as she lived, nothing could be more sure, more happy and serene, than little Mary’s life; and why should she die? She did not perhaps put this into words; but the meaning of her smile, and the manner in which she put aside every suggestion about the chances of the hereafter away from her, said it more clearly than words. It was not that she had any superstitious fear about the making of a will. When the doctor or the vicar or her man of business, the only persons who ever talked to her on the subject, ventured periodically to refer to it, she assented pleasantly,—Yes, certainly, she must do it—some time or other.

“It is a very simple thing to do,” the lawyer said. “I will save you all trouble; nothing

but your signature will be wanted—and that you give every day.”

“Oh, I should think nothing of the trouble!” she said.

“And it would liberate your mind from all care, and leave you free to think of things more important still,” said the clergyman.

“I think I am very free of care,” she replied.

Then the doctor added, bluntly, “And you will not die an hour the sooner for having made your will.”

“Die!” said Lady Mary, surprised. And then she added, with a smile, “I hope you don’t think so little of me as to believe I would be kept back by that?”

These gentlemen all consulted together in despair, and asked each other what should be done? They were tempted to think her an egotist—a cold-hearted old woman, holding at arm’s-length any idea of the inevitable. And so she did; but not because she was cold-hearted—because she was so accustomed to living, and had survived so many calamities, and gone on so long—so long; and because everything was so comfortably arranged about her—all her little habits so firmly established, as if nothing could interfere with them. To think of the day arriving which should begin with some other formula than that of her maid’s entrance, drawing aside the curtains, lighting the cheerful fire, bringing her a report of the weather; and then the little tray,

resplendent with snowy linen and shining silver and china, with its bouquet of violets or a rose in the season, the newspaper carefully dried and cut, the letters ;—every detail was so perfect, so unchanging, regular as the morning. It seemed impossible that it should come to an end. And then when she came downstairs, there were all the little articles upon her table always ready to her hand ; a certain number of things to do, each at the appointed hour ; the slender refreshments it was necessary for her to take, in which there was a little exquisite variety—but never any change in the fact that at eleven and at three and so forth something had to be taken. Had a woman wanted to abandon the peaceful life which was thus supported and carried on, the very framework itself would have resisted. It was impossible (almost) to contemplate the idea that at a given moment the whole machinery must stop. She was neither without heart nor without religion, but, on the contrary, a good woman, to whom many gentle thoughts had been given at various portions of her career. But the occasion seemed to have passed for that as well as other kinds of emotion. The mere fact of living was enough for her. The little exertion which it was well she was required to make produced a pleasant weariness. It was a duty much enforced upon her by all around her, that she should do nothing which would exhaust or fatigue her. “I don’t want you to think even,” the doctor would say ; “you have

done enough of thinking in your time." And this she accepted with great composure of spirit. She had thought and felt and done much in her day; but now everything of the kind was over. There was no need for her to fatigue herself; and day followed day, all warm and sheltered and pleasant. People died, it is true, now and then out of doors; but they were mostly young people, whose death might have been prevented had proper care been taken—who were seized with violent maladies, or caught sudden infections, or were cut down by accident—all which things seemed natural. Her own contemporaries were very few, and they were like herself—living on in something of the same way. At eighty-five all people under seventy are young; and one's contemporaries are very, very few.

Nevertheless these men did disturb her a little about her will. She had made more than one will in the former days during her active life; but all those to whom she had bequeathed her possessions were dead. She had survived them all, and inherited from many of them, which had been a hard thing in its time. One day the lawyer had been more than ordinarily pressing. He had told her stories of men who had died intestate, and left trouble and penury behind them to those whom they would have most wished to preserve from all trouble. It would not have become Mr Furnival to say brutally to Lady Mary—"This is how you will leave your godchild when you die." But he

told her story after story, many of them piteous enough.

"People think it is so troublesome a business," he said, "when it is nothing at all—the most easy matter in the world. We are getting so much less particular nowadays about formalities. So long as the testator's intentions are made quite apparent—that is the chief matter: and a very bad thing for us lawyers."

"I daresay," said Lady Mary, "it is unpleasant for a man to think of himself as 'the testator.' It is a very abstract title, when you come to think of it."

"Pooh!" said Mr Furnival, who had no sense of humour.

"But if this great business is so very simple," she went on, "one could do it, no doubt, for oneself?"

"Many people do—but it is never advisable," said the lawyer. "You will say it is natural for me to tell you that. When they do, it should be as simple as possible. I give all my real property, or my personal property, or my shares in so-and-so, or my jewels, or so forth, to—whoever it may be. The fewer words the better, so that nobody may be able to read between the lines, you know; and the signature attested by two witnesses; but they must not be witnesses that have any interest—that is, that have anything left to them by the document they witness."

Lady Mary put up her hand defensively, with a laugh. It was still a most delicate

hand, like ivory, a little yellowed with age, but fine, the veins standing out a little upon it, the finger-tips still pink. "You speak," she said, "as if you expected me to take the law in my own hands. No, no, my old friend; never fear, you shall have the doing of it."

"Whenever you please, my dear lady—when-ever you please. Such a thing cannot be done an hour too soon. Shall I take your instructions now?"

Lady Mary laughed, and said, "You were always a very keen man for business. I remember your father used to say, Robert would never neglect an opening."

"No," he said, with a peculiar look. "I have always looked after my six-and-eightpences; and in that case it is true the pounds take care of themselves."

"Very good care," said Lady Mary; and then she bade her young companion bring that book she had been reading, where there was something she wanted to show Mr Furnival. "It is only a case in a novel—but I am sure it is bad law; give me your opinion," she said.

He was obliged to be civil, very civil. Nobody is rude to the Lady Marys of life; and besides, she was old enough to have an additional right to every courtesy. But while he sat over the novel, and tried with unnecessary vehemence to make her see what very bad law it was, and glanced from her smiling attention to the innocent sweetness of the girl beside her, who was her loving attend-

ant, the good man's heart was sore. He said many hard things of her in his own mind as he went away.

"She will die," he said, bitterly. "She will go off in a moment when nobody is looking for it, and that poor child will be left destitute."

It was all he could do not to go back and take her by her fragile old shoulders and force her to sign and seal at once. But then he knew very well that as soon as he found himself in her presence, he would of necessity be obliged to subdue his impatience, and be once more civil, very civil, and try to suggest and insinuate the duty, which he dared not force upon her. And it was very clear that till she pleased she would take no hint. He supposed it must be that strange reluctance to part with their power which is said to be common to old people, or else that horror of death, and determination to keep it at arm's-length, which is also common. Thus he did as spectators are so apt to do, he forced a meaning and motive into what had no motive at all, and imagined Lady Mary, the kindest of women, to be of purpose and intention risking the future of the girl whom she had brought up, and whom she loved—not with passion, indeed, or anxiety, but with tender benevolence: a theory which was as false as anything could be.

That evening in her room, Lady Mary, in a very cheerful mood, sat by a little bright unnecessary fire, with her writing-book before her, waiting till she should be sleepy. It was the

only point in which she was a little hard upon her maid, who in every other respect was the best-treated of servants. Lady Mary, as it happened, had often no inclination for bed till the night was far advanced. She slept little, as is common enough at her age. She was in her warm wadded dressing-gown, an article in which she still showed certain traces (which were indeed visible in all she wore) of her ancient beauty, with her white hair becomingly arranged under a cap of cambric and lace. At the last moment, when she had been ready to step into bed, she had changed her mind, and told Hopgood that she would write a letter or two first. And she had written her letters, but still felt no inclination to sleep. Then there fluttered across her memory somehow the conversation she had held with Mr Furnival in the morning. It would be amusing, she thought, to cheat him out of some of those six-and-eightpences he pretended to think so much of. It would be still more amusing, next time the subject of her will was recurred to, to give his arm a little tap with her fan, and say, "Oh, that is all settled, months ago." She laughed to herself at this, and took out a fresh sheet of paper. It was a little jest that pleased her.

"Do you think there is any one up yet, Hopgood, except you and me?" she said to the maid. Hopgood hesitated a little, and then said that she believed Mr Brown had not gone to bed yet: for he had been going over

the cellar, and was making up his accounts. Hopgood was so explanatory that her mistress divined what was meant. "I suppose I have been spoiling sport, keeping you here," she said, good-humouredly; for it was well known that Miss Hopgood and Mr Brown were engaged, and that they were only waiting (everybody knew but Lady Mary, who never suspected it) the death of their mistress to set up a lodging-house in Jermyn Street, where they fully intended to make their fortune. "Then go," Lady Mary said, "and call Brown. I have a little business paper to write, and you must both witness my signature." She laughed to herself a little as she said this, thinking how she would steal a march on Mr Furnival. "I give and bequeath," she said to herself playfully, after Hopgood had hurried away. She fully intended to leave both of these good servants something, but then she recollected that people who are interested in a will cannot sign as witnesses. "What does it matter?" she said to herself gaily; "if it should ever be wanted, Mary would see to that." Accordingly she dashed off in her pretty old-fashioned handwriting, which was very angular and pointed, as was the fashion in her day, and still very clear, though slightly tremulous, a few lines, in which, remembering playfully Mr Furnival's recommendation of "few words," she left to little Mary all she possessed, adding, by the prompting of that recollection about the witnesses, "She will take care of the servants."

It filled one side only of the large sheet of note-paper, which was what Lady Mary habitually used. Brown, introduced timidly by Hopgood, and a little overawed by the solemnity of the bedchamber, came in and painted solidly his large signature after the spidery lines of his mistress. She had folded down the paper, so that neither saw what it was.

"Now I will go to bed," Lady Mary said, when Brown had left the room. "And Hopgood, you must go to bed too."

"Yes, my lady," said Hopgood.

"I don't approve of courtship at this hour."

"No, my lady," Hopgood replied, deprecating and disappointed.

"Why cannot he tell his tale in daylight?"

"Oh, my lady, there's no tale to tell," cried the maid. "We are not of the gossiping sort, my lady, neither me nor Mr Brown." Lady Mary laughed, and watched while the candles were put out: the fire made a pleasant flicker in the room—it was autumn and still warm, and it was "for company" and cheerfulness that the little fire was lit; she liked to see it dancing and flickering upon the walls,—and then closed her eyes amid an exquisite softness of comfort and luxury, life itself bearing her up as softly, filling up all crevices as warmly, as the downy pillow upon which she rested her still beautiful old head.

If she had died that night! The little sheet of paper that meant so much lay openly, innocently, in her writing-book, along with the

letters she had written, and looking of as little importance as they. There was nobody in the world who grudged old Lady Mary one of those pretty placid days of hers. Brown and Hopgood, if they were sometimes a little impatient, consoled each other that they were both sure of something in her will, and that in the meantime it was a very good place. And all the rest would have been very well content that Lady Mary should live for ever. But how wonderfully it would have simplified everything, and how much trouble and pain it would have saved to everybody, herself included, could she have died that night!

But naturally there was no question of dying on that night. When she was about to go downstairs next day, Lady Mary, giving her letters to be posted, saw the paper which she had forgotten lying beside them. She had forgotten all about it, but the sight of it made her smile. She folded it up and put it in an envelope while Hopgood went downstairs with the letters; and then, to carry out her joke, she looked round her to see where she would put it. There was an old Italian cabinet in the room with a secret drawer, which it was a little difficult to open, almost impossible for any one who did not know the secret. Lady Mary looked round her, smiled, hesitated a little, and then walked across the room and put the envelope in the secret drawer. She was still fumbling with it when Hopgood came back, but there was no connection in Hopgood's

mind then, or ever after, between the paper she had signed and this old cabinet, which was one of the old lady's toys. She arranged Lady Mary's shawl, which had dropped off her shoulders a little in her unusual activity, and took up her book and her favourite cushion, and all the little paraphernalia that moved with her, and gave her lady her arm to go downstairs; where little Mary had placed her chair just at the right angle, and arranged the little table, on which there were so many little necessities and conveniences, and was standing smiling, the prettiest object of all, the climax of the gentle luxury and pleasantness, to receive her godmother, who had been her providence all her life.

But what a pity! oh, what a pity, that she had not died that night!

II.

Life went on after this without any change. There was never any change in that delightful house; and if it was years or months, or even days, the youngest of its inhabitants could scarcely tell, and Lady Mary could not tell at all. This was one of her little imperfections—a little mist which hung like the lace about her head over her memory. She could not remember how time went, or that there was any difference between one day and another. There were Sundays, it was true, which made a

kind of gentle measure of the progress of time ; but she said, with a smile, that she thought it was always Sunday—they came so close upon each other. And Time flew on gentle wings, that made no sound and left no reminders. She had her little ailments like everybody, but in reality less than anybody, seeing there was nothing to fret her, nothing to disturb the even tenor of her days. Still there were times when she took a little cold, or got a chill, in spite of all precautions, as she went from one room to another. She came to be one of the marvels of the time—an old lady who had seen everybody worth seeing for generations back—who remembered as distinctly as if they had happened yesterday, great events that had taken place before the present age began at all, before the great statesmen of our time were born. And in full possession of all her faculties, as everybody said, her mind as clear as ever, her intelligence as active, reading everything, interested in everything, and still beautiful in extreme old age. Everybody about her, and in particular all the people who helped to keep the thorns from her path, and felt themselves to have a hand in her preservation, were proud of Lady Mary : and she was perhaps a little, a very little, delightfully, charmingly proud of herself. The doctor, beguiled by professional vanity, feeling what a feather she was in his cap, quite confident that she would reach her hundredth birthday, and with an ecstatic hope that even, by grace of his admirable treatment

and her own beautiful constitution she might (almost) solve the problem and live for ever, gave up troubling about the will which at a former period he had taken so much interest in. "What is the use?" he said; "she will see us all out." And the vicar, though he did not give in to this, was overawed by the old lady, who knew everything that could be taught her, and to whom it seemed an impertinence to utter commonplaces about duty, or even to suggest subjects of thought. Mr Furnival was the only man who did not cease his representations, and whose anxiety about the young Mary, who was so blooming and sweet in the shadow of the old, did not decrease. But the recollection of the bit of paper in the secret drawer of the cabinet, fortified his old client against all his attacks. She had intended it only as a jest, with which some day or other to confound him, and show how much wiser she was than he supposed. It became quite a pleasant subject of thought to her, at which she laughed to herself. Some day, when she had a suitable moment, she would order him to come with all his formalities, and then produce her bit of paper, and turn the laugh against him. But oddly, the very existence of that little document kept her indifferent even to the laugh. It was too much trouble; she only smiled at him, and took no more notice, amused to think how astonished he would be—when, if ever, he found it out.

It happened, however, that one day in the

early winter the wind changed when Lady Mary was out for her drive: at least they all vowed the wind changed. It was in the south, that genial quarter, when she set out, but turned about in some uncomfortable way, and was a keen north-easter when she came back. And in the moment of stepping from the carriage she caught a chill. It was the coachman's fault, Hopgood said, who allowed the horses to make a step forward when Lady Mary was getting out, and kept her exposed, standing on the step of the carriage, while he pulled them up; and it was Hopgood's fault, the footman said, who was not clever enough to get her lady out, or even to throw a shawl round her, when she perceived how the weather had changed. It is always some one's fault, or some unforeseen unprecedented change, that does it at the last. Lady Mary was not accustomed to be ill, and did not bear it with her usual grace. She was a little impatient at first, and thought they were making an unnecessary fuss. But then there passed a few uncomfortable feverish days, when she began to look forward to the doctor's visit as the only thing there was any comfort in. Afterwards she passed a night of a very agitating kind. She dozed and dreamed, and awoke and dreamed again. Her life seemed all to run into dreams—a strange confusion was about her, through which she could define nothing. Once waking up, as she supposed, she saw a group round her bed, the doctor with a candle in his hand (how should the doctor be

there in the middle of the night?), holding her hand or feeling her pulse: little Mary at one side crying—why should the child cry? and Hopgood very anxious, pouring something into a glass. There were other faces there which she was sure must have come out of a dream, so unlikely was it that they should be collected in her bedchamber; and all with a sort of halo of feverish light about them, a magnified and mysterious importance. This strange scene, which she did not understand, seemed to make itself visible all in a moment out of the darkness, and then disappeared again as suddenly as it came.

III.

When she woke again it was morning; and her first waking consciousness was, that she must be much better. The choking sensation in her throat was altogether gone. She had no desire to cough—no difficulty in breathing. She had a fancy, however, that she must be still dreaming, for she felt sure that some one had called her by her name, "Mary." Now all who could call her by her Christian name were dead years ago—therefore it must be a dream. However, in a short time it was repeated,—“Mary, Mary! get up; there is a great deal to do.” This voice confused her greatly. Was it possible that all that was past had been mere fancy; that she had but dreamed

those long, long years—maturity and motherhood, and trouble and triumph, and old age at the end of all? It seemed to her possible that she might have dreamed the rest, for she had been a girl much given to visions; but she said to herself that she never could have dreamed old age. And then with a smile she mused and thought that it must be the voice that was a dream; for how could she get up without Hopgood, who had never appeared yet to draw the curtains or make the fire? Hopgood perhaps had sat up late. She remembered now to have seen her that time in the middle of the night by her bedside, so that it was natural enough, poor thing, that she should be late. Get up! who was it that was calling to her so. She had not been so called to, she who had always been a great lady, since she was a girl by her mother's side. "Mary, Mary!" It was a very curious dream. And what was yet more curious was, that by-and-by she could not keep still any longer, but got up without thinking any more of Hopgood, and going out of her room came all at once into the midst of a company of people all very busy—whom she was much surprised to find at first, but whom she soon accustomed herself to, finding the greatest interest in their proceedings, and curious to know what they were doing. They, for their part, did not seem at all surprised by her appearance, nor did any one stop to explain, as would have been natural; but she took this with great

composure, somewhat astonished perhaps, being accustomed, wherever she went, to a great many observances and much respect, but soon, very soon, becoming used to it. Then some one repeated what she had heard before. "It was time you got up—for there is a great deal to do."

"To do," she said, "for me?" and then she looked round upon them with that charming smile which had subjugated so many. "I am afraid," she said, "you will find me of very little use. I am too old now, if ever I could have done much, for work."

"Oh no, you are not old,—you will do very well," some one said.

"Not old!"—Lady Mary felt a little offended in spite of herself. "Perhaps I like flattery as well as my neighbours," she said with dignity, "but then it must be reasonable. To say I am anything but a very old woman——"

Here she paused a little, perceiving for the first time with surprise that she was standing and walking without her stick or the help of any one's arm, quite freely and at her ease, and that the place in which she was had expanded into a great place like a gallery in a palace, instead of the room next her own into which she had walked a few minutes ago; but this discovery did not at all affect her mind, or occupy her except with the most passing momentary surprise.

"The fact is, I feel a great deal better and stronger," she said.

"Quite well, Mary, and stronger than ever you were before?"

"Who is it that calls me Mary? I have had nobody for a long time to call me Mary; the friends of my youth are all dead. I think that you must be right, although the doctor, I feel sure, thought me very bad last night. I should have got alarmed if I had not fallen asleep again."

"And then woke up well?"

"Quite well: it is wonderful, but quite true. You seem to know a great deal about me?"

"I know everything about you. You have had a very pleasant life, and do you think you have made the best of it? Your old age has been very pleasant——"

"Ah! you acknowledge that I am old, then?" cried Lady Mary, with a smile.

"You are old no longer, and you are a great lady no longer. Don't you see that something has happened to you? It is seldom that such a great change happens without being found out."

"Yes; it is true I have got better all at once. I feel an extraordinary renewal of strength. I seem to have left home without knowing it; none of my people seem near me. I feel very much as if I had just awakened from a long dream. Is it possible," she said, with a wondering look, "that I have dreamed all my life, and after all am just a girl at

home?" The idea was ludicrous, and she laughed. "You see I am very much improved indeed," she said.

She was still so far from perceiving the real situation, that some one came towards her out of the group of people about—some one whom she recognised—with the evident intention of explaining to her how it was. She started a little at the sight of him, and held out her hand, and cried: "You here! I am very glad to see you—doubly glad, since I was told a few days ago that you had—died."

There was something in this word as she herself pronounced it that troubled her a little. She had never been one of those who are afraid of death. On the contrary, she had always taken a great interest in it, and liked to hear everything that could be told her on the subject. It gave her now, however, a curious little thrill of sensation, which she did not understand: she hoped it was not superstition.

"You have guessed rightly," he said—"quite right. That is one of the words with a false meaning, which is to us a mere symbol of something we cannot understand. But you see what it means now."

It was a great shock, it need not be concealed. Otherwise she had been quite pleasantly occupied with the interest of something new, into which she had walked so easily out of her own bedchamber, without any trouble, and with the delightful new sensation of health and strength. But when it flashed upon her

that she was not to go back to her bedroom again, nor have any of those cares and attentions which had seemed necessary to existence, she was very much startled and shaken. Died! Was it possible that she personally had died? She had known it was a thing that happened to everybody; but yet.—And it was a solemn matter, to be prepared for, and looked forward to, whereas—— “If you mean that I too——” she said, faltering a little; and then she added, “it is very surprising,” with a trouble in her mind which yet was not all trouble. “If that is so, it is a thing well over. And it is very wonderful how much disturbance people give themselves about it—if this is all.”

“This is not all, however,” her friend said; “you have an ordeal before you which you will not find pleasant. You are going to think about your life, and all that was imperfect in it, and which might have been done better.”

“We are none of us perfect,” said Lady Mary, with a little of that natural resentment with which one hears one’s self accused—however ready one may be to accuse one’s self.

“Permit me,” said he, and took her hand and led her away without further explanation. The people about were so busy with their own occupations, that they took very little notice; neither did she pay much attention to the manner in which they were engaged. Their looks were friendly when they met her eye, and she too felt friendly, with a sense of brother-

hood. But she had always been a kind woman. She wanted to step aside and help, on more than one occasion, when it seemed to her that some people in her way had a task above their powers; but this her conductor would not permit. And she endeavoured to put some questions to him as they went along with still less success.

"The change is very confusing," she said; "one has no standard to judge by. I should like to know something about—the kind of people—and the—manner of life."

"For a time," he said, "you will have enough to do, without troubling yourself about that."

This naturally produced an uneasy sensation in her mind. "I suppose," she said rather timidly, "that we are not in—what we have been accustomed to call heaven?"

"That is a word," he said, "which expresses rather a condition than a place."

"But there must be a place—in which that condition can exist." She had always been fond of discussions of this kind, and felt encouraged to find that they were still practicable. "It cannot be the——Inferno, that is clear at least," she added with the sprightliness which was one of her characteristics; "perhaps—Purgatory? since you infer that I have something to endure."

"Words are interchangeable," he said: "that means one thing to one of us which to another has a totally different signification."

There was something so like his old self in this, that she laughed with an irresistible sense of amusement.

"You were always fond of the oracular," she said. She was conscious that on former occasions, if he had made such a speech to her, though she would have felt the same amusement, she would not have expressed it so frankly. But he did not take it at all amiss. And her thoughts went on in other directions. She felt herself saying over to herself the words of the old north-country dirge, which came to her recollection she knew not how—

"If hosen and shoon thou gavest nane,
The whins shall prick thee intill the bane."

When she saw that her companion heard her, she asked, "Is that true?"

He shook his head a little. "It is too matter of fact," he said, "as I need hardly tell you. Hosen and shoon are good, but they do not always sufficiently indicate the state of the heart."

Lady Mary had a consciousness, which was pleasant to her, that so far as the hosen and shoon went, she had abundant means of preparing herself for the pricks of any road, however rough; but she had no time to indulge this pleasing reflection, for she was shortly introduced into a great building full of innumerable rooms, in one of which her companion left her.

IV.

The door opened, and she felt herself free to come out. How long she had been there, or what passed there, is not for any one to say. She came out tingling and smarting—if such words can be used—with an intolerable recollection of the last act of her life. So intolerable was it that all that had gone before, and all the risings up of old errors and visions long dead, were forgotten in the sharp and keen prick of this, which was not over and done like the rest. No one had accused her, or brought before her Judge the things that were against her. She it was who had done it all—she whose memory did not spare her one fault, who remembered everything. But when she came to that last frivolity of her old age, and saw for the first time how she had played with the future of the child whom she had brought up, and abandoned to the hardest fate—for nothing, for folly, for a jest—the horror and bitterness of the thought filled her mind to overflowing. In the first anguish of that recollection she had to go forth, receiving no word of comfort in respect to it, meeting only with a look of sadness and compassion, which went to her very heart. She came forth as if she had been driven away, but not by any outward influence, by the force of her own miserable sensations. “I will write,” she said to herself, “and tell them—I will go——” And then

she stopped short, remembering that she could neither go nor write—that all communication with the world she had left was closed. Was it all closed? Was there no way in which a message could reach those who remained behind? She caught the first passer-by, and addressed him piteously. "Oh, tell me—you have been longer here than I—cannot one send a letter, a message, if it were only a single word?"

"Where?" he said, stopping and listening; so that it began to seem possible to her that some such expedient might still be within her reach.

"It is to England," she said, thinking he meant to ask to which quarter of the world.

"Ah," he said, shaking his head, "I fear that is impossible."

"But it is to set something right, which out of mere inadvertence, with no ill meaning——" No, no (she repeated to herself), no ill meaning—none! "Oh sir, for charity! tell me how I can find a way. There must—there must be some way."

He was greatly moved by the sight of her distress. "I am but a stranger here," he said; "I may be wrong. There are others who can tell you better; but"—and he shook his head sadly—"most of us would be so thankful, if we could, to send a word, if it were only a single word, to those we have left behind, that I fear, I fear——"

"Ah!" cried Lady Mary, "but that would

be only for tenderness; whereas this is for justice and for pity, and to do away with a great wrong which I did before I came here."

"I am very sorry for you," he said; but shook his head once more as he went away. She was more careful next time, and chose one who had the look of much experience and knowledge of the place. He listened to her very gravely, and answered Yes, that he was one of the officers, and could tell her whatever she wanted to know; but when she told him what she wanted, he too shook his head. "I do not say it cannot be done," he said. "There are some cases in which it has been successful, but very few. It has often been attempted. There is no law against it. Those who do it do it at their own risk. They suffer much, and almost always they fail."

"No, oh no. You said there were some who succeeded. No one can be more anxious than I. I will give—anything—everything I have in the world!——"

He gave her a smile, which was very grave nevertheless, and full of pity. "You forget," he said, "that you have nothing to give; and if you had, that there is no one here to whom it would be of any value."

Though she was no longer old and weak, yet she was still a woman, and she began to weep, in the terrible failure and contrariety of all things; but yet she would not yield. She cried: "There must be some one here who would do it for love. I have had people who

loved me in my time. There must be some here who have not forgotten. Ah! I know what you would say. I lived so long I forgot them all, and why should they remember me?"

Here she was touched on the arm, and looking round, saw close to her the face of one whom, it was very true, she had forgotten. She remembered him but dimly, after she had looked long at him. A little group had gathered about her, with grieved looks, to see her distress. He who had touched her was the spokesman of them all.

"There is nothing I would not do," he said, "for you and for love." And then they all sighed, surrounding her, and added, "But it is impossible—impossible!"

She stood and gazed at them, recognising by degrees faces that she knew, and seeing in all that look of grief and sympathy which makes all human souls brothers. Impossible was not a word that had been often said to her in her life; and to come out of a world in which everything could be changed, everything communicated in the twinkling of an eye, and find a dead blank before her and around her, through which not a word could go, was more terrible than can be said in words. She looked piteously upon them, with that anguish of helplessness which goes to every heart, and cried, "What is impossible? To send a word—only a word—to set right what is wrong? Oh, I understand," she said, lifting up her hands. "I understand! that to send messages of com-

fort must not be ; that the people who love you must bear it, as we all have done in our time, and trust to God for consolation. But I have done a wrong ! Oh, listen, listen to me, my friends. I have left a child, a young creature, unprovided for—without any one to help her. And must that be ? Must she bear it, and I bear it, for ever, and no means, no way of setting it right ? Listen to me ! I was there last night,—in the middle of the night I was still there,—and here this morning. So it must be easy to come—only a short way ; and two words would be enough,—only two words !”

They gathered closer and closer round her, full of compassion. “It is easy to come,” they said, “but not to go.”

And one added, “It will not be for ever ; comfort yourself. When she comes here, or to a better place, that will seem to you only as a day.”

“But to her,” cried Lady Mary,—“to her it will be long years—it will be trouble and sorrow ; and she will think I took no thought for her : and she will be right,” the penitent said, with a great and bitter cry.

It was so terrible that they were all silent, and said not a word ; except the man who had loved her, who put his hand upon her arm, and said, “We are here for that ; this is the fire that purges us,—to see at last what we have done, and the true aspect of it, and to know the cruel wrong, yet never be able to make amends.”

She remembered then that this was a man who had neglected all lawful affections, and broken the hearts of those who trusted him for her sake ; and for a moment she forgot her own burden in sorrow for his.

It was now that he who had called himself one of the officers came forward again,—for the little crowd had gathered round her so closely that he had been shut out. He said, “No one can carry your message for you ; that is not permitted. But there is still a possibility. You yourself may have permission to go. Such things have been done, though they have not often been successful. But if you will——”

She shivered when she heard him ; and it became apparent to her why no one could be found to go,—for all her nature revolted from that step which it was evident must be the most terrible which could be thought of. She looked at him with troubled, beseeching eyes, and the rest all looked at her, pitying and trying to soothe her.

“Permission will not be refused,” he said, “for a worthy cause.”

Upon which the others all spoke together, entreating her. “Already,” they cried, “they have forgotten you living. You are to them one who is dead. They will be afraid of you if they can see you. Oh, go not back ! Be content to wait—to wait ; it is only a little while. The life of man is nothing ; it appears for a little time, and then it vanishes away. And when she comes here she will know—or

in a better place." They sighed as they named the better place; though some smiled too, feeling perhaps more near to it.

Lady Mary listened to them all, but she kept her eyes upon the face of him who offered her this possibility. There passed through her mind a hundred stories she had heard of those who had *gone back*; but not one that spoke of them as welcome, as received with joy, as comforting those they loved. Ah no! was it not rather a curse upon the house to which they came? The rooms were shut up, the houses abandoned, where they were supposed to appear. Those whom they had loved best feared and fled them. They were a vulgar wonder,—a thing that the poorest laughed at, yet dreaded. Poor banished souls! it was because no one would listen to them that they had to linger and wait, and come and go. She shivered, and, in spite of her longing and her repentance, a cold dread and horror took possession of her. She looked round upon her companions for comfort, and found none.

"Do not go," they said; "do not go. We have endured like you. We wait till all things are made clear."

And another said, "All will be made clear. It is but for a time."

She turned from one to another, and back again to the first speaker,—he who had authority.

He said, "It is very rarely successful; it retards the course of your penitence. It is an

indulgence, and it may bring harm and not good; but if the meaning is generous and just, permission will be given, and you may go."

Then all the strength of her nature rose in her. She thought of the child forsaken, and of the dark world round her, where she would find so few friends; and of the home shut up in which she had lived her young and pleasant life; and of the thoughts that must rise in her heart, as though she were forsaken and abandoned of God and man. Then Lady Mary turned to the man who had authority. She said, "If He whom I saw to-day will give me His blessing, I will go——" and they all pressed round her, weeping and kissing her hands.

"He will not refuse His blessing," they said; "but the way is terrible, and you are still weak. How can you encounter all the misery of it? He commands no one to try that dark and dreadful way."

"I will try," Lady Mary said.

V.

The night which Lady Mary had been conscious of, in a momentary glimpse full of the exaggeration of fever, had not indeed been so short as she believed. The doctor, it is true, had been pronouncing her death-warrant when she saw him holding her wrist and wondered what he did there in the middle of the night;

but she had been very ill before this, and the conclusion of her life had been watched with many tears. Then there had risen up a wonderful commotion in the house, of which little Mary, her godchild, was very little sensible. Had she left any will, any instructions, the slightest indication of what she wished to be done after her death? Mr Furnival, who had been very anxious to be allowed to see her, even in the last days of her illness, said emphatically, No. She had never executed any will, never made any disposition of her affairs, he said, almost with bitterness, in the tone of one who is ready to weep with vexation and distress. The vicar took a more hopeful view. He said it was impossible that so considerate a person could have done this, and that there must, he was sure, be found somewhere, if close examination was made, a memorandum, a letter—something which would show what she wished; for she must have known very well, notwithstanding all flatteries and compliments upon her good looks, that from day to day her existence was not to be calculated upon.

The doctor did not share this last opinion. He said that there was no fathoming the extraordinary views that people took of their own case; and that it was quite possible, though it seemed incredible, that Lady Mary might really be as little expectant of death, on the way to ninety, as a girl of seventeen; but still he was of opinion that she might have left a

memorandum somewhere. These three gentlemen were in the foreground of affairs ; because she had no relations to step in and take the management. The Earl, her grandson, was abroad, and there were only his solicitors to interfere on his behalf—men to whom Lady Mary's fortune was quite unimportant, although it was against their principles to let anything slip out of their hands that could aggrandise their client ; but who knew nothing about the circumstances—about little Mary, about the old lady's peculiarities, in any way. Therefore the persons who had surrounded her in her life, and Mr Furnival, her man of business, were the persons who really had the management of everything. Their wives interfered a little too, or rather the one wife who only could do so—the wife of the vicar, who came in beneficently at once, and took poor little Mary, in her first desolation, out of the melancholy house. Mrs Vicar did this without any hesitation, knowing very well that, in all probability, Lady Mary had made no will, and consequently that the poor girl was destitute. A great deal is said about the hardness of the world, and the small consideration that is shown for a destitute dependant in such circumstances. But this is not true ; and, as a matter of fact, there is never, or very rarely, such profound need in the world, without a great deal of kindness and much pity. The three gentlemen all along had been entirely in Mary's interest. They had not expected leg-

acies from the old lady, or any advantage to themselves. It was of the girl that they had thought. And when now they examined everything and inquired into all her ways and what she had done, it was of Mary they were thinking. But Mr Furnival was very certain of his point. He knew that Lady Mary had made no will; time after time he had pressed it upon her. He was very sure, even while he examined her writing-table, and turned out all the drawers, that nothing would be found. The little Italian cabinet had *chiffons* in it, fragments of old lace, pieces of ribbon, little nothings of all sorts. Nobody thought of the secret drawer; and if they had thought of it, what place could have been less likely? If she had ever made a will, she could have had no reason for concealing it. To be sure, they did not reason in this way, being simply unaware of any place of concealment at all. And Mary knew nothing about this search they were making. She did not know how she was herself "left." When the first misery of grief was exhausted, she began, indeed, to have troubled thoughts in her own mind,—to expect that the vicar would speak to her, or Mr Furnival send for her, and tell her what she was to do. But nothing was said to her. The vicar's wife had asked her to come for a long visit; and the anxious people, who were for ever talking over this subject and consulting what was best for her, had come to no decision as yet, as to what must be said to the person chiefly concerned.

It was too heartrending to have to put the real state of affairs before her.

The doctor had no wife; but he had an anxious mother, who, though she would not for the world have been unkind to the poor girl, yet was very anxious that she should be disposed of and out of her son's way. It is true that the doctor was forty and Mary only eighteen,—but what then? matches of that kind were seen every day. And his heart was so soft to the child that his mother never knew from one day to another what might happen. She had naturally no doubt at all that Mary would seize the first hand held out to her, and as time went on held many an anxious consultation with the vicar's wife on the subject. "You cannot have her with you for ever," she said. "She must know one time or another how she is left, and that she must learn to do something for herself."

"Oh," said the vicar's wife, "how is she to be told? It is heartrending to look at her and to think,—nothing but luxury all her life, and now, in a moment, destitution. I am very glad to have her with me; she is a dear little thing, and so nice with the children. And if some good man would only step in——"

The doctor's mother trembled; for that a good man should step in was exactly what she feared. "That is a thing that can never be depended upon," she said; "and marriages made out of compassion are just as bad as mercenary marriages. Oh no, my dear Mrs

Bowyer, Mary has a great deal of character. You should put more confidence in her. No doubt she will be much cast down at first, but when she knows, she will rise to the occasion and show what is in her."

"Poor little thing! what is in a girl of eighteen, and one that has lain on the roses and fed on the lilies all her life? Oh, I could find it in my heart to say a great deal about old Lady Mary that would not be pleasant! Why did she bring her up so if she did not mean to provide for her? I think she must have been at heart a wicked old woman."

"Oh no—we must not say that. I daresay, as my son says, she always meant to do it some time——"

"Some time! how long did she expect to live, I wonder?"

"Well," said the doctor's mother, "it is wonderful how little old one feels sometimes within oneself, even when one is well up in years." She was of the faction of the old, instead of being like Mrs Bowyer, who was not much over thirty, of the faction of the young. She could make excuses for Lady Mary; but she thought that it was unkind to keep the poor little girl in ignorance of her real position, and in the way of men—who, though old enough to know better, were still capable of folly, as what man is not where a girl of eighteen is concerned? "I hope," she added "that the Earl will do something for her. Certainly he ought to, when he knows all that

his grandmother did, and what her intentions must have been. He ought to make her a little allowance—that is the least he can do. Not, to be sure, such a provision as we all hoped Lady Mary was going to make for her, but enough to live upon. Mr Furnival, I believe, has written to him to that effect.”

“Hush!” cried the vicar’s wife; indeed she had been making signs to the other lady, who stood with her back to the door, for some moments. Mary had come in while this conversation was going on. She had not paid any attention to it; and yet her ear had been caught by the names of Lady Mary and the Earl and Mr Furnival. For whom was it that the Earl should make an allowance enough to live upon? whom Lady Mary had not provided for, and whom Mr Furnival had written about? When she sat down to the needlework in which she was helping Mrs Vicar, it was not to be supposed that she should not ponder these words—for some time very vaguely, not perceiving the meaning of them; and then with a start she woke up to perceive that there must be something meant, some one—even some one she knew. And then the needle dropped out of the girl’s hand, and the pinafore she was making fell on the floor. Some one!—it must be herself they meant! Who but she could be the subject of that earnest conversation? She began to remember a great many conversations as earnest, which had been stopped when she came into the room, and the looks of pity

which had been bent upon her. She had thought in her innocence that this was because she had lost her godmother, her protectress—and had been very grateful for the kindness of her friends. But now another meaning came into everything. Mrs Bowyer had accompanied her visitor to the door, still talking, and when she returned her face was very grave. But she smiled when she met Mary's look, and said cheerfully, "How kind of you, my dear, to make all those pinafores for me! The little ones will not know themselves. They never were so fine before."

"Oh, Mrs Bowyer," cried the girl, "I have guessed something, and I want you to tell me! Are you keeping me for charity, and is it I that am left—without any provision? and for whom Mr Furnival has written——"

She could not finish her sentence, for it was very bitter to her, as may be supposed.

"I don't know what you mean, my dear," cried the vicar's wife. "Charity,—well, I suppose that is the same as love—at least it is so in the 13th chapter of 1st Corinthians. You are staying with us, I hope, for love, if that is what you mean."

Upon which she took the girl in her arms and kissed her, and cried as women must. "My dearest," she said, "as you have guessed the worst, it is better to tell you. Lady Mary—I don't know why,—oh, I don't wish to blame her,—has left no will: and, my dear, my dear, you who have been brought up in

luxury, you have not a penny." Here the vicar's wife gave Mary a closer hug, and kissed her once more. "We love you all the better—if that was possible," she said.

How many thoughts will fly through a girl's mind while her head rests on some kind shoulder, and she is being consoled for the first calamity that has touched her life! She was neither ungrateful nor unresponsive; but as Mrs Bowyer pressed her close to her kind breast and cried over her, Mary did not cry but thought, seeing in a moment a succession of scenes, and realising in a moment so complete a new world, that all her pain was quelled by the hurry and rush in her brain as her forces rallied to sustain her. She withdrew from that kind support after a moment with eyes tearless and shining, the colour mounting to her face, and not a sign of discouragement in her, nor yet of sentiment, though she grasped her kind friend's hands with a pressure which her innocent small fingers seemed incapable of giving. "One has read of such things—in books," she said, with a faint courageous smile; "and I suppose they happen—in life."

"Oh, my dear, too often in life. Though how people can be so cruel, so indifferent, so careless of the happiness of those they love——"

Here Mary pressed her friend's hands till they hurt, and cried, "Not cruel, not indifferent. I cannot hear a word——"

"Well, dear, it is like you to feel so—I

knew you would ; and I will not say a word. Oh, Mary, if she ever thinks of such things now——”

“I hope she will not—I hope she cannot!” cried the girl, with once more a vehement pressure of her friend’s hands.

“What is that?” Mrs Bowyer said, looking round. “It is somebody in the next room, I suppose. No, dear ; I hope so too, for she could not be happy if she remembered. Mary, dry your eyes, my dear. Try not to think of this. I am sure there is some one in the next room. And you must try not to look wretched, for all our sakes——”

“Wretched!” cried Mary, springing up. “I am not wretched.” And she turned with a countenance glowing and full of courage to the door. But there was no one there—no visitor lingering in the smaller room, as sometimes happened.

“I thought I heard some one come in,” said the vicar’s wife. “Didn’t you hear something, Mary? I suppose it is because I am so agitated with all this, but I could have sworn I heard some one come in.”

“There is nobody,” said Mary, who, in the shock of the calamity which had so suddenly changed the world to her, was perfectly calm. She did not feel at all disposed to cry or “give way.” It went to her head with a thrill of pain, which was excitement as well, like a strong stimulant suddenly applied ; and she added, “I should like to go out a little, if

you don't mind, just to get used to the idea."

"My dear, I will get my hat in a moment——"

"No, please. It is not unkindness; but I must think it over by myself—by myself," Mary cried. She hurried away, while Mrs Bowyer took another survey of the outer room, and called the servant to know who had been calling. Nobody had been calling, the maid said; but her mistress still shook her head.

"It must have been some one who does not ring, who just opens the door," she said to herself. "That is the worst of the country. It might be Mrs Blunt, or Sophia Blackburn, or the curate, or half-a-dozen people—and they have just gone away when they heard me crying. How could I help crying? But I wonder how much they heard, whoever it was."

VI.

It was winter, and snow was on the ground.

Lady Mary found herself on the road that led through her own village going home. It was like a picture of a wintry night—like one of those pictures that please the children at Christmas. A little snow sprinkled on the roofs, just enough to define them, and on the edges of the roads; every cottage window showing a ruddy glimmer in the twilight; the

men coming home from their work ; the children, tied up in comforters and fur caps, stealing in from the slides, and from the pond where they were forbidden to go ; and, in the distance, the trees of the great House standing up dark, turning the twilight into night. She had a curious enjoyment in it, simple like that of a child, and a wish to talk to some one out of the fulness of her heart. She overtook, her step being far lighter and quicker than his, one of the men going home from his work, and spoke to him, telling him with a smile not to be afraid ; but he never so much as raised his head, and went plodding on with his heavy step, not knowing that she had spoken to him. She was startled by this ; but said to herself that the men were dull, that their perceptions were confused, and that it was getting dark—and went on, passing him quickly. His breath made a cloud in the air as he walked, and his heavy plodding steps sounded into the frosty night. She perceived that her own were invisible and inaudible, with a curious momentary sensation half of pleasure, half of pain. She felt no cold, and she saw through the twilight as clearly as if it had been day. There was no fatigue or sense of weakness in her ; but she had the strange, wistful feeling of an exile returning after long years, not knowing how he may find those he had left.

At one of the first houses in the village there was a woman standing at her door, looking out for her children—one who knew Lady Mary

well. She stopped quite cheerfully to bid her good evening, as she had done in her vigorous days, before she grew old. It was a little experiment, too. She thought it possible that Catherine would scream out, and perhaps fly from her; but surely would be easily reassured when she heard the voice she knew, and saw by her one who was no ghost, but her own kind mistress. But Catherine took no notice when she spoke; she did not so much as turn her head. Lady Mary stood by her patiently, with more and more of that wistful desire to be recognised. She put her hand timidly upon the woman's arm, who was thinking of nothing but her boys, and calling to them, straining her eyes in the fading light. "Don't be afraid—they are coming, they are safe," she said, pressing Catherine's arm. But the woman never moved. She took no notice. She called to a neighbour who was passing to ask if she had seen the children, and the two stood and talked in the dim air, not conscious of the third who stood between them, looking from one to another, astonished, paralysed. Lady Mary had not been prepared for this; she could not believe it even now. She repeated their names more and more anxiously, and even plucked at their sleeves to call their attention. She stood as a poor dependant sometimes stands, wistful, civil, trying to say something that will please, while they talked and took no notice; and then the neighbour passed on, and Catherine went into her house.

It is hard to be left out in the cold when others go into their cheerful houses ; but to be thus left outside of life, to speak and not be heard, to stand, unseen, astounded, unable to secure any attention ! She had thought they would be frightened, but it was not they who were frightened. A great panic seized the woman who was no more of this world. She had almost rejoiced to find herself back walking so lightly, so strongly, finding everything easy that had been so hard ; and yet but a few minutes had passed, and she knew, never more to be deceived, that she was no longer of this world. What if she should be condemned to wander for ever among familiar places that knew her no more, appealing for a look, a word, to those who could no longer see her, or hear her cry, or know of her presence ? Terror seized upon her, a chill and pang of fear beyond description. She felt an impulse to fly wildly into the dark, into the night, like a lost creature ; to find again somehow, she could not tell how, the door out of which she had come, and beat upon it wildly with her hands, and implore to be taken home. For a moment she stood looking round her, lost and alone in the wide universe ; no one to speak to her, no one to comfort her—outside of life altogether. Other rustic figures, slow-stepping, leisurely, at their ease, went and came, one at a time ; but in this place, where every stranger was an object of curiosity, no

one cast a glance at her. She was as if she had never been.

Presently she found herself entering her own house.

It was all shut up and silent,—not a window lighted along the whole front of the house which used to twinkle and glitter with lights. It soothed her somewhat to see this, as if in evidence that the place had changed with her. She went in silently, and the darkness was as day to her. Her own rooms were all shut up, yet were open to her steps, which no external obstacle could limit. There was still the sound of life below stairs, and in the housekeeper's room a cheerful party gathered round the fire. It was there that she turned first with some wistful human attraction towards the warmth and light rather than to the still places in which her own life had been passed. Mrs Prentiss, the housekeeper, had her daughter with her on a visit, and the daughter's baby lay asleep in a cradle placed upon two chairs outside the little circle of women round the table—one of whom was Hopgood, Lady Mary's maid. Hopgood sat and worked and cried, and mixed her words with little sobs. "I never thought as I should have had to take another place," she said. "Brown and me, we made sure of a little something to start upon. He's been here for twenty years, and so have you, Mrs Prentiss; and me, as nobody can say I wasn't faithful night and day."

"I never had that confidence in my lady to expect anything," Prentiss said.

"Oh, mother, don't say that : many and many a day you've said, when my lady dies——"

"And we've all said it," said Hopgood. "I can't think how she did it, nor why she did it ; for she was a kind lady, though appearances is against her."

"She was one of them, and I've known a many, as could not abide to see a gloomy face," said the housekeeper. "She kept us all comfortable for the sake of being comfortable herself, but no more."

"Oh, you are hard upon my lady !" cried Hopgood, "and I can't bear to hear a word against her, though it's been an awful disappointment to me."

"What's you or me, or any one," cried Mrs Prentiss, "in comparison of that poor little thing that can't work for her living like we can ; that is left on the charity of folks she don't belong to ? I'd have forgiven my lady anything if she'd done what was right by Miss Mary. You'll get a place, and a good place ; and me, they'll leave me here when the new folks come as have taken the house. But what will become of her, the darling ? and not a penny, nor a friend, nor one to look to her ? Oh, you selfish old woman ! oh, you heart of stone ! I just hope you are feeling it where you're gone," the housekeeper cried.

But as she said this, the woman did not

know who was looking at her with wide wistful eyes, holding out her hands in appeal, receiving every word as if it had been a blow. Though she knew it was useless, Lady Mary could not help it. She cried out to them, "Have pity upon me! have pity upon me! I am not cruel, as you think," with a keen anguish in her voice, which seemed to be sharp enough to pierce the very air and go up to the skies. And so, perhaps, it did; but never touched the human atmosphere in which she stood a stranger. Hopgood was threading her needle when her mistress uttered that cry, but her hand did not tremble, nor did the thread deflect a hair's-breadth from the straight line. The young mother alone seemed to be moved by some faint disturbance. "Hush!" she said; "is he waking?" looking towards the cradle. But as the baby made no further sound, she too returned to her sewing; and they sat bending their heads over their work round the table, and continued their talk. The room was very comfortable, bright, and warm, as Lady Mary had liked all her rooms to be. The warm firelight danced upon the walls; the women talked in cheerful tones. She stood outside their circle, and looked at them with a wistful face. Their notice would have been more sweet to her as she stood in that great humiliation, than in other times the look of a queen.

"But what is the matter with baby?" the mother said, rising hastily.

It was with no servile intention of securing a look from that little prince of life that she who was not of this world had stepped aside forlorn, and looked at him in his cradle. Though she was not of this world, she was still a woman, and had nursed her children in her arms. She bent over the infant by the soft impulse of nature, tenderly, with no interested thought. But the child saw her; was it possible? He turned his head towards her, and flickered his baby hands, and cooed with that indescribable voice that goes to every woman's heart. Lady Mary felt such a thrill of pleasure go through her, as no incident had given her for long years. She put out her arms to him as the mother snatched him from his little bed; and he, which was more wonderful, stretched towards her in his innocence, turning away from them all.

"He wants to go to some one," cried the mother. "Oh look, look, for God's sake! who is there that the child sees?"

"There's no one there—not a soul. Now dearie, dearie, be reasonable. You can see for yourself there's not a creature," said the grandmother.

"Oh, my baby, my baby! He sees something we can't see," the young woman cried. "Something has happened to his father, or he's going to be taken from me!" she said, holding the child to her in a sudden passion. The other women rushed to her to console her—the mother with reason and Hopgood with

poetry. "It's the angels whispering, like the song says." Oh the pang that was in the heart of the other whom they could not hear! She stood wondering how it could be—wondering with an amazement beyond words, how all that was in her heart, the love and the pain, and the sweetness and bitterness, could all be hidden—all hidden by that air in which the women stood so clear! She held out her hands, she spoke to them, telling who she was, but no one paid any attention; only the little dog Fido, who had been basking by the fire, sprang up, looked at her, and, retreating slowly backwards till he reached the wall, sat down there and looked at her again, with now and then a little bark of inquiry. The dog saw her. This gave her a curious pang of humiliation, yet pleasure. She went away out of that little centre of human life in a great excitement and thrill of her whole being. The child had seen her, and the dog; but, oh heavens! how was she to work out her purpose by such auxiliaries as these?

She went up to her old bedchamber with unshed tears heavy about her eyes, and a pathetic smile quivering on her mouth. It touched her beyond measure that the child should have that confidence in her. "Then God is still with me," she said to herself. Her room, which had been so warm and bright, lay desolate in the stillness of the night; but she wanted no light, for the darkness was no darkness to her. She looked round her for a

little, wondering to think how far away from her now was this scene of her old life, but feeling no pain in the sight of it—only a kind indulgence for the foolish simplicity which had taken so much pride in all these infantile elements of living. She went to the little Italian cabinet which stood against the wall, feeling now at least that she could do as she would,—that here there was no blank of human unconsciousness to stand in her way. But she was met by something that baffled and vexed her once more. She felt the polished surface of the wood under her hand, and saw all the pretty ornamentation, the inlaid work, the delicate carvings, which she knew so well. They swam in her eyes a little, as if they were part of some phantasmagoria about her, existing only in her vision. Yet the smooth surface resisted her touch; and when she withdrew a step from it, it stood before her solidly and square, as it had stood always, a glory to the place. She put forth her hands upon it, and could have traced the waving lines of the exquisite work, in which some artist soul had worked itself out in the old times; but though she thus saw it and felt, she could not with all her endeavours find the handle of the drawer, the richly wrought knob of ivory, the little door that opened into the secret place. How long she stood by it, attempting again and again to find what was as familiar to her as her own hand, what was before her, visible in every line, what she felt with fingers which began to

tremble, she could not tell. Time did not count with her as with common men. She did not grow weary, or require refreshment or rest, like those who were still of this world. But at length her head grew giddy and her heart failed. A cold despair took possession of her soul.

She could do nothing then—nothing; neither by help of man, neither by use of her own faculties, which were greater and clearer than ever before. She sank down upon the floor at the foot of that old toy, which had pleased her in the softness of her old age, to which she had trusted the fortunes of another; by which, in wantonness and folly, she had sinned, she had sinned! And she thought she saw standing round, her companions in the land she had left, saying, "It is impossible, impossible!" with infinite pity in their eyes; and the face of Him who had given her permission to come, yet who had said no word to her to encourage her in what was against nature. And there came into her heart a longing to fly, to get home, to be back in the land where her fellows were, and her appointed place. A child lost, how pitiful that is! without power to reason or divine how help will come; but a soul lost, outside of one method of existence, withdrawn from the other, knowing no way to retrace its steps, nor how help can come! There had been no bitterness in the passing from earth to the land where she had gone; but now there came upon her soul, in all the power of her

new faculties, the bitterness of death. The place which was hers she had forsaken and left, and the place that had been hers knew her no more.

VII.

Mary, when she left her kind friend in the vicarage, went out and took a long walk. She had received a shock so great that it took all sensation from her, and threw her into the seething and surging of an excitement altogether beyond her control. She could not think until she had got familiar with the idea, which indeed had been vaguely shaping itself in her mind ever since she had emerged from the first profound gloom and prostration of the shadow of death. She had never definitely thought of her position before—never even asked herself what was to become of her when Lady Mary died. She did not see, any more than Lady Mary did, why she should ever die; and girls who have never wanted anything in their lives, who have had no sharp experience to enlighten them, are slow to think upon such subjects. She had not expected anything; her mind had not formed any idea of inheritance: and it had not surprised her to hear of the Earl, who was Lady Mary's natural heir; nor to feel herself separated from the house in which all her previous life had been passed. But there had been gradually dawn-

ing upon her a sense that she had come to a crisis in her life, and that she must soon be told what was to become of her. It was not so urgent as that she should ask any questions; but it began to appear very clearly in her mind that things were not to be with her as they had been. She had heard the complaints and astonishment of the servants, to whom Lady Mary had left nothing, with resentment. Hopgood, who could not marry and take her lodging-house, but must wait until she had saved more money, and wept to think, after all her devotion, of having to take another place; and Mrs Prentiss, the housekeeper, who was cynical, and expounded Lady Mary's kindness to her servants to be the issue of a refined selfishness; and Brown, who had sworn subdued oaths, and had taken the liberty of representing himself to Mary as "in the same box" with her. Mary had been angry, very angry at all this; and she had not by word or look given any one to understand that she felt herself "in the same box." But yet she had been vaguely anxious, curious, desiring to know. And she had not even begun to think what she should do. That seemed a sort of affront to her godmother's memory, at all events, until some one had made it clear to her. But now, in a moment, with her first consciousness of the importance of this matter in the sight of others, a consciousness of what it was to herself came into her mind. A change of everything—a new life—a new world; and not only

so, but a severance from the old world,—a giving up of everything that had been most near and pleasant to her.

These thoughts were driven through her mind like the snowflakes in a storm. The year had slid on since Lady Mary's death. Winter was beginning to yield to spring; the snow was over and the great cold. And other changes had taken place. The great house had been let, and the family who had taken it had been about a week in possession. Their coming had inflicted a wound upon Mary's heart; but everybody had urged upon her the idea that it was much better the house should be let for a time "till everything was settled." When all was settled things would be different. Mrs Bowyer did not say, "You can then do what you please," but she did convey to Mary's mind somehow a sort of inference that she would have something to do it with. And when Mary had protested, "It shall never be let again with my will," the kind woman had said tremulously, "Well, my dear!" and had changed the subject. All these things now came to Mary's mind. They had been afraid to tell her; they had thought it would be so much to her—so important, such a crushing blow. To have nothing—to be destitute; to be written about by Mr Furnival to the Earl; to have her case represented—Mary felt herself stung by such unendurable suggestions into an energy, a determination, of which her soft young life had known nothing. No one should write

about her, or ask charity for her, she said to herself. She had gone through the woods and round the park, which was not large, and now she could not leave these beloved precincts without going to look at the house. Up to this time she had not had the courage to go near the house; but to the commotion and fever of her mind every violent sensation was congenial, and she went up the avenue now almost gladly, with a little demonstration to herself of energy and courage. Why not that as well as all the rest?

It was once more twilight, and the dimness favoured her design. She wanted to go there unseen, to look up at the windows with their alien lights, and to think of the time when Lady Mary sat behind the curtains, and there was nothing but tenderness and peace throughout the house. There was a light in every window along the entire front, a lavishness of firelight and lamplight which told of a household in which there were many inhabitants. Mary's mind was so deeply absorbed, and perhaps her eyes so dim with tears, that she could scarcely see what was before her, when the door opened suddenly and a lady came out. "I will go myself," she said in an agitated tone to some one behind her. "Don't get yourself laughed at," said a voice from within. The sound of the voices roused the young spectator. She looked with a little curiosity, mixed with dislike, at the lady who had come out of the house, and who started too,

with a gesture of alarm, when she saw Mary move in the dark. "Who are you?" she cried out in a trembling voice, "and what do you want here?"

Then Mary made a step or two forward and said, "I must ask your pardon if I am trespassing. I did not know there was any objection——" This stranger to object to *her* as an intruder! It brought something like a tremulous laugh to Mary's lips.

"Oh, there is no objection," said the lady, "only we have been a little put out. I see now: you are the young lady who—you are the young lady that,—you are the one that—suffered most."

"I am Lady Mary's goddaughter," said the girl. "I have lived here all my life."

"Oh, my dear, I have heard all about you," the stranger cried. The people who had taken the house were merely rich people; they had no other characteristic; and in the vicarage, as well as in the other houses about, it was said when they were spoken of, that it was a good thing they were not people to be visited, since nobody could have had the heart to visit strangers in Lady Mary's house. And Mary could not but feel a keen resentment to think that her story, such as it was, the story which she had only now heard in her own person, should be discussed by such people. But the speaker had a look of kindness, and, so far as could be seen, of perplexity and fretted anxiety in her face, and had been in a hurry, but

stopped herself in order to show her interest. "I wonder," she said impulsively, "that you can come here and look at the place again after all that has passed."

"I never thought," said Mary, "that there could be—any objection."

"Oh, how can you think I mean that? how can you pretend to think so?" cried the other impatiently. "But after you have been treated so heartlessly, so unkindly,—and left, poor thing! they tell me, without a penny, without any provision——"

"I don't know you," cried Mary, breathless with quick-rising passion. "I don't know what right you can have to meddle with my affairs."

The lady stared at her for a moment without speaking, and then she said, all at once, "That is quite true—but it is rude as well; for though I have no right to meddle with your affairs, I did it in kindness, because I took an interest in you from all I have heard."

Mary was very accessible to such a reproach and argument. Her face flushed with a sense of her own churlishness. "I beg your pardon," she said; "I am sure you mean to be kind."

"Well," said the stranger, "that is perhaps going too far on the other side, for you can't even see my face to know what I mean. But I do mean to be kind, and I am very sorry for you. And though I think you've been treated abominably, all the same I like you better for not allowing any one to say so. And now, do you know where I was going? I was going to

the vicarage,—where you are living, I believe, —to see if the vicar, or his wife, or you, or all of you together, could do a thing for me.”

“Oh, I am sure Mrs Bowyer——” said Mary, with a voice much less assured than her words.

“You must not be too sure, my dear. I know she doesn’t mean to call upon me, because my husband is a City man. That is just as she pleases. I am not very fond of City men myself. But there’s no reason why I should stand on ceremony when I want something, is there? Now, my dear, I want to know—— Don’t laugh at me. I am not superstitious, so far as I am aware; but—— Tell me, in your time was there ever any disturbance, any appearances you couldn’t understand, any—— Well, I don’t like the word ghosts. It’s disrespectful, if there’s anything of the sort; and it’s vulgar if there isn’t. But you know what I mean. Was there anything—of that sort—in your time?”

In your time! Poor Mary had scarcely realised yet that her time was over. Her heart refused to allow it when it was thus so abruptly brought before her; but she obliged herself to subdue these rising rebellions, and to answer, though with some *hauteur*. “There is nothing of the kind that I ever heard of. There is no superstition—or ghost—in our house.”

She thought it was the vulgar desire of new people to find a conventional mystery, and

it seemed to Mary that this was a desecration of her home. Mrs Turner, however (for that was her name), did not receive the intimation as the girl expected, but looked at her very gravely, and said, "That makes it a great deal more serious," as if to herself. She paused, and then added, "You see, the case is this. I have a little girl who is our youngest, who is just my husband's idol. She is a sweet little thing, though perhaps I should not say it. Are you fond of children? Then I almost feel sure you would think so too. Not a moping child at all, or too clever, or anything to alarm one. Well, you know, little Connie, since ever we came here, has seen an old lady walking about the house——"

"An old lady!" said Mary, with an involuntary smile.

"Oh yes. I laughed too, the first time. I said it would be old Mrs Prentiss, or perhaps the charwoman, or some old lady from the village that had been in the habit of coming in the former people's time. But the child got very angry. She said it was a real lady. She would not allow me to speak. Then we thought perhaps it was some one who did not know the house was let, and had walked in to look at it; but nobody would go on coming like that with all the signs of a large family in the house. And now the doctor says the child must be low, that the place perhaps doesn't agree with her, and that we must send her away. Now, I ask

you, how could I send little Connie away, the apple of her father's eye? I should have to go with her, of course, and how could the house get on without me? Naturally we are very anxious. And this afternoon she has seen her again, and sits there crying because she says the dear old lady looks so sad. I just seized my hat, and walked out, to come to you and your friends at the vicarage to see if you could help me. Mrs Bowyer may look down upon a City person—I don't mind that; but she is a mother, and surely she would feel for a mother," cried the poor lady vehemently, putting up her hands to her wet eyes.

"Oh indeed, indeed she would! I am sure now that she will call directly. We did not know what a——" Mary stopped herself in saying, "what a nice woman you are," which she thought would be rude, though poor Mrs Turner would have liked it. But then she shook her head and added, "What could any of us do to help you? I have never heard of any old lady. There never was anything—— I know all about the house, everything that has ever happened, and Prentiss will tell you. There is nothing of that kind—indeed there is nothing at all. You must have——" But here Mary stopped again; for to suggest that a new family, a City family, should have brought an apparition of their own with them, was too ridiculous an idea to be entertained.

"Miss Vivian," said Mrs Turner, "will you come back with me and speak to the child?"

At this Mary faltered a little. "I have never been there—since the—funeral," she said.

The good woman laid a kind hand upon her shoulder, caressing and soothing. "You were very fond of her—in spite of the way she has used you?"

"Oh, how dare you, or any one, to speak of her so? She used me as if I had been her dearest child. She was more kind to me than a mother. There is no one in the world like her!" Mary cried.

"And yet she left you without a penny. Oh, you must be a good girl to feel for her like that. She left you without—— What are you going to do, my dear? I feel like a friend. I feel like a mother to you, though you don't know me. You mustn't think it is only curiosity. You can't stay with your friends for ever,—and what are you going to do?"

There are some cases in which it is more easy to speak to a stranger than to one's dearest and oldest friend. Mary had felt this when she rushed out, not knowing how to tell the vicar's wife that she must leave her, and find some independence for herself. It was, however, strange to rush into such a discussion with so little warning, and Mary's pride was very sensitive. She said, "I am not going to burden my friends," with a little

indignation; but then she remembered how forlorn she was, and her voice softened. "I must do something—but I don't know what I am good for," she said, trembling, and on the verge of tears.

"My dear, I have heard a great deal about you," said the stranger; "it is not rash, though it may look so. Come back with me directly, and see Connie. She is a very interesting little thing, though I say it—it is wonderful sometimes to hear her talk. You shall be her governess, my dear. Oh, you need not teach her anything—that is not what I mean. I think, I am sure, you will be the saving of her, Miss Vivian; and such a lady as you are, it will be everything for the other girls to live with you. Don't stop to think, but just come with me. You shall have whatever you please, and always be treated like a lady. Oh, my dear, consider my feelings as a mother, and come; oh, come to Connie! I know you will save her; it is an inspiration. Come back. Come back with me!"

It seemed to Mary, too, like an inspiration. What it cost her to cross that threshold and walk in, a stranger, to the house which had been all her life as her own, she never said to any one. But it was independence; it was deliverance from entreaties and remonstrances without end. It was a kind of setting right, so far as could be, of the balance which had got so terribly wrong. No writing to the Earl now; no appeal to friends,—anything in all

the world, much more honest service and kindness, must be better than that.

VIII.

"Tell the young lady all about it, Connie," said her mother.

But Connie was very reluctant to tell. She was very shy, and clung to her mother, and hid her face in her ample dress; and though presently she was beguiled by Mary's voice, and in a short time came to her side, and clung to her as she had clung to Mrs Turner, she still kept her secret to herself. They were all very kind to Mary, the elder girls standing round in a respectful circle looking at her, while their mother exhorted them to "take a pattern" by Miss Vivian. The novelty, the awe which she inspired, the real kindness about her, ended by overcoming in Mary's young mind the first miserable impression of such a return to her home. It gave her a kind of pleasure to write to Mrs Bowyer that she had found employment, and had thought it better to accept it at once. "Don't be angry with me: and I think you will understand me," she said. And then she gave herself up to the strange new scene.

The "ways" of the large simple-minded family, homely yet kindly, so transformed Lady Mary's graceful old rooms that they no longer looked the same place. And when Mary sat

down with them at the big heavy-laden table, surrounded with the hum of so large a party, it was impossible for her to believe that everything was not new about her. In no way could the saddening recollections of a home from which the chief figure had disappeared have been more completely broken up. Afterwards Mrs Turner took her aside, and begged to know which was Mary's old room: "for I should like to put you there, as if nothing had happened." "Oh, do not put me there!" Mary cried, "so much has happened." But this was too much refinement for the kind woman, a fancy which it was far better for her young guest not to "yield" to. The room Mary had occupied had been next to her god-mother's, with a door between, and when it turned out that Connie, with an elder sister, was in Lady Mary's room, everything seemed perfectly arranged in Mrs Turner's eyes. She thought it was providential, with a simple belief in Mary's powers that in other circumstances would have been amusing. But there was no amusement in Mary's mind when she took possession of the old room "as if nothing had happened." She sat by the fire for half the night, in an agony of silent recollection and thought, going over the last days of her god-mother's life, calling up everything before her, and realising, as she had never realised till now, the lonely career on which she was setting out, the subjection to the will and convenience of strangers in which henceforth her life must be

passed. This was a kind woman who had opened her doors to the destitute girl; but notwithstanding, however great the torture to Mary, there was no escaping this room, which was haunted by the saddest recollections of her life. Of such things she must no longer complain—nay, she must think of nothing but thanking the mistress of the house for her thoughtfulness, for the wish to be kind which so often exceeds the performance.

The room was warm and well lighted; the night was very calm and sweet outside. Nothing had been touched or changed of all her little decorations, the ornaments which had been so delightful to her girlhood. A large photograph of Lady Mary held the chief place over the mantelpiece, representing her in the fulness of her beauty,—a photograph which had been taken from the picture painted ages ago by a Royal Academician. It was fortunately so little like Lady Mary in her old age that, save as a thing which had always hung there, and belonged to her happier life, it did not affect the girl; but no picture was necessary to bring before her the well-remembered figure. She could not realise that the little movements she heard on the other side of the door were any other than those of her mistress, her friend, her mother, for all these names Mary lavished upon her in the fulness of her heart. The blame that was being cast upon Lady Mary from all sides made this child of her bounty but more deeply her partisan, more

warm in her adoration. She would not, for all the inheritances of the world, have acknowledged even to herself that Lady Mary was in fault. Mary felt that she would rather a thousand times be poor and have to gain her daily bread, than that she who had nourished and cherished her should have been forced in her cheerful old age to think, before she chose to do so, of parting and farewell and the inevitable end.

She thought, like every young creature in strange and painful circumstances, that she would be unable to sleep, and did indeed lie awake and weep for an hour or more, thinking of all the changes that had happened; but sleep overtook her before she knew, while her mind was still full of these thoughts; and her dreams were endless, confused, full of misery and longing. She dreamed a dozen times over that she heard Lady Mary's soft call through the open door—which was not open, but shut closely and locked by the sisters who now inhabited the next room; and once she dreamed that Lady Mary came to her bedside and stood there looking at her earnestly with the tears flowing from her eyes. Mary struggled in her sleep to tell her benefactress how she loved her, and approved of all she had done, and wanted nothing—but felt herself bound as by a nightmare, so that she could not move or speak, or even put out a hand to dry those tears which it was intolerable to her to see; and woke with the struggle, and the miserable

sensation of seeing her dearest friend weep and being unable to comfort her. The moon was shining into the room, throwing part of it into a cold full light, while blackness lay in all the corners. The impression of her dream was so strong that Mary's eyes turned instantly to the spot where in her dream her godmother had stood. To be sure, there was nobody there; but as her consciousness returned, and with it the sweep of painful recollection, the sense of change, the miserable contrast between the present and the past, sleep fled from her eyes. She fell into the vividly awake condition which is the alternative of broken rest, and gradually, as she lay, there came upon her that mysterious sense of another presence in the room, which is so subtle and indescribable. She neither saw anything nor heard anything, and yet she felt that some one was there.

She lay still for some time and held her breath, listening for a movement, even for the sound of breathing, scarcely alarmed, yet sure that she was not alone. After a while she raised herself on her pillow, and in a low voice asked, "Who is there? is any one there?" There was no reply, no sound of any description, and yet the conviction grew upon her. Her heart began to beat, and the blood to mount to her head. Her own being made so much sound, so much commotion, that it seemed to her she could not hear anything save those beatings and pulsings. Yet she was not afraid. After a time, however, the

oppression became more than she could bear. She got up and lit her candle, and searched through the familiar room; but she found no trace that any one had been there. The furniture was all in its usual order. There was no hiding-place where any human thing could find refuge. When she had satisfied herself, and was about to return to bed, suppressing a sensation which must, she said to herself, be altogether fantastic, she was startled by a low knocking at the door of communication. Then she heard the voice of the elder girl. "Oh, Miss Vivian—what is it? Have you seen anything?" A new sense of anger, disdain, humiliation, swept through Mary's mind. And if she had seen anything, she said to herself, what was that to those strangers? She replied, "No, nothing; what should I see?" in a tone which was almost haughty in spite of herself.

"I thought it might be—the ghost. Oh, please, don't be angry. I thought I heard this door open, but it is locked. Oh! perhaps it is very silly, but I am so frightened, Miss Vivian."

"Go back to bed," said Mary; "there is no—ghost. I am going to sit up and write some—letters. You will see my light under the door."

"Oh, thank you," cried the girl.

Mary remembered what a consolation and strength in all wakefulness had been the glimmer of the light under her godmother's door. She smiled to think that she herself,

so desolate as she was, was able to afford this innocent comfort to another girl, and then sat down and wept quietly, feeling her solitude and the chill about her, and the dark and the silence. The moon had gone behind a cloud. There seemed no light but her small miserable candle in earth and heaven. And yet that poor little speck of light kept up the heart of another—which made her smile again in the middle of her tears. And by and-by the commotion in her head and heart calmed down, and she too fell asleep.

Next day she heard all the floating legends that were beginning to rise in the house. They all arose from Connie's questions about the old lady whom she had seen going upstairs before her, the first evening after the new family's arrival. It was in the presence of the doctor—who had come to see the child, and whose surprise at finding Mary there was almost ludicrous—that she heard the story, though much against his will.

"There can be no need for troubling Miss Vivian about it," he said, in a tone which was almost rude. But Mrs Turner was not sensitive.

"When Miss Vivian has just come, like a dear, to help us with Connie!" the good woman cried. "Of course she must hear it, doctor; for otherwise, how could she know what to do?"

"Is it true that you have come here—*here*? to help—— Good heavens, Miss Mary, *here*?"

"Why not here?" Mary said, smiling as best she could. "I am Connie's governess, doctor."

He burst out into that suppressed roar which serves a man instead of tears, and jumped up from his seat, clenching his fist. The clenched fist was to the intention of the dead woman whose fault this was; and if it had ever entered the doctor's mind, as his mother supposed, to marry this forlorn child, and thus bestow a home upon her whether she would or no, no doubt he would now have attempted to carry out that plan. But as no such thing had occurred to him, the doctor only showed his sense of the intolerable by look and gesture. "I must speak to the vicar. I must see Furnival. It can't be permitted," he cried.

"Do you think I shall not be kind to her, doctor?" cried Mrs Turner. "Oh, ask her! She is one that understands. She knows far better than that. We're not fine people, doctor, but we're kind people. I can say that for myself. There is nobody in this house but will be good to her, and admire her, and take an example by her. To have a real lady with the girls, that is what I would give anything for; and as she wants taking care of, poor dear, and petting, and an 'ome——"

Mary, who would not hear any more, got up hastily, and took the hand of her new protectress, and kissed her, partly out of gratitude and kindness, partly to stop her mouth, and prevent the saying of something which it might

have been still more difficult to support. "You are a real lady yourself, dear Mrs Turner," she cried. (And this notwithstanding the one deficient letter: but many people who are much more dignified than Mrs Turner—people who behave themselves very well in every other respect—say "'ome.")

"Oh, my dear, I don't make any pretensions," the good woman cried, but with a little shock of pleasure which brought the tears to her eyes.

And then the story was told. Connie had seen the lady walk upstairs, and had thought no harm. The child supposed it was some one belonging to the house. She had gone into the room which was now Connie's room, but as that had a second door, there was no suspicion caused by the fact that she was not found there a little time after, when the child told her mother what she had seen. After this Connie had seen the same lady several times, and once had met her face to face. The child declared that she was not at all afraid. She was a pretty old lady, with white hair and dark eyes. She looked a little sad, but smiled when Connie stopped and stared at her—not angry at all, but rather pleased—and looked for a moment as if she would speak. That was all. Not a word about a ghost was said in Connie's hearing. She had already told it all to the doctor, and he had pretended to consider which of the old ladies in the neighbourhood this could be. In Mary's mind, occupied as it was by so many important

matters, there had been up to this time no great question about Connie's apparition : now she began to listen closely, not so much from real interest as from a perception that the doctor, who was her friend, did not want her to hear. This naturally aroused her attention at once. She listened to the child's description with growing eagerness, all the more because the doctor opposed.

"Now that will do, Miss Connie," he said ; "it is one of the old Miss Murchisons, who are always so fond of finding out about their neighbours. I have no doubt at all on that subject. She wants to find you out in your pet naughtiness, whatever it is, and tell me."

"I am sure it is not for that," cried Connie. "Oh, how can you be so disagreeable? I know she is not a lady who would tell. Besides, she is not thinking at all about me. She was either looking for something she had lost, or—oh, I don't know what it was!—and when she saw me she just smiled. She is not dressed like any of the people here. She had got no cloak on, or bonnet, or anything that is common, but a beautiful white shawl and a long dress : and it gives a little sweep when she walks—oh no ! not like your rustling, mamma ; but all soft, like water—and it looks like lace upon her head, tied here," said Connie, putting her hands to her chin, "in such a pretty, large, soft knot."

Mary had gradually risen as this description went on, starting a little at first, looking up,

getting upon her feet. The colour went altogether out of her face—her eyes grew to twice their natural size. The doctor put out his hand without looking at her, and laid it on her arm with a strong emphatic pressure. "Just like some one you have seen a picture of," he said.

"Oh no. I never saw a picture that was so pretty," said the child.

"Doctor, why do you ask her any more? don't you see, don't you see, the child has seen——?"

"Miss Mary, for God's sake, hold your tongue; it is folly, you know. Now, my little girl, tell me. I know this old lady is the very image of that pretty old lady with the toys for good children, who was in the last Christmas number?"

"Oh!" said Connie, pausing a little. "Yes, I remember; it was a very pretty picture—mamma put it up in the nursery. No, she is not like that, not at all, much prettier; and then *my* lady is sorry about something—except when she smiles at me. She has her hair put up like this, and this," the child went on, twisting her own bright locks.

"Doctor! I can't bear any more."

"My dear! you are mistaken, it is all a delusion. She has seen a picture. I think now, Mrs Turner, that my little patient had better run away and play. Take a good run through the woods, Miss Connie, with your brother, and I will send you some physic

which will not be at all nasty, and we shall hear no more of your old lady. My dear Miss Vivian, if you will but hear reason! I have known such cases a hundred times. The child has seen a picture, and it has taken possession of her imagination. She is a little below par, and she has a lively imagination: and she has learned something from Prentiss, though probably she does not remember that. And there it is! a few doses of quinine, and she will see visions no more."

"Doctor," cried Mary, "how can you speak so to me? You dare not look me in the face. You know you dare not: as if you did not know as well as I do! Oh, why does that child see her, and not me?"

"There it is," he said, with a broken laugh; "could anything show better that it is a mere delusion? Why, in the name of all that is reasonable, should this stranger child see her, if it was anything, and not you?"

Mrs Turner looked from one to another with wondering eyes. "You know what it is?" she said. "Oh, you know who it is? Doctor, doctor, is it because my Connie is so delicate? is it a warning? is it——?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake! you will drive me mad, you ladies. Is it this, and is it that? It is nothing, I tell you. The child is out of sorts, and she has seen some picture that has caught her fancy—and she thinks she sees—— I'll send her a bottle," he cried, jumping up; "that will put an end to all that."

"Doctor, don't go away : tell me rather what I must do. If she is looking for something ! Oh, doctor, think if she were unhappy, if she were kept out of her sweet rest !"

"Miss Mary ! for God's sake be reasonable. You ought never to have heard a word."

"Doctor, think ! if it should be anything we can do. Oh, tell me, tell me ! don't go away and leave me : perhaps we can find out what it is."

"I will have nothing to do with your findings out. It is mere delusion. Put them both to bed, Mrs Turner—put them all to bed ! As if there were not trouble enough !"

"What is it ?" cried Connie's mother ; "is it a warning ! Oh, for the love of God, tell me, is that what comes before a death ?"

When they were all in this state of agitation, the vicar and his wife were suddenly shown into the room. Mrs Bowyer's eyes flew to Mary, but she was too well-bred a woman not to pay her respects first to the lady of the house, and there were a number of politenesses exchanged, very breathlessly on Mrs Turner's part, before the new-comers were free to show the real occasion of their visit. "Oh, Mary, what did you mean by taking such a step all in a moment ? How could you come here of all places in the world ? and how could you leave me without a word ?" the vicar's wife said, with her lips against Mary's cheek. She had already perceived, without understanding it, the excitement in which all the party were.

This was said while the vicar was still making his bow to his new parishioner—who knew very well that her visitors had not intended to call: for the Turners were Dissenters, to crown all their misdemeanours, besides being city people and *nouveaux riches*.

“Don’t ask me any questions just now,” said Mary, clasping almost hysterically her friend’s hand. “It was providential. Come and hear what the child has seen.” Mrs Turner, though she was so anxious, was too polite not to make a fuss about getting chairs for all her visitors. She postponed her own trouble to this necessity, and trembling, sought the most comfortable seat for Mrs Bowyer, the largest and most imposing for the vicar himself. When she had established them in a little circle, and done her best to draw Mary too into a chair, she sat down quietly, her mind divided between the cares of courtesy and the alarms of an anxious mother. Mary stood at the table and waited till the commotion was over. The new-comers thought she was going to explain her conduct in leaving them; and Mrs Bowyer, at least, who was critical in point of manners, shivered a little, wondering if perhaps (though she could not find it in her heart to blame Mary) her proceedings were in perfect taste.

“The little girl,” Mary said, beginning abruptly. She had been standing by the table, her lips apart, her countenance utterly pale, her mind evidently too much absorbed to

notice anything. "The little girl—has seen several times a lady going upstairs. Once she met her and saw her face, and the lady smiled at her; but her face was sorrowful, and the child thought she was looking for something. The lady was old, with white hair done up upon her forehead, and lace upon her head. She was dressed,"—here Mary's voice began to be interrupted from time to time by a brief sob,—“in a long dress that made a soft sound when she walked, and a white shawl, and the lace tied under her chin in a large soft knot——”

"Mary, Mary!" Mrs Bowyer had risen, and stood behind the girl, in whose slender throat the climbing sorrow was almost visible, supporting her, trying to stop her. "Mary, Mary!" she cried; "oh, my darling, what are you thinking of? Francis! doctor! make her stop, make her stop——"

"Why should she stop?" said Mrs Turner, rising too in her agitation. "Oh, is it a warning, is it a warning? for my child has seen it—Connie has seen it."

"Listen to me, all of you," said Mary, with an effort. "You all know—who that is. And she has seen her—the little girl——"

The vicar and his wife looked at each other, exchanging a startled look.

"My dear people," cried the doctor, "the case is not the least unusual. No, no, Mrs Turner, it is no warning—it is nothing of the sort. Look here, Bowyer; you'll believe me.

The child is very nervous and sensitive. She has evidently seen a picture somewhere of our dear old friend. She has heard the story somehow—oh, perhaps in some garbled version from Prentiss, or—of course they've all been talking of it. And the child is one of those creatures with its nerves all on the surface—and a little below par in health, in need of iron and quinine, and all that sort of thing. I've seen a hundred such cases," cried the doctor—"a thousand such; but now, of course, we'll have a fine story made of it, now that it's come into the ladies' hands."

He was much excited with this long speech; but it cannot be said that any one paid much attention to him. Mrs Bowyer was holding Mary in her arms, uttering little cries and sobs over her, and looking anxiously at her husband. The vicar sat down suddenly in his chair, with the air of a man who has judgment to deliver without the least idea what to say; while Mary, freeing herself unconsciously from her friend's restraining embrace, stood facing them all with a sort of trembling defiance: and Mrs Turner kept on explaining nervously that—"no, no, her Connie was not excitable, was not oversensitive, never had known what a delusion was."

"This is very strange," the vicar said.

"Oh, Mr Bowyer," cried Mary, "tell me what I am to do!—think if she cannot rest, if she is not happy, she that was so good to everybody, that never could bear to see any

one in trouble. Oh, tell me, tell me what I am to do! It is you that have disturbed her with all you have been saying. Oh, what can I do, what can I do to give her rest?"

"My dear Mary! My dear Mary!" they all cried in different tones of consternation; and for a few minutes no one could speak. Mrs Bowyer, as was natural, said something, being unable to endure the silence; but neither she nor any of the others knew what it was she said. Then it became evident that the vicar must speak, all were silent, waiting for him; and though it had now become imperative that something in the shape of a judgment must be delivered, yet he was as far as ever from knowing what to say.

"Mary," he said, with a little tremulousness of voice, "it is quite natural that you should ask me; but, my dear, I am not at all prepared to answer. I think you know that the doctor, who ought to know best about such matters——"

"Nay, not I. I only know about the physical; the other—if there is another—that's your concern."

"——who ought to know best," repeated Mr Bowyer; "for everybody will tell you, my dear, that the mind is so dependent upon the body. I suppose he must be right. I suppose it is just the imagination of a nervous child working upon the data which has been given—the picture; and then, as you justly remind me, all we have been saying——"

"How could the child know what we have been saying, Francis?"

"Connie has heard nothing that any one has been saying; and there is no picture."

"My dear lady, you hear what the doctor says. If there is no picture, and she has heard nothing, I suppose, then, your premisses are gone, and the conclusion falls to the ground."

"What does it matter about premisses?" cried the vicar's wife; "here is something dreadful that has happened. Oh, what nonsense that is about imagination; children have no imagination. A dreadful thing has happened. In heaven's name, Francis, tell this poor child what she is to do."

"My dear," said the vicar again, "you are asking me to believe in purgatory,—nothing less. You are asking me to contradict the Church's teaching. Mary, you must compose yourself. You must wait till this excitement has passed away."

"I can see by her eyes she did not sleep last night," the doctor said, relieved. "We shall have her seeing visions too, if we don't take care."

"And, my dear Mary," continued the vicar, "if you will think of it, it is derogatory to the dignity of the——of our dear friends who have passed away. How can we suppose that one of the blessed would come down from heaven, and walk about her own house, which she had just left, and show herself to a—to a—little child who had never seen her before."

"Impossible," said the doctor. "I told you so: a stranger—that had no connection with her, knew nothing about her——"

"Instead of," said the vicar, with a slight tremor, "making herself known, if that was permitted, to—to me, for example; or our friend here."

"That sounds reasonable, Mary," said Mrs Bowyer; "don't you think so, my dear? If she had come to one of us, or to yourself, my darling, I should never have wondered, after all that has happened. But to this little child——"

"Whereas there is nothing more likely—more consonant with all the teachings of science—than that the little thing should have this hallucination, of which you ought never to have heard a word. You are the very last person——"

"That is true," said the vicar, "and all the associations of the place must be overwhelming. My dear, we must take her away with us. Mrs Turner, I am sure, is very kind, but it cannot be good for Mary to be here."

"No, no! I never thought so," said Mrs Bowyer; "I never intended——dear Mrs Turner, we all appreciate your motives. I hope you will let us see much of you, and that we may become very good friends. But, Mary—it is her first grief, don't you know?" said the vicar's wife, with the tears in her eyes; "she has always been so much cared for, so much thought of all her life,—and then all at

once! You will not think that we misunderstand your kind motives; but it is more than she can bear. She made up her mind in a hurry without thinking. You must not be annoyed if we take her away."

Mrs Turner had been looking from one to another while this dialogue went on. She said now, a little wounded, "I wished only to do what was kind; but, perhaps, I was thinking most of my own child. Miss Vivian must do what she thinks best."

"You are all kind—too kind," Mary cried; "but no one must say another word, please. Unless Mrs Turner should send me away, until I know what this all means, it is my place to stay here."

IX.

It was Lady Mary who had come into the vicarage that afternoon when Mrs Bowyer supposed some one had called. She wandered about to a great many places in these days, but always returned to the scenes in which her life had been passed, and where alone her work could be done, if it were done at all. She came in and listened while the tale of her own carelessness and heedlessness was told, and stood by while her favourite was taken to another woman's bosom for comfort, and heard everything and saw everything. She was used to it by this time: but to be nothing is hard, even when you are accustomed to it;

and though she knew that they would not hear her, what could she do but cry out to them as she stood there unregarded? "Oh, have pity upon me!" Lady Mary said; and the pang in her heart was so great that the very atmosphere was stirred, and the air could scarcely contain her and the passion of her endeavour to make herself known, but thrilled like a harp-string to her cry. Mrs Bowyer heard the jar and tingle in the inanimate world; but she thought only that it was some charitable visitor who had come in, and gone softly away again at the sound of tears.

And if Lady Mary could not make herself known to the poor cottagers who had loved her, or to the women who wept for her loss while they blamed her, how was she to reveal herself and her secret to the men who, if they had seen her, would have thought her a hallucination? Yet she tried all, and even went a long journey over land and sea to visit the Earl who was her heir, and awake in him an interest in her child. And she lingered about all these people in the silence of the night, and tried to move them in dreams, since she could not move them waking. It is more easy for one who is no more of this world, to be seen and heard in sleep; for then those who are still in the flesh stand on the borders of the unseen, and see and hear things which, waking, they do not understand. But, alas! when they woke, this poor wanderer discovered that her friends remembered no

more what she had said to them in their dreams.

Presently, however, when she found Mary re-established in her old home, in her own room, there came to her a new hope. For there is nothing in the world so hard to believe, or to be convinced of, as that no effort, no device, will ever make you known and visible to those you love. Lady Mary being little altered in her character, though so much in her being, still believed that if she could but find the way, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, all would be revealed and understood. She went to Mary's room with this new hope strong in her heart. When they were alone together, in that nest of comfort which she had herself made beautiful for her child,—two hearts so full of thought for each other,—what was there in earthly bonds which could prevent them from meeting? She went into the silent room, which was so familiar and dear, and waited like a mother long separated from her child, with a faint doubt trembling on the surface of her mind, yet a great joyful confidence underneath in the force of nature. A few words would be enough,—a moment, and all would be right. And then she pleased herself with fancies of how, when that was done, she would whisper to her darling what has never been told to flesh and blood; and so go home proud, and satisfied, and happy in the accomplishment of all that she had hoped.

Mary came in with her candle in her hand, and closed the door between her and all external things. She looked round wistful with that strange consciousness which she had already experienced that some one was there. The other stood so close to her that the girl could not move without touching her. She held up her hands, imploring, to the child of her love. She called to her, "Mary, Mary!" putting her hands upon her, and gazed into her face with an intensity and anguish of eagerness which might have drawn the stars out of the sky. And a strange tumult was in Mary's bosom. She stood looking blankly round her, like one who is blind with open eyes, and saw nothing; and strained her ears, like a deaf man, but heard nothing. All was silence, vacancy, an empty world about her. She sat down at her little table, with a heavy sigh. "The child can see her, but she will not come to me," Mary said, and wept.

Then Lady Mary turned away with a heart full of despair. She went quickly from the house, out into the night. The pang of her disappointment was so keen, that she could not endure it. She remembered what had been said to her in the place from whence she came, and how she had been entreated to be patient and wait. Oh, had she but waited and been patient! She sat down upon the ground, a soul forlorn, outside of life, outside of all things, lost in a world which had no place for her. The moon shone, but she made

no shadow in it; the rain fell upon her, but did not hurt her; the little night-breeze blew without finding any resistance in her. She said to herself, "I have failed. What am I that I should do what they all said was impossible? It was my pride, because I have had my own way all my life. But now I have no way and no place on earth, and what I have to tell them will never, never be known. Oh my little Mary, a servant in her own house! And a word would make it right!—but never, never can she hear that word. I am wrong to say never; she will know when she is in heaven. She will not live to be old and foolish, like me. She will go up there early, and then she will know. But I, what will become of me?—for I am nothing here, and I cannot go back to my own place."

A little moaning wind rose up suddenly in the middle of the dark night, and carried a faint wail, like the voice of some one lost, to the windows of the sleeping house. It woke the children, and Mary, who opened her eyes quickly in the dark, wondering if perhaps now the vision might come to her. But the vision had come when she could not see it, and now returned no more.

X.

On the other side, however, visions which had nothing sacred in them began to be heard

of, and Connie's ghost, as it was called in the house, had various vulgar effects. A house-maid became hysterical, and announced that she too had seen the lady, of whom she gave a description, exaggerated from Connie's, which all the household were ready to swear she had never heard. The lady, whom Connie had only seen passing, went to Betsy's room in the middle of the night, and told her, in a hollow and terrible voice, that she could not rest, opening a series of communications by which it was evident all the secrets of the unseen world would soon be disclosed. And following upon this, there came a sort of panic in the house—noises were heard in various places, sounds of footsteps pacing, and of a long robe sweeping about the passages; and Lady Mary's costume, and the head-dress which was so peculiar, which all her friends had recognised in Connie's description, grew into something portentous under the heavier hand of the foot-boy and the kitchen-maid. Mrs Prentiss, who had remained as a special favour to the new people, was deeply indignant and outraged by this treatment of her mistress. She appealed to Mary with mingled anger and tears.

"I would have sent the hussy away at an hour's notice, if I had the power in my hands," she cried; "but, Miss Mary, it is easily seen who is a real lady and who is not. Mrs Turner interferes herself in everything, though she likes it to be supposed that she has a housekeeper."

"Dear Prentiss, you must not say Mrs Turner is not a lady. She has far more delicacy of feeling than many ladies," cried Mary.

"Yes, Miss Mary, dear, I allow that she is very nice to you; but who could help that? and to hear my lady's name—that might have her faults, but who was far above anything of the sort—in every mouth, and her costooime, that they don't know how to describe: and to think that *she* would go and talk to the like of Betsy Barnes about what is on her mind! I think sometimes I shall break my heart—or else throw up my place, Miss Mary," Prentiss said, with tears.

"Oh, don't do that; oh, don't leave me, Prentiss!" Mary said, with an involuntary cry of dismay.

"Not if you mind, not if you mind, dear," the housekeeper cried. And then she drew close to the young lady with an anxious look. "You haven't seen anything?" she said. "That would be only natural, Miss Mary; I could well understand she couldn't rest in her grave—if she came and told it all to you."

"Prentiss, be silent," cried Mary; "that ends everything between you and me if you say such a word. There has been too much said already—oh, far too much! as if I only loved her for what she was to leave me."

"I did not mean that, dear," said Prentiss; "but——"

"There is no but; and everything she did

was right," the girl cried with vehemence. She shed hot and bitter tears over this wrong which all her friends did to Lady Mary's memory. "I am *glad* it was so," she said to herself when she was alone, with youthful extravagance. "I am glad it was so; for now no one can think that I loved her for anything but herself."

The household, however, was agitated by all these rumours and inventions. Alice, Connie's elder sister, declined to sleep any longer in that which was now called the haunted room. She, too, began to think she saw something, she could not tell what, gliding out of the room in the evenings in the twilight, and to hear sighs and moans in the corridors. The servants, who all wanted to leave, and the villagers, who avoided the grounds after nightfall, spread the rumour far and near that the house was haunted.

XI.

In the meantime Connie herself was silent, and said no more of the Lady. Her attachment to Mary grew into one of those visionary passions which little girls so often form for young women. She followed her so-called governess wherever she went, hanging upon her arm when she could, holding her dress when no other hold was possible—following her everywhere, like her shadow. The vicarage, jealous and annoyed at first, and all the neighbours indignant too, to see Mary metamor-

phosed into a dependant of the city family, held out as long as possible against the good-nature of Mrs Turner, and were revolted by the spectacle of this child claiming poor Mary's attention wherever she moved. But by-and-by all these strong sentiments softened, as was natural. The only real drawback was, that amid these agitations Mary lost her bloom. She began to droop and grow pale under the observation of the watchful doctor, who had never been otherwise than dissatisfied with the new position of affairs, and betook himself to Mrs Bowyer for sympathy and information. "Did you ever see a girl so fallen off?" he said. "Fallen off, doctor! I think she is prettier and prettier every day." "Oh," the poor man cried, with a strong breathing of impatience, "you ladies think of nothing but prettiness! was I talking of prettiness? She must have lost a stone since she went back there. It is all very well to laugh," the doctor added, growing red with suppressed anger, "but I can tell you that is the true test. That little Connie Turner is as well as possible; she has handed over her nerves to Mary Vivian. I wonder now if she ever talks to you on that subject."

"Who? little Connie?"

"Of course I mean Miss Vivian, Mrs Bowyer. Don't you know the village is all in a tremble about the ghost at the Great House?"

"Oh yes, I know; and it is very strange. I can't help thinking, doctor——"

"We had better not discuss that subject. Of course I don't put a moment's faith in any such nonsense. But girls are full of fancies. I want you to find out for me whether she has begun to think she sees anything. She looks like it; and if something isn't done she will soon do so, if not now."

"Then you do think there is something to see," said Mrs Bowyer, clasping her hands; "that has always been my opinion: what so natural——?"

"As that Lady Mary, the greatest old aristocrat in the world, should come and make private revelations to Betsy Barnes, the under housemaid——?" said the doctor, with a sardonic grin.

"I don't mean that, doctor; but if she could not rest in her grave, poor old lady——"

"You think then, my dear," said the vicar, "that Lady Mary, our old friend, who was as young in her mind as any of us, lies body and soul in that old dark hole of a vault?"

"How you talk, Francis! what can a woman say between you horrid men? I say if she couldn't rest—wherever she is—because of leaving Mary destitute, it would be only natural—and I should think the more of her for it," Mrs Bowyer cried.

The vicar had a gentle professional laugh over the confusion of his wife's mind. But the doctor took the matter more seriously. "Lady Mary is safely buried and done with. I am not thinking of her," he said; "but I am

thinking of Mary Vivian's senses, which will not stand this much longer. Try and find out from her if she sees anything: if she has come to that, whatever she says we must have her out of there."

But Mrs Bowyer had nothing to report when this conclave of friends met again. Mary would not allow that she had seen anything. She grew paler every day, her eyes grew larger, but she made no confession. And Connie bloomed and grew, and met no more old ladies upon the stairs.

XII.

The days passed on, and no new event occurred in this little history. It came to be summer, balmy and green, and everything around the old house was delightful, and its beautiful rooms became more pleasant than ever in the long days and soft brief nights. Fears of the Earl's return and of the possible end of the Turners' tenancy began to disturb the household, but no one so much as Mary, who felt herself to cling as she had never done before to the old house. She had never got over the impression that a secret presence, revealed to no one else, was continually near her, though she saw no one. And her health was greatly affected by this visionary double life.

Such was the state of affairs on a certain soft wet day when the family were all within

doors. Connie had exhausted all her means of amusement in the morning. When the afternoon came, with its long, dull, uneventful hours, she had nothing better to do than to fling herself upon Miss Vivian, upon whom she had a special claim. She came to Mary's room, disturbing the strange quietude of that place, and amused herself looking over the trinkets and ornaments that were to be found there, all of which were associated to Mary with her godmother. Connie tried on the bracelets and brooches which Mary in her deep mourning had not worn, and asked a hundred questions. The answer which had to be so often repeated, "That was given to me by my godmother," at last called forth the child's remark, "How fond your godmother must have been of you, Miss Vivian! she seems to have given you everything——"

"Everything!" cried Mary, with a full heart.

"And yet they all say she was not kind enough," said little Connie—"what do they mean by that? for you seem to love her very much still, though she is dead. Can one go on loving people when they are dead?"

"Oh yes, and better than ever," said Mary; "for often you do not know how you loved them, or what they were to you, till they are gone away."

Connie gave her governess a hug and said, "Why did not she leave you all her money, Miss Vivian? everybody says she was wicked and unkind to die without——"

"My dear," cried Mary, "do not repeat what ignorant people say, because it is not true."

"But mamma said it, Miss Vivian."

"She does not know, Connie; you must not say it: and I will tell your mamma she must not say it; for nobody can know so well as I do—and it is not true——"

"But they say," cried Connie, "that that is why she can't rest in her grave. You must have heard. Poor old lady, they say she cannot rest in her grave because——"

Mary seized the child in her arms with a pressure that hurt Connie. "You must not! you must not!" she cried, with a sort of panic. Was she afraid that some one might hear? She gave Connie a hurried kiss, and turned her face away, looking out into the vacant room. "It is not true! it is not true!" she cried, with a great excitement and horror, as if to stay a wound. "She was always good, and like an angel to me. She is with the angels. She is with God. She cannot be disturbed by anything—anything! Oh let us never say, or think, or imagine——!" Mary cried. Her cheeks burned, her eyes were full of tears. It seemed to her that something of wonder and anguish and dismay was in the room round her—as if some one unseen had heard a bitter reproach, an accusation undeserved, which must wound to the very heart.

Connie struggled a little in that too tight hold. "Are you frightened, Miss Vivian? what are you frightened for? No one can hear;

and if you mind it so much, I will never say it again."

"You must never, never say it again. There is nothing I mind so much," Mary said.

"Oh!" said Connie, with mild surprise. Then as Mary's hold relaxed, she put her arms round her beloved companion's neck. "I will tell them all you don't like it. I will tell them they must not—— Oh!" cried Connie again, in a quick astonished voice. She clutched Mary round the neck, returning the violence of the grasp which had hurt her, and with her other hand pointed to the door. "The lady! the lady! Oh, come and see where she is going!" Connie cried.

Mary felt as if the child in her vehemence lifted her from her seat. She had no sense that her own limbs or her own will carried her, in the impetuous rush with which Connie flew. The blood mounted to her head. She felt a heat and throbbing as if her spine were on fire. Connie, holding by her skirts, pushing her on, went along the corridor to the other door, now deserted, of Lady Mary's room. "There, there! don't you see her? She is going in," the child cried, and rushed on, clinging to Mary, dragging her on, her light hair streaming, her little white dress waving.

Lady Mary's room was unoccupied and cold—cold, though it was summer, with the chill that rests in uninhabited apartments. The blinds were drawn down over the windows;

a sort of blank whiteness, greyness, was in the place, which no one ever entered. The child rushed on with eager gestures, crying "Look! look!" turning her lively head from side to side. Mary, in a still and passive expectation, seeing nothing, looking mechanically where Connie told her to look, moving like a creature in a dream, against her will, followed. There was nothing to be seen. The blank, the vacancy went to her heart. She no longer thought of Connie or her vision. She felt the emptiness with a desolation such as she had never felt before. She loosed her arm with something like impatience from the child's close clasp. For months she had not entered the room which was associated with so much of her life. Connie and her cries and warnings passed from her mind like the stir of a bird or a fly. Mary felt herself alone with her dead, alone with her life, with all that had been and that never could be again. Slowly, without knowing what she did, she sank upon her knees. She raised her face in the blank of desolation about her to the unseen heaven. Unseen! unseen! whatever we may do. God above us, and those who have gone from us, and He who has taken them, who has redeemed them, who is ours and theirs, our only hope; but all unseen, unseen, concealed as much by the blue skies as by the dull blank of that roof. Her heart ached and cried into the unknown. "O God," she cried, "I do not know where

she is, but Thou art everywhere. O God, let her know that I have never blamed her, never wished it otherwise, never ceased to love her, and thank her, and bless her. God! God!" cried Mary, with a great and urgent cry, as if it were a man's name. She knelt there for a moment before her senses failed her, her eyes shining as if they would burst from their sockets, her lips dropping apart, her countenance like marble—.

XIII.

"And *She* was standing there all the time," said Connie, crying and telling her little tale after Mary had been carried away—"standing with her hand upon that cabinet, looking and looking, oh, as if she wanted to say something and couldn't. Why couldn't she, mamma? Oh, Mr Bowyer, why couldn't she, if she wanted so much? Why wouldn't God let her speak?"

XIV.

Mary had a long illness, and hovered on the verge of death. She said a great deal in her wanderings about some one who had looked at her. "For a moment, a moment," she would cry; "only a moment! and I had so much to say." But as she got better nothing was said

to her about this face she had seen. And perhaps it was only the suggestion of some feverish dream. She was taken away, and was a long time getting up her strength; and in the meantime the Turners insisted that the drains should be thoroughly seen to, which were not at all in a perfect state. And the Earl coming to see the place, took a fancy to it, and determined to keep it in his own hands. He was a friendly person, and his ideas of decoration were quite different from those of his grandmother. He gave away a great deal of her old furniture, and sold the rest.

Among the articles given away was the Italian cabinet which the vicar had always had a fancy for; and naturally it had not been in the vicarage a day before the boys insisted on finding out the way of opening the secret drawer. And there the paper was found in the most natural way, without any trouble or mystery at all.

XV.

They all gathered to see the wanderer coming back. She was not as she had been when she went away. Her face, which had been so easy, was worn with trouble; her eyes were deep with things unspeakable. Pity and knowledge were in the lines which time had not made. It was a great event in that place to see one come back who did not come by the

common way. She was received by the great officer who had given her permission to go, and her companions who had received her at the first all came forward, wondering, to hear what she had to say: because it only occurs to those wanderers who have gone back to earth of their own will, to return—when they had accomplished what they wished, or it is judged above that there is nothing possible more. Accordingly the question was on all their lips, "You have set the wrong right—you have done what you desired?"

"Oh," she said, stretching out her hands, "how well one is in one's own place! how blessed to be at home! I have seen the trouble and sorrow in the earth till my heart is sore, and sometimes I have been near to die."

"But that is impossible," said the man who had loved her.

"If it had not been impossible, I should have died," she said. "I have stood among people who loved me, and they have not seen me nor known me, nor heard my cry. I have been outcast from all life, for I belonged to none. I have longed for you all, and my heart has failed me. Oh how lonely it is in the world when you are a wanderer, and can be known of none——"

"You were warned," said he who was in authority, "that it was more bitter than death."

"What is death?" she said. And no one made any reply. Neither did any one venture to ask her again whether she had been success-

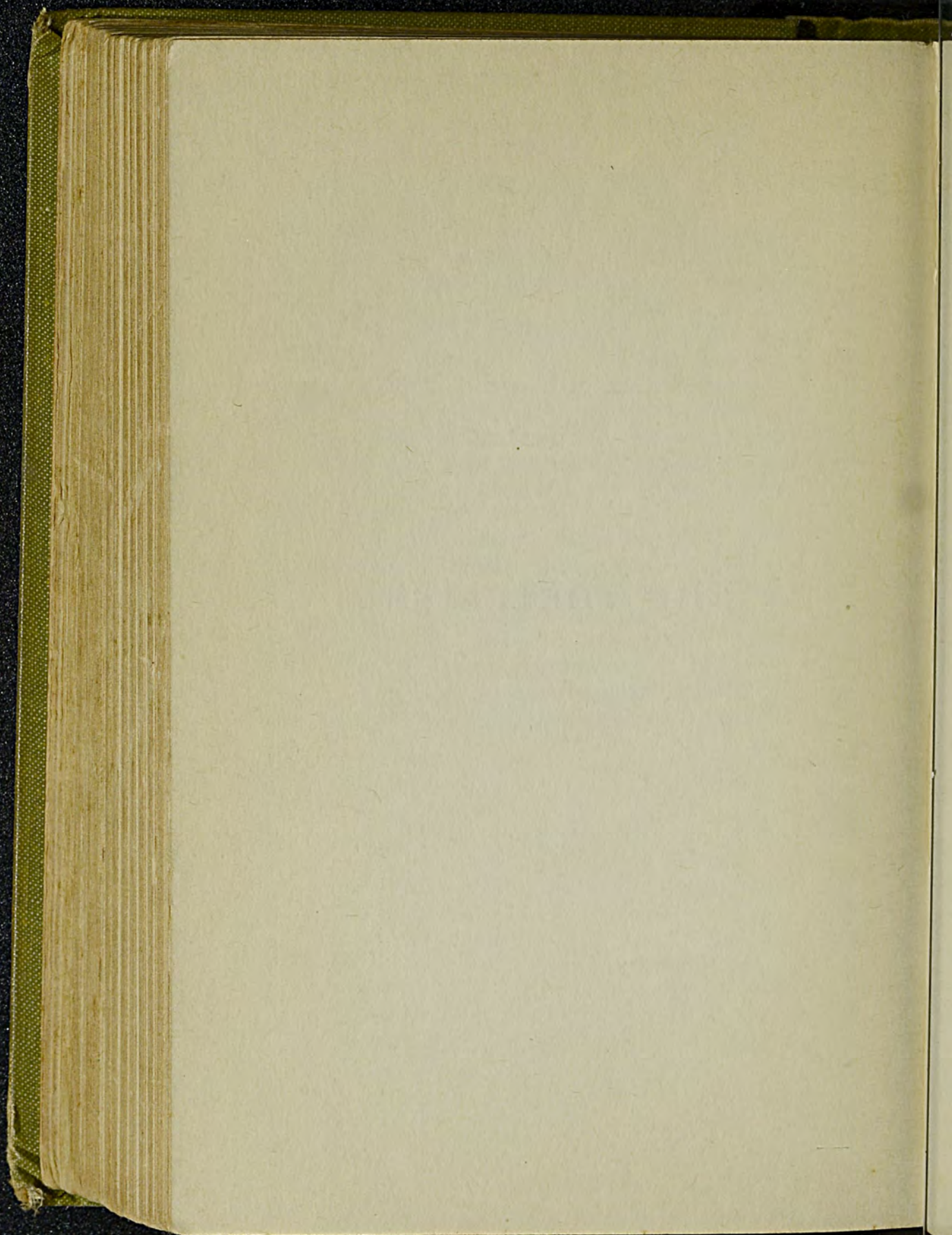
ful in her mission. But at last, when the warmth of her appointed home had melted the ice about her heart, she smiled once more and spoke.

"The little children knew me; they were not afraid of me; they held out their arms. And God's dear and innocent creatures——" She wept a few tears, which were sweet after the ice-tears she had shed upon the earth. And then some one, more bold than the rest, asked again, "And did you accomplish what you wished?"

She had come to herself by this time, and the dark lines were melting from her face. "I am forgiven," she said, with a low cry of happiness. "She whom I wronged loves me and blessed me; and we saw each other face to face. I know nothing more."

"There is no more," said all together. For everything is included in pardon and love.

THE PORTRAIT



THE PORTRAIT.

AT the period when the following incidents occurred I was living with my father at The Grove, a large old house in the immediate neighbourhood of a little town. This had been his home for a number of years ; and I believe I was born in it. It was a kind of house which, notwithstanding all the red and white architecture, known at present by the name of Queen Anne, builders nowadays have forgotten how to build. It was straggling and irregular, with wide passages, wide staircases, broad landings ; the rooms large but not very lofty ; the arrangements leaving much to be desired, with no economy of space : a house belonging to a period when land was cheap, and, so far as that was concerned, there was no occasion to economise. Though it was so near the town, the clump of trees in which it was environed was a veritable grove. In the grounds in spring the primroses grew as thickly as in the forest. We had a few fields for the cows, and an excellent walled garden. The place is be-

ing pulled down at this moment to make room for more streets of mean little houses,—the kind of thing, and not a dull house of faded gentry, which perhaps the neighbourhood requires. The house was dull, and so were we, its last inhabitants; and the furniture was faded, even a little dingy,—nothing to brag of. I do not, however, intend to convey a suggestion that we were faded gentry, for that was not the case. My father, indeed, was rich, and had no need to spare any expense in making his life and his house bright if he pleased; but he did not please, and I had not been long enough at home to exercise any special influence of my own. It was the only home I had ever known; but except in my earliest childhood, and in my holidays as a schoolboy, I had in reality known but little of it. My mother had died at my birth, or shortly after, and I had grown up in the gravity and silence of a house without women. In my infancy, I believe, a sister of my father's had lived with us, and taken charge of the household and of me; but she, too, had died long, long ago, my mourning for her being one of the first things I could recollect. And she had no successor. There was, indeed, a housekeeper and some maids,—the latter of whom I only saw disappearing at the end of a passage, or whisking out of a room when one of "the gentlemen" appeared. Mrs Weir, indeed, I saw nearly every day; but a curtsy, a smile, a pair of nice round arms which she caressed while fold-

ing them across her ample waist, and a large white apron, were all I knew of her. This was the only female influence in the house. The drawing-room I was aware of only as a place of deadly good order, into which nobody ever entered. It had three long windows opening on the lawn, and communicated at the upper end, which was rounded like a great bay, with the conservatory. Sometimes I gazed into it as a child from without, wondering at the needlework on the chairs, the screens, the looking-glasses which never reflected any living face. My father did not like the room, which probably was not wonderful, though it never occurred to me in those early days to inquire why.

I may say here, though it will probably be disappointing to those who form a sentimental idea of the capabilities of children, that it did not occur to me either, in these early days, to make any inquiry about my mother. There was no room in life, as I knew it, for any such person; nothing suggested to my mind either the fact that she must have existed, or that there was need of her in the house. I accepted, as I believe most children do, the facts of existence, on the basis with which I had first made acquaintance with them, without question or remark. As a matter of fact, I was aware that it was rather dull at home; but neither by comparison with the books I read, nor by the communications received from my school-fellows, did this seem to me anything remarkable. And I was possibly somewhat

dull too by nature, for I did not mind. I was fond of reading, and for that there was unbounded opportunity. I had a little ambition in respect to work, and that too could be prosecuted undisturbed. When I went to the university, my society lay almost entirely among men; but by that time and afterwards, matters had of course greatly changed with me, and though I recognised women as part of the economy of nature, and did not indeed by any means dislike or avoid them, yet the idea of connecting them at all with my own home never entered into my head. That continued to be as it had always been, when at intervals I descended upon the cool, grave, colourless place, in the midst of my traffic with the world: always very still, well-ordered, serious—the cooking very good, the comfort perfect—old Morpew, the butler, a little older (but very little older, perhaps on the whole less old, since in my childhood I had thought him a kind of Methuselah), and Mrs Weir, less active, covering up her arms in sleeves, but folding and caressing them just as always. I remember looking in from the lawn through the windows upon that deadly-orderly drawing-room, with a humorous recollection of my childish admiration and wonder, and feeling that it must be kept so for ever and ever, and that to go into it would break some sort of amusing mock mystery, some pleasantly ridiculous spell.

But it was only at rare intervals that I went

home. In the long vacation, as in my school holidays, my father often went abroad with me, so that we had gone over a great deal of the Continent together very pleasantly. He was old in proportion to the age of his son, being a man of sixty when I was twenty, but that did not disturb the pleasure of the relations between us. I don't know that they were ever very confidential. On my side there was but little to communicate, for I did not get into scrapes nor fall in love, the two predicaments which demand sympathy and confidences. And as for my father himself, I was never aware what there could be to communicate on his side. I knew his life exactly—what he did almost at every hour of the day; under what circumstances of the temperature he would ride and when walk; how often and with what guests he would indulge in the occasional break of a dinner-party, a serious pleasure,—perhaps, indeed, less a pleasure than a duty. All this I knew as well as he did, and also his views on public matters, his political opinions, which naturally were different from mine. What ground, then, remained for confidence? I did not know any. We were both of us of a reserved nature, not apt to enter into our religious feelings, for instance. There are many people who think reticence on such subjects a sign of the most reverential way of contemplating them. Of this I am far from being sure; but, at all events, it was the practice most congenial to my own mind.

And then I was for a long time absent, making my own way in the world. I did not make it very successfully. I accomplished the natural fate of an Englishman, and went out to the Colonies; then to India in a semi-diplomatic position; but returned home after seven or eight years, invalided, in bad health and not much better spirits, tired and disappointed with my first trial of life. I had, as people say, "no occasion" to insist on making my way. My father was rich, and had never given me the slightest reason to believe that he did not intend me to be his heir. His allowance to me was not illiberal, and though he did not oppose the carrying out of my own plans, he by no means urged me to exertion. When I came home he received me very affectionately, and expressed his satisfaction in my return. "Of course," he said, "I am not glad that you are disappointed, Philip, or that your health is broken; but otherwise it is an ill wind, you know, that blows nobody good—and I am very glad to have you at home. I am growing an old man——"

"I don't see any difference, sir," said I; "everything here seems exactly the same as when I went away——"

He smiled, and shook his head. "It is true enough," he said, "after we have reached a certain age we seem to go on for a long time on a plane, and feel no great difference from year to year; but it is an inclined plane—and the longer we go on, the more sudden will

be the fall at the end. But at all events it will be a great comfort to me to have you here."

"If I had known that," I said, "and that you wanted me, I should have come in any circumstances. As there are only two of us in the world——"

"Yes," he said, "there are only two of us in the world; but still I should not have sent for you, Phil, to interrupt your career."

"It is as well, then, that it has interrupted itself," I said, rather bitterly; for disappointment is hard to bear.

He patted me on the shoulder, and repeated, "It is an ill wind that blows nobody good," with a look of real pleasure which gave me a certain gratification too; for, after all, he was an old man, and the only one in all the world to whom I owed any duty. I had not been without dreams of warmer affections, but they had come to nothing—not tragically, but in the ordinary way. I might perhaps have had love which I did not want, but not that which I did want,—which was not a thing to make any unmanly moan about, but in the ordinary course of events. Such disappointments happen every day; indeed, they are more common than anything else, and sometimes it is apparent afterwards that it is better it was so.

However, here I was at thirty stranded—yet wanting for nothing, in a position to call forth rather envy than pity from the greater

part of my contemporaries,—for I had an assured and comfortable existence, as much money as I wanted, and the prospect of an excellent fortune for the future. On the other hand, my health was still low, and I had no occupation. The neighbourhood of the town was a drawback rather than an advantage. I felt myself tempted, instead of taking the long walk into the country which my doctor recommended, to take a much shorter one through the High Street, across the river, and back again, which was not a walk but a lounge. The country was silent and full of thoughts—thoughts not always very agreeable—whereas there were always the humours of the little urban population to glance at, the news to be heard, all those petty matters which so often make up life in a very impoverished version for the idle man. I did not like it, but I felt myself yielding to it, not having energy enough to make a stand. The rector and the leading lawyer of the place asked me to dinner. I might have glided into the society, such as it was, had I been disposed for that—everything about me began to close over me as if I had been fifty, and fully contented with my lot.

It was possibly my own want of occupation which made me observe with surprise, after a while, how much occupied my father was. He had expressed himself glad of my return; but now that I had returned, I saw very little of him. Most of his time was spent in his

library, as had always been the case. But on the few visits I paid him there, I could not but perceive that the aspect of the library was much changed. It had acquired the look of a business-room, almost an office. There were large business-like books on the table, which I could not associate with anything he could naturally have to do; and his correspondence was very large. I thought he closed one of those books hurriedly as I came in, and pushed it away, as if he did not wish me to see it. This surprised me at the moment, without arousing any other feeling; but afterwards I remembered it with a clearer sense of what it meant. He was more absorbed altogether than I had been used to see him. He was visited by men sometimes not of very prepossessing appearance. Surprise grew in my mind without any very distinct idea of the reason of it; and it was not till after a chance conversation with Morpew that my vague uneasiness began to take definite shape. It was begun without any special intention on my part. Morpew had informed me that master was very busy, on some occasion when I wanted to see him. And I was a little annoyed to be thus put off. "It appears to me that my father is always busy," I said, hastily. Morpew then began very oracularly to nod his head in assent.

"A deal too busy, sir, if you take my opinion," he said.

This startled me much, and I asked hurriedly, "What do you mean?" without re-

flecting that to ask for private information from a servant about my father's habits was as bad as investigating into a stranger's affairs. It did not strike me in the same light.

"Mr Philip," said Morpew, "a thing 'as 'appened as 'appens more often than it ought to. Master has got awful keen about money in his old age."

"That's a new thing for him," I said.

"No, sir, begging your pardon, it ain't a new thing. He was once broke of it, and that wasn't easy done; but it's come back, if you'll excuse me saying so. And I don't know as he'll ever be broke of it again at his age."

I felt more disposed to be angry than disturbed by this. "You must be making some ridiculous mistake," I said. "And if you were not so old a friend as you are, Morpew, I should not have allowed my father to be so spoken of to me."

The old man gave me a half-astonished, half-contemptuous look. "He's been my master a deal longer than he's been your father," he said, turning on his heel. The assumption was so comical that my anger could not stand in face of it. I went out, having been on my way to the door when this conversation occurred, and took my usual lounge about, which was not a satisfactory sort of amusement. Its vanity and emptiness appeared to be more evident than usual to-day. I met half-a-dozen people I knew, and had as many pieces of news

confided to me. I went up and down the length of the High Street. I made a small purchase or two. And then I turned homeward—despising myself, yet finding no alternative within my reach. Would a long country walk have been more virtuous?—it would at least have been more wholesome—but that was all that could be said. My mind did not dwell on Morphey's communication. It seemed without sense or meaning to me; and after the excellent joke about his superior interest in his master to mine in my father, was dismissed lightly enough from my mind. I tried to invent some way of telling this to my father without letting him perceive that Morphey had been finding faults in him, or I listening; for it seemed a pity to lose so good a joke. However, as I returned home, something happened which put the joke entirely out of my head. It is curious when a new subject of trouble or anxiety has been suggested to the mind in an unexpected way, how often a second advertisement follows immediately after the first, and gives to that a potency which in itself it had not possessed.

I was approaching our own door, wondering whether my father had gone, and whether, on my return, I should find him at leisure—for I had several little things to say to him—when I noticed a poor woman lingering about the closed gates. She had a baby sleeping in her arms. It was a spring night, the stars shining in the twilight, and everything soft

and dim; and the woman's figure was like a shadow, flitting about, now here, now there, on one side or another of the gate. She stopped when she saw me approaching, and hesitated for a moment, then seemed to take a sudden resolution. I watched her without knowing, with a prevision that she was going to address me, though with no sort of idea as to the subject of her address. She came up to me doubtfully, it seemed, yet certainly, as I felt, and when she was close to me, dropped a sort of hesitating curtsey, and said, "It's Mr Philip?" in a low voice.

"What do you want with me?" I said.

Then she poured forth suddenly, without warning or preparation, her long speech—a flood of words which must have been all ready and waiting at the doors of her lips for utterance. "Oh, sir, I want to speak to you! I can't believe you'll be so hard, for you're young; and I can't believe he'll be so hard if so be as his own son, as I've always heard he had but one, 'll speak up for us. Oh, gentleman, it is easy for the likes of you, that, if you ain't comfortable in one room, can just walk into another; but if one room is all you have, and every bit of furniture you have taken out of it, and nothing but the four walls left—not so much as the cradle for the child, or a chair for your man to sit down upon when he comes from his work, or a saucepan to cook him his supper——"

"My good woman," I said, "who can have

taken all that from you? surely nobody can be so cruel?"

"You say it's cruel!" she cried with a sort of triumph. "Oh, I knowed you would, or any true gentleman that don't hold with screwing poor folks. Just go and say that to him inside there, for the love of God. Tell him to think what he's doing, driving poor creatures to despair. Summer's coming, the Lord be praised, but yet it's bitter cold at night with your counterpane gone; and when you've been working hard all day, and nothing but four bare walls to come home to, and all your poor little sticks of furniture that you've saved up for, and got together one by one, all gone—and you no better than when you started, or rather worse, for then you was young. Oh, sir!" the woman's voice rose into a sort of passionate wail. And then she added, beseechingly, recovering herself—"Oh, speak for us—he'll not refuse his own son——"

"To whom am I to speak? who is it that has done this to you?" I said.

The woman hesitated again, looking keenly in my face—then repeated with a slight faltering, "It's Mr Philip?" as if that made everything right.

"Yes; I am Philip Canning," I said; "but what have I to do with this? and to whom am I to speak?"

She began to whimper, crying and stopping herself. "Oh, please sir! it's Mr Canning as owns all the house property about—it's him

that our court and the lane and everything belongs to. And he's taken the bed from under us, and the baby's cradle, although it's said in the Bible as you're not to take poor folks's bed."

"My father!" I cried in spite of myself—"then it must be some agent, some one else in his name. You may be sure he knows nothing of it. Of course I shall speak to him at once."

"Oh, God bless you, sir," said the woman. But then she added, in a lower tone—"It's no agent. It's one as never knows trouble. It's him that lives in that grand house." But this was said under her breath, evidently not for me to hear.

Morphew's words flashed through my mind as she spoke. What was this? Did it afford an explanation of the much occupied hours, the big books, the strange visitors? I took the poor woman's name, and gave her something to procure a few comforts for the night, and went indoors disturbed and troubled. It was impossible to believe that my father himself would have acted thus; but he was not a man to brook interference, and I did not see how to introduce the subject, what to say. I could but hope that, at the moment of broaching it, words would be put into my mouth, which often happens in moments of necessity, one knows not how, even when one's theme is not so all-important as that for which such help has been promised. As usual, I

did not see my father till dinner. I have said that our dinners were very good, luxurious in a simple way, everything excellent in its kind, well cooked, well served, the perfection of comfort without show—which is a combination very dear to the English heart. I said nothing till Morpew, with his solemn attention to everything that was going, had retired—and then it was with some strain of courage that I began.

“I was stopped outside the gate to-day by a curious sort of petitioner—a poor woman, who seems to be one of your tenants, sir, but whom your agent must have been rather too hard upon.”

“My agent? who is that?” said my father, quietly.

“I don’t know his name, and I doubt his competence. The poor creature seems to have had everything taken from her—her bed, her child’s cradle.”

“No doubt she was behind with her rent.”

“Very likely, sir. She seemed very poor,” said I.

“You take it coolly,” said my father, with an upward glance, half-amused, not in the least shocked by my statement. “But when a man, or a woman either, takes a house, I suppose you will allow that they ought to pay rent for it.”

“Certainly, sir,” I replied, “when they have got anything to pay.”

“I don’t allow the reservation,” he said.

But he was not angry, which I had feared he would be.

"I think," I continued, "that your agent must be too severe. And this emboldens me to say something which has been in my mind for some time"—(these were the words, no doubt, which I had hoped would be put into my mouth; they were the suggestion of the moment, and yet as I said them it was with the most complete conviction of their truth)—"and that is this: I am doing nothing; my time hangs heavy on my hands. Make me your agent. I will see for myself, and save you from such mistakes; and it will be an occupation——"

"Mistakes? What warrant have you for saying these are mistakes?" he said testily; then after a moment: "This is a strange proposal from you, Phil. Do you know what it is you are offering?—to be a collector of rents, going about from door to door, from week to week; to look after wretched little bits of repairs, drains, &c.; to get paid, which, after all, is the chief thing, and not to be taken in by tales of poverty."

"Not to let you be taken in by men without pity," I said.

He gave me a strange glance, which I did not very well understand, and said, abruptly, a thing which, so far as I remember, he had never in my life said before, "You've become a little like your mother, Phil——"

"My mother!" The reference was so un-

usual—nay, so unprecedented—that I was greatly startled. It seemed to me like the sudden introduction of a quite new element in the stagnant atmosphere, as well as a new party to our conversation. My father looked across the table, as if with some astonishment at my tone of surprise.

“Is that so very extraordinary?” he said.

“No; of course it is not extraordinary that I should resemble my mother. Only—I have heard very little of her—almost nothing.”

“That is true.” He got up and placed himself before the fire, which was very low, as the night was not cold—had not been cold heretofore at least; but it seemed to me now that a little chill came into the dim and faded room. Perhaps it looked more dull from the suggestion of a something brighter, warmer, that might have been. “Talking of mistakes,” he said, “perhaps that was one: to sever you entirely from her side of the house. But I did not care for the connection. You will understand how it is that I speak of it now when I tell you——” He stopped here, however, said nothing more for a minute or so, and then rang the bell. Morphew came, as he always did, very deliberately, so that some time elapsed in silence, during which my surprise grew. When the old man appeared at the door—“Have you put the lights in the drawing-room, as I told you?” my father said.

“Yes, sir; and opened the box, sir; and it’s a—it’s a speaking likeness——”

This the old man got out in a great hurry, as if afraid that his master would stop him. My father did so with a wave of his hand.

"That's enough. I asked no information. You can go now."

The door closed upon us, and there was again a pause. My subject had floated away altogether like a mist, though I had been so concerned about it. I tried to resume, but could not. Something seemed to arrest my very breathing: and yet in this dull respectable house of ours, where everything breathed good character and integrity, it was certain that there could be no shameful mystery to reveal. It was some time before my father spoke, not from any purpose that I could see, but apparently because his mind was busy with probably unaccustomed thoughts.

"You scarcely know the drawing-room, Phil," he said at last.

"Very little. I have never seen it used. I have a little awe of it, to tell the truth."

"That should not be. There is no reason for that. But a man by himself, as I have been for the greater part of my life, has no occasion for a drawing-room. I always, as a matter of preference, sat among my books; however, I ought to have thought of the impression on you."

"Oh, it is not important," I said; "the awe was childish. I have not thought of it since I came home."

"It never was anything very splendid at

the best," said he. He lifted the lamp from the table with a sort of abstraction, not remarking even my offer to take it from him, and led the way. He was on the verge of seventy, and looked his age: but it was a vigorous age, with no symptoms of giving way. The circle of light from the lamp lit up his white hair, and keen blue eyes, and clear complexion; his forehead was like old ivory, his cheek warmly coloured: an old man, yet a man in full strength. He was taller than I was, and still almost as strong. As he stood for a moment with the lamp in his hand, he looked like a tower in his great height and bulk. I reflected as I looked at him that I knew him intimately, more intimately than any other creature in the world,—I was familiar with every detail of his outward life; could it be that in reality I did not know him at all?

The drawing-room was already lighted with a flickering array of candles upon the mantelpiece and along the walls, producing the pretty starry effect which candles give without very much light. As I had not the smallest idea what I was about to see, for Morpew's "speaking likeness" was very hurriedly said, and only half comprehensible in the bewilderment of my faculties, my first glance was at this very unusual illumination, for which I

could assign no reason. The next showed me a large full-length portrait, still in the box in which apparently it had travelled, placed upright, supported against a table in the centre of the room. My father walked straight up to it, motioned to me to place a smaller table close to the picture on the left side, and put his lamp upon that. Then he waved his hand towards it, and stood aside that I might see.

It was a full-length portrait of a very young woman—I might say a girl, scarcely twenty—in a white dress, made in a very simple old fashion, though I was too little accustomed to female costume to be able to fix the date. It might have been a hundred years old, or twenty, for aught I knew. The face had an expression of youth, candour, and simplicity more than any face I had ever seen,—or so, at least, in my surprise, I thought. The eyes were a little wistful, with something which was almost anxiety—which at least was not content—in them; a faint, almost imperceptible, curve in the lids. The complexion was of a dazzling fairness, the hair light, but the eyes dark, which gave individuality to the face. It would have been as lovely had the eyes been blue—probably more so—but their darkness gave a touch of character, a slight discord, which made the harmony finer. It was not, perhaps, beautiful in the highest sense of the word. The girl must have been too young, too slight, too little developed for actual beauty; but a

face which so invited love and confidence I never saw. One smiled at it with instinctive affection. "What a sweet face!" I said. "What a lovely girl! Who is she? Is this one of the relations you were speaking of on the other side?"

My father made me no reply. He stood aside, looking at it as if he knew it too well to require to look,—as if the picture was already in his eyes. "Yes," he said, after an interval, with a long-drawn breath, "she was a lovely girl, as you say."

"Was?—then she is dead. What a pity!" I said; "what a pity! so young and so sweet!"

We stood gazing at her thus, in her beautiful stillness and calm—two men, the younger of us full grown and conscious of many experiences, the other an old man—before this impersonation of tender youth. At length he said, with a slight tremulousness in his voice, "Does nothing suggest to you who she is, Phil?"

I turned round to look at him with profound astonishment, but he turned away from my look. A sort of quiver passed over his face. "That is your mother," he said, and walked suddenly away, leaving me there.

My mother!

I stood for a moment in a kind of consternation before the white-robed innocent creature, to me no more than a child; then a sudden laugh broke from me, without any will of mine: something ludicrous, as well as something aw-

ful, was in it. When the laugh was over, I found myself with tears in my eyes, gazing, holding my breath. The soft features seemed to melt, the lips to move, the anxiety in the eyes to become a personal inquiry. Ah, no! nothing of the kind; only because of the water in mine. My mother! oh, fair and gentle creature, scarcely woman—how could any man's voice call her by that name! I had little idea enough of what it meant,—had heard it laughed at, scoffed at, revered, but never had learned to place it even among the ideal powers of life. Yet, if it meant anything at all, what it meant was worth thinking of. What did she ask, looking at me with those eyes? what would she have said if "those lips had language"? If I had known her only as Cowper did—with a child's recollection—there might have been some thread, some faint but comprehensible link, between us; but now all that I felt was the curious incongruity. Poor child! I said to myself; so sweet a creature: poor little tender soul! as if she had been a little sister, a child of mine,—but my mother! I cannot tell how long I stood looking at her, studying the candid, sweet face, which surely had germs in it of everything that was good and beautiful; and sorry, with a profound regret, that she had died and never carried these promises to fulfilment. Poor girl! poor people who had loved her! These were my thoughts: with a curious vertigo and giddiness of my whole being in the sense of a mysterious

relationship, which it was beyond my power to understand.

Presently my father came back: possibly because I had been a long time unconscious of the passage of the minutes, or perhaps because he was himself restless in the strange disturbance of his habitual calm. He came in and put his arm within mine, leaning his weight partially upon me, with an affectionate suggestion which went deeper than words. I pressed his arm to my side: it was more between us two grave Englishmen than any embracing.

"I cannot understand it," I said.

"No. I don't wonder at that; but if it is strange to you, Phil, think how much more strange to me! That is the partner of my life. I have never had another—or thought of another. That—girl! If we are to meet again, as I have always hoped we should meet again, what am I to say to her—I, an old man? Yes; I know what you mean. I am not an old man for my years; but my years are three-score and ten, and the play is nearly played out. How am I to meet that young creature? We used to say to each other that it was for ever, that we never could be but one, that it was for life and death. But what—what am I to say to her, Phil, when I meet her again, that—that angel? No, it is not her being an angel that troubles me; but she is so young! She is like my—my grand-daughter," he cried, with a burst of what was half sobs, half laugh-

ter; "and she is my wife,—and I am an old man—an old man! And so much has happened that she could not understand."

I was too much startled by this strange complaint to know what to say. It was not my own trouble, and I answered it in the conventional way.

"They are not as we are, sir," I said; "they look upon us with larger, other eyes than ours."

"Ah! you don't know what I mean," he said quickly; and in the interval he had subdued his emotion. "At first, after she died, it was my consolation to think that I should meet her again—that we never could be really parted. But, my God, how I have changed since then! I am another man—I am a different being. I was not very young even then—twenty years older than she was: but her youth renewed mine. I was not an unfit partner; she asked no better: and knew as much more than I did in some things—being so much nearer the source—as I did in others that were of the world. But I have gone a long way since then, Phil—a long way; and there she stands just where I left her."

I pressed his arm again. "Father," I said, which was a title I seldom used, "we are not to suppose that in a higher life the mind stands still." I did not feel myself qualified to discuss such topics, but something one must say.

"Worse, worse!" he replied; "then she

too will be like me, a different being, and we shall meet as what? as strangers, as people who have lost sight of each other, with a long past between us—we who parted, my God! with—with——”

His voice broke and ended for a moment: then while, surprised and almost shocked by what he said, I cast about in my mind what to reply, he withdrew his arm suddenly from mine, and said in his usual tone, “Where shall we hang the picture, Phil? It must be here in this room. What do you think will be the best light?”

This sudden alteration took me still more by surprise, and gave me almost an additional shock; but it was evident that I must follow the changes of his mood, or at least the sudden repression of sentiment which he originated. We went into that simpler question with great seriousness, consulting which would be the best light. “You know I can scarcely advise,” I said; “I have never been familiar with this room. I should like to put off, if you don’t mind, till daylight.”

“I think,” he said, “that this would be the best place.” It was on the other side of the fireplace, on the wall which faced the windows,—not the best light, I knew enough to be aware, for an oil-painting. When I said so, however, he answered me with a little impatience,—“It does not matter very much about the best light. There will be nobody to see it but you and me. I have my reasons——”

There was a small table standing against the wall at this spot, on which he had his hand as he spoke. Upon it stood a little basket in very fine lace-like wickerwork. His hand must have trembled, for the table shook, and the basket fell, its contents turning out upon the carpet,—little bits of needlework, coloured silks, a small piece of knitting half done. He laughed as they rolled out at his feet, and tried to stoop to collect them, then tottered to a chair, and covered for a moment his face with his hands.

No need to ask what they were. No woman's work had been seen in the house since I could recollect it. I gathered them up reverently and put them back. I could see, ignorant as I was, that the bit of knitting was something for an infant. What could I do less than put it to my lips? It had been left in the doing—for me.

"Yes, I think this is the best place," my father said a minute after, in his usual tone.

We placed it there that evening with our own hands. The picture was large, and in a heavy frame, but my father would let no one help me but himself. And then, with a superstition for which I never could give any reason even to myself, having removed the packings, we closed and locked the door, leaving the candles about the room, in their soft strange illumination lighting the first night of her return to her old place.

That night no more was said. My father

went to his room early, which was not his habit. He had never, however, accustomed me to sit late with him in the library. I had a little study or smoking-room of my own, in which all my special treasures were, the collections of my travels and my favourite books—and where I always sat after prayers, a ceremonial which was regularly kept up in the house. I retired as usual this night to my room, and as usual read—but to-night somewhat vaguely, often pausing to think. When it was quite late, I went out by the glass door to the lawn, and walked round the house, with the intention of looking in at the drawing-room windows, as I had done when a child. But I had forgotten that these windows were all shuttered at night, and nothing but a faint penetration of the light within through the crevices bore witness to the instalment of the new dweller there.

In the morning my father was entirely himself again. He told me without emotion of the manner in which he had obtained the picture. It had belonged to my mother's family, and had fallen eventually into the hands of a cousin of hers, resident abroad—"A man whom I did not like, and who did not like me," my father said; "there was, or had been, some rivalry, he thought: a mistake, but he was never aware of that. He refused all my requests to have a copy made. You may suppose, Phil, that I wished this very much. Had I succeeded, you would have been ac-

quainted, at least, with your mother's appearance, and need not have sustained this shock. But he would not consent. It gave him, I think, a certain pleasure to think that he had the only picture. But now he is dead—and out of remorse, or with some other intention, has left it to me."

"That looks like kindness," said I.

"Yes; or something else. He might have thought that by so doing he was establishing a claim upon me," my father said: but he did not seem disposed to add any more. On whose behalf he meant to establish a claim I did not know, nor who the man was who had laid us under so great an obligation on his deathbed. He *had* established a claim on me at least: though, as he was dead, I could not see on whose behalf it was. And my father said nothing more. He seemed to dislike the subject. When I attempted to return to it, he had recourse to his letters or his newspapers. Evidently he had made up his mind to say no more.

Afterwards I went into the drawing-room to look at the picture once more. It seemed to me that the anxiety in her eyes was not so evident as I had thought it last night. The light possibly was more favourable. She stood just above the place where, I make no doubt, she had sat in life, where her little work-basket was—not very much above it. The picture was full-length, and we had hung it low, so that she might have been stepping into the

room, and was little above my own level as I stood and looked at her again. Once more I smiled at the strange thought that this young creature, so young, almost childish, could be my mother ; and once more my eyes grew wet looking at her. He was a benefactor, indeed, who had given her back to us. I said to myself, that if I could ever do anything for him or his, I would certainly do, for my—for this lovely young creature's sake.

And with this in my mind, and all the thoughts that came with it, I am obliged to confess that the other matter, which I had been so full of on the previous night, went entirely out of my head.

It is rarely, however, that such matters are allowed to slip out of one's mind. When I went out in the afternoon for my usual stroll—or rather when I returned from that stroll—I saw once more before me the woman with her baby whose story had filled me with dismay on the previous evening. She was waiting at the gate as before, and—"Oh, gentleman, but haven't you got some news to give me?" she said.

"My good woman—I—have been greatly occupied. I have had—no time to do anything."

"Ah!" she said, with a little cry of disappointment, "my man said not to make too sure, and that the ways of the gentlefolks is hard to know."

"I cannot explain to you," I said, as gently as I could, "what it is that has made me forget you. It was an event that can only do you good in the end. Go home now, and see the man that took your things from you, and tell him to come to me. I promise you it shall all be put right."

The woman looked at me in astonishment, then burst forth, as it seemed, involuntarily,—
"What ! without asking no questions?" After this there came a storm of tears and blessings, from which I made haste to escape, but not without carrying that curious commentary on my rashness away with me—"Without asking no questions?" It might be foolish, perhaps: but after all how slight a matter. To make the poor creature comfortable at the cost of what—a box or two of cigars, perhaps, or some other trifle. And if it should be her own fault, or her husband's—what then? Had I been punished for all my faults, where should I have been now. And if the advantage should be only temporary, what then? To be relieved and comforted even for a day or two, was not that something to count in life? Thus I quenched the fiery dart of criticism which my *protégée* herself had thrown into the transaction, not without a certain sense of the humour of it. Its effect, however, was to make me less anxious to see my father, to repeat my proposal to him, and to call his attention to the cruelty performed in his name. This one case I had taken out

of the category of wrongs to be righted, by assuming arbitrarily the position of Providence in my own person—for, of course, I had bound myself to pay the poor creature's rent as well as redeem her goods—and, whatever might happen to her in the future, had taken the past into my own hands. The man came presently to see me who, it seems, had acted as my father's agent in the matter. "I don't know, sir, how Mr Canning will take it," he said. "He don't want none of those irregular, bad-paying one's in his property. He always says as to look over it and let the rent run on is making things worse in the end. His rule is, 'Never more than a month, Stevens:' that's what Mr Canning says to me, sir. He says, 'More than that they can't pay. It's no use trying.' And it's a good rule; it's a very good rule. He won't hear none of their stories, sir. Bless you, you'd never get a penny of rent from them small houses if you listened to their tales. But if so be as you'll pay Mrs Jordan's rent, it's none of my business how it's paid, so long as it's paid, and I'll send her back her things. But they'll just have to be took next time," he added, composedly. "Over and over: it's always the same story with them sort of poor folks—they're too poor for anything, that's the truth," the man said.

Morphew came back to my room after my visitor was gone. "Mr Philip," he said, "you'll excuse me, sir, but if you're going to pay all

the poor folk's rent as have distresses put in, you may just go into the court at once, for it's without end——"

"I am going to be the agent myself, Morphey, and manage for my father: and we'll soon put a stop to that," I said, more cheerfully than I felt.

"Manage for—master," he said, with a face of consternation. "You, Mr Philip!"

"You seem to have a great contempt for me, Morphey."

He did not deny the fact. He said with excitement, "Master, sir—master don't let himself be put a stop to by any man. Master's—not one to be managed. Don't you quarrel with master, Mr Philip, for the love of God." The old man was quite pale.

"Quarrel!" I said. "I have never quarrelled with my father, and I don't mean to begin now."

Morphey dispelled his own excitement by making up the fire, which was dying in the grate. It was a very mild spring evening, and he made up a great blaze which would have suited December. This is one of many ways in which an old servant will relieve his mind. He muttered all the time as he threw on the coals and wood. "He'll not like it—we all know as he'll not like it. Master won't stand no meddling, Mr Philip,"—this last he discharged at me like a flying arrow as he closed the door.

I soon found there was truth in what he said. My father was not angry; he was even

half amused. "I don't think that plan of yours will hold water, Phil. I hear you have been paying rents and redeeming furniture—that's an expensive game, and a very profitless one. Of course, so long as you are a benevolent gentleman acting for your own pleasure, it makes no difference to me. I am quite content if I get my money, even out of your pockets—so long as it amuses you. But as my collector, you know, which you are good enough to propose to be——"

"Of course I should act under your orders," I said; "but at least you might be sure that I would not commit you to any—to any——" I paused for a word.

"Act of oppression," he said with a smile—"piece of cruelty, exaction—there are half-a-dozen words——"

"Sir——" I cried.

"Stop, Phil, and let us understand each other. I hope I have always been a just man. I do my duty on my side, and I expect it from others. It is your benevolence that is cruel. I have calculated anxiously how much credit it is safe to allow; but I will allow no man, or woman either, to go beyond what he or she can make up. My law is fixed. Now you understand. My agents, as you call them, originate nothing—they execute only what I decide——"

"But then no circumstances are taken into account—no bad luck, no evil chances, no loss unexpected."

"There are no evil chances," he said, "there is no bad luck—they reap as they sow. No, I don't go among them to be cheated by their stories, and spend quite unnecessary emotion in sympathising with them. You will find it much better for you that I don't. I deal with them on a general rule, made, I assure you, not without a great deal of thought."

"And must it always be so?" I said. "Is there no way of ameliorating or bringing in a better state of things?"

"It seems not," he said; "we don't get 'no forrarder' in that direction so far as I can see." And then he turned the conversation to general matters.

I retired to my room greatly discouraged that night. In former ages—or so one is led to suppose—and in the lower primitive classes who still linger near the primeval type, action of any kind was, and is, easier than amid the complications of our higher civilisation. A bad man is a distinct entity, against whom you know more or less what steps to take. A tyrant, an oppressor, a bad landlord, a man who lets miserable tenements at a rack-rent (to come down to particulars), and exposes his wretched tenants to all those abominations of which we have heard so much—well! he is more or less a satisfactory opponent. There he is, and there is nothing to be said for him—down with him! and let there be an end of his wickedness. But when, on the contrary, you have before you a good man, a just man,

who has considered deeply a question which you allow to be full of difficulty ; who regrets, but cannot, being human, avert, the miseries which to some unhappy individuals follow from the very wisdom of his rule,—what can you do—what is to be done? Individual benevolence at haphazard may baulk him here and there, but what have you to put in the place of his well-considered scheme? Charity which makes paupers? or what else? I had not considered the question deeply, but it seemed to me that I now came to a blank wall, which my vague human sentiment of pity and scorn could find no way to breach. There must be wrong somewhere—but where? There must be some change for the better to be made—but how?

I was seated with a book before me on the table, with my head supported on my hands. My eyes were on the printed page, but I was not reading—my mind was full of these thoughts, my heart of great discouragement and despondency, a sense that I could do nothing, yet that there surely must and ought, if I but knew it, be something to do. The fire which Morpew had built up before dinner was dying out, the shaded lamp on my table left all the corners in a mysterious twilight. The house was perfectly still, no one moving: my father in the library, where, after the habit of many solitary years, he liked to be left alone, and I here in my retreat, preparing for the formation of similar habits. I thought all at

once of the third member of the party, the new-comer, alone too in the room that had been hers; and there suddenly occurred to me a strong desire to take up my lamp and go to the drawing-room and visit her, to see whether her soft angelic face would give any inspiration. I restrained, however, this futile impulse—for what could the picture say?—and instead wondered what might have been had she lived, had she been there, warmly enthroned beside the warm domestic centre, the hearth which would have been a common sanctuary, the true home. In that case what might have been? Alas! the question was no more simple to answer than the other: she might have been there alone too, her husband's business, her son's thoughts, as far from her as now, when her silent representative held her old place in the silence and darkness. I had known it so, often enough. Love itself does not always give comprehension and sympathy. It might be that she was more to us there, in the sweet image of her undeveloped beauty, than she might have been had she lived and grown to maturity and fading, like the rest.

I cannot be certain whether my mind was still lingering on this not very cheerful reflection, or if it had been left behind, when the strange occurrence came of which I have now to tell: can I call it an occurrence? My eyes were on my book, when I thought I heard the sound of a door opening and shutting, but so far away and faint that if real at all it must

have been in a far corner of the house. I did not move except to lift my eyes from the book, as one does instinctively the better to listen; when—— But I cannot tell, nor have I ever been able to describe exactly what it was. My heart made all at once a sudden leap in my breast. I am aware that this language is figurative, and that the heart cannot leap: but it is a figure so entirely justified by sensation, that no one will have any difficulty in understanding what I mean. My heart leapt up and began beating wildly in my throat, in my ears, as if my whole being had received a sudden and intolerable shock. The sound went through my head like the dizzy sound of some strange mechanism, a thousand wheels and springs, circling, echoing, working in my brain. I felt the blood bound in my veins, my mouth became dry, my eyes hot, a sense of something insupportable took possession of me. I sprang to my feet, and then I sat down again. I cast a quick glance round me beyond the brief circle of the lamplight, but there was nothing there to account in any way for this sudden extraordinary rush of sensation—nor could I feel any meaning in it, any suggestion, any moral impression. I thought I must be going to be ill, and got out my watch and felt my pulse: it was beating furiously, about 125 throbs in a minute. I knew of no illness that could come on like this without warning, in a moment, and I tried to subdue myself, to say to myself that it was nothing, some flutter of

the nerves, some physical disturbance. I laid myself down upon my sofa to try if rest would help me, and kept still—as long as the thumping and throbbing of this wild excited mechanism within, like a wild beast plunging and struggling, would let me. I am quite aware of the confusion of the metaphor—the reality was just so. It was like a mechanism deranged, going wildly with ever-increasing precipitation, like those horrible wheels that from time to time catch a helpless human being in them and tear him to pieces: but at the same time it was like a maddened living creature making the wildest efforts to get free.

When I could bear this no longer I got up and walked about my room; then having still a certain command of myself, though I could not master the commotion within me, I deliberately took down an exciting book from the shelf, a book of breathless adventure which had always interested me, and tried with that to break the spell. After a few minutes, however, I flung the book aside; I was gradually losing all power over myself. What I should be moved to do,—to shout aloud, to struggle with I know not what; or if I was going mad altogether, and next moment must be a raving lunatic,—I could not tell. I kept looking round, expecting I don't know what: several times, with the corner of my eye I seemed to see a movement, as if some one was stealing out of sight; but when I looked straight, there was never anything but the plain outlines of

the wall and carpet, the chairs standing in good order. At last I snatched up the lamp in my hand and went out of the room. To look at the picture? which had been faintly showing in my imagination from time to time, the eyes, more anxious than ever, looking at me from out the silent air. But no; I passed the door of that room swiftly, moving, it seemed, without any volition of my own, and before I knew where I was going, went into my father's library with my lamp in my hand.

He was still sitting there at his writing-table; he looked up astonished to see me hurrying in with my light. "Phil!" he said, surprised. I remember that I shut the door behind me, and came up to him, and set down the lamp on his table. My sudden appearance alarmed him. "What is the matter?" he cried. "Philip, what have you been doing with yourself?"

I sat down on the nearest chair and gasped, gazing at him. The wild commotion ceased, the blood subsided into its natural channels, my heart resumed its place. I use such words as mortal weakness can to express the sensations I felt. I came to myself thus, gazing at him, confounded, at once by the extraordinary passion which I had gone through, and its sudden cessation. "The matter?" I cried; "I don't know what is the matter."

My father had pushed his spectacles up from his eyes. He appeared to me as faces appear in a fever, all glorified with light which is not in them—his eyes glowing, his white

hair shining like silver; but his look was severe. "You are not a boy, that I should reprove you; but you ought to know better," he said.

Then I explained to him, so far as I was able, what had happened. Had happened? nothing had happened. He did not understand me—nor did I, now that it was over, understand myself; but he saw enough to make him aware that the disturbance in me was serious, and not caused by any folly of my own. He was very kind as soon as he had assured himself of this, and talked, taking pains to bring me back to unexciting subjects. He had a letter in his hand with a very deep border of black when I came in. I observed it, without taking any notice or associating it with anything I knew. He had many correspondents, and although we were excellent friends, we had never been on those confidential terms which warrant one man in asking another from whom a special letter has come. We were not so near to each other as this, though we were father and son. After a while I went back to my own room, and finished the evening in my usual way, without any return of the excitement which, now that it was over, looked to me like some extraordinary dream. What had it meant? had it meant anything? I said to myself that it must be purely physical, something gone temporarily amiss, which had righted itself. It was physical; the excitement did not affect my mind.

I was independent of it all the time, a spectator of my own agitation—a clear proof that, whatever it was, it had affected my bodily organisation alone.

Next day I returned to the problem which I had not been able to solve. I found out my petitioner in the back street, and that she was happy in the recovery of her possessions, which to my eyes indeed did not seem very worthy either of lamentation or delight. Nor was her house the tidy house which injured virtue should have when restored to its humble rights. She was not injured virtue, it was clear. She made me a great many curtseys, and poured forth a number of blessings. Her "man" came in while I was there, and hoped in a gruff voice that God would reward me, and that the old gentleman 'd let 'em alone. I did not like the looks of the man. It seemed to me that in the dark lane behind the house of a winter's night he would not be a pleasant person to find in one's way. Nor was this all: when I went out into the little street which it appeared was all, or almost all, my father's property, a number of groups formed in my way, and at least half-a-dozen applicants sidled up. "I've more claims nor Mary Jordan any day," said one; "I've lived on Squire Canning's property, one place and another, this twenty year." "And what do you say to me," said another; "I've six children to her two, bless you, sir, and ne'er a father to do for them." I be-

lieved in my father's rule before I got out of the street, and approved his wisdom in keeping himself free from personal contact with his tenants. Yet when I looked back upon the swarming thoroughfare, the mean little houses, the women at their doors all so open-mouthed, and eager to contend for my favour, my heart sank within me at the thought that out of their misery some portion of our wealth came—I don't care how small a portion: that I, young and strong, should be kept idle and in luxury, in some part through the money screwed out of their necessities, obtained sometimes by the sacrifice of everything they prized! Of course I know all the ordinary commonplaces of life as well as any one—that if you build a house with your hands or your money, and let it, the rent of it is your just due, and must be paid. But yet——

“Don't you think, sir,” I said that evening at dinner, the subject being reintroduced by my father himself, “that we have some duty towards them when we draw so much from them?”

“Certainly,” he said; “I take as much trouble about their drains as I do about my own.”

“That is always something, I suppose.”

“Something! it is a great deal—it is more than they get anywhere else. I keep them clean, as far as that's possible. I give them at least the means of keeping clean, and thus

check disease, and prolong life—which is more, I assure you, than they've any right to expect."

I was not prepared with arguments as I ought to have been. That is all in the Gospel according to Adam Smith, which my father had been brought up in, but of which the tenets had begun to be less binding in my day. I wanted something more, or else something less; but my views were not so clear, nor my system so logical and well-built, as that upon which my father rested his conscience, and drew his percentage with a light heart.

Yet I thought there were signs in him of some perturbation. I met him one morning coming out of the room in which the portrait hung, as if he had gone to look at it stealthily. He was shaking his head, and saying "No, no," to himself, not perceiving me, and I stepped aside when I saw him so absorbed. For myself, I entered that room but little. I went outside, as I had so often done when I was a child, and looked through the windows into the still and now sacred place, which had always impressed me with a certain awe. Looked at so, the slight figure in its white dress seemed to be stepping down into the room from some slight visionary altitude, looking with that which had seemed to me at first anxiety, which I sometimes represented to myself now as a wistful curiosity, as if she were looking for the life which might have been hers. Where was the existence that had belonged to her, the sweet household place,

the infant she had left? She would no more recognise the man who thus came to look at her as through a veil with a mystic reverence, than I could recognise her. I could never be her child to her, any more than she could be a mother to me.

Thus time passed on for several quiet days. There was nothing to make us give any special heed to the passage of time, life being very uneventful and its habits unvaried. My mind was very much preoccupied by my father's tenants. He had a great deal of property in the town which was so near us,—streets of small houses, the best-paying property (I was assured) of any. I was very anxious to come to some settled conclusion: on the one hand, not to let myself be carried away by sentiment; on the other, not to allow my strongly roused feelings to fall into the blank of routine, as his had done. I was seated one evening in my own sitting-room busy with this matter,—busy with calculations as to cost and profit, with an anxious desire to convince him, either that his profits were greater than justice allowed, or that they carried with them a more urgent duty than he had conceived.

It was night, but not late, not more than ten o'clock, the household still astir. Everything was quiet—not the solemnity of midnight silence, in which there is always something of

mystery, but the soft-breathing quiet of the evening, full of the faint habitual sounds of a human dwelling, a consciousness of life about. And I was very busy with my figures, interested, feeling no room in my mind for any other thought. The singular experience which had startled me so much had passed over very quickly, and there had been no return. I had ceased to think of it: indeed I had never thought of it save for the moment, setting it down after it was over to a physical cause without much difficulty. At this time I was far too busy to have thoughts to spare for anything, or room for imagination: and when suddenly in a moment, without any warning, the first symptom returned, I started with it into determined resistance, resolute not to be fooled by any mock influence which could resolve itself into the action of nerves or ganglions. The first symptom, as before, was that my heart sprang up with a bound, as if a cannon had been fired at my ear. My whole being responded with a start. The pen fell out of my fingers, the figures went out of my head as if all faculty had departed: and yet I was conscious for a time at least of keeping my self-control. I was like the rider of a frightened horse, rendered almost wild by something which in the mystery of its voiceless being it has seen, something on the road which it will not pass, but wildly plunging, resisting every persuasion, turns from, with ever increasing passion. The rider himself after a time

becomes infected with this inexplicable desperation of terror, and I suppose I must have done so: but for a time I kept the upper hand. I would not allow myself to spring up as I wished, as my impulse was, but sat there doggedly, clinging to my books, to my table, fixing myself on I did not mind what, to resist the flood of sensation, of emotion, which was sweeping through me, carrying me away. I tried to continue my calculations. I tried to stir myself up with recollections of the miserable sights I had seen, the poverty, the helplessness. I tried to work myself into indignation; but all through these efforts I felt the contagion growing upon me, my mind falling into sympathy with all those straining faculties of the body, startled, excited, driven wild by something I knew not what. It was not fear. I was like a ship at sea straining and plunging against wind and tide, but I was not afraid. I am obliged to use these metaphors, otherwise I could give no explanation of my condition, seized upon against my will, and torn from all those moorings of reason to which I clung with desperation—as long as I had the strength.

When I got up from my chair at last, the battle was lost, so far as my powers of self-control were concerned. I got up, or rather was dragged up, from my seat, clutching at these material things round me as with a last effort to hold my own. But that was no longer possible; I was overcome. I stood for

a moment looking round me feebly, feeling myself begin to babble with stammering lips, which was the alternative of shrieking, and which I seemed to choose as a lesser evil. What I said was, "What am I to do?" and after a while, "What do you want me to do?" although throughout I saw no one, heard no voice, and had in reality not power enough in my dizzy and confused brain to know what I myself meant. I stood thus for a moment looking blankly round me for guidance, repeating the question, which seemed after a time to become almost mechanical. What do you want me to do? though I neither knew to whom I addressed it nor why I said it. Presently—whether in answer, whether in mere yielding of nature, I cannot tell—I became aware of a difference: not a lessening of the agitation, but a softening, as if my powers of resistance being exhausted, a gentler force, a more benignant influence, had room. I felt myself consent to whatever it was. My heart melted in the midst of the tumult; I seemed to give myself up, and move as if drawn by some one whose arm was in mine, as if softly swept along, not forcibly, but with an utter consent of all my faculties to do I knew not what, for love of I knew not whom. For love—that was how it seemed—not by force, as when I went before. But my steps took the same course: I went through the dim passages in an exaltation indescribable, and opened the door of my father's room.

He was seated there at his table as usual, the light of the lamp falling on his white hair: he looked up with some surprise at the sound of the opening door. "Phil," he said, and, with a look of wondering apprehension on his face, watched my approach. I went straight up to him, and put my hand on his shoulder. "Phil, what is the matter? What do you want with me? What is it?" he said.

"Father, I can't tell you. I come not of myself. There must be something in it, though I don't know what it is. This is the second time I have been brought to you here."

"Are you going——?" he stopped himself. The exclamation had been begun with an angry intention. He stopped, looking at me with a scared look, as if perhaps it might be true.

"Do you mean mad? I don't think so. I have no delusions that I know of. Father, think—do you know any reason why I am brought here? for some cause there must be."

I stood with my hand upon the back of his chair. His table was covered with papers, among which were several letters with the broad black border which I had before observed. I noticed this now in my excitement without any distinct associations of thoughts, for that I was not capable of; but the black border caught my eye. And I was conscious that he, too, gave a hurried glance at them, and with one hand swept them away.

"Philip," he said, pushing back his chair, "you must be ill, my poor boy. Evidently

we have not been treating you rightly: you have been more ill all through than I supposed. Let me persuade you to go to bed."

"I am perfectly well," I said. "Father, don't let us deceive one another. I am neither a man to go mad nor to see ghosts. What it is that has got the command over me I can't tell: but there is some cause for it. You are doing something or planning something with which I have a right to interfere."

He turned round squarely in his chair with a spark in his blue eyes. He was not a man to be meddled with. "I have yet to learn what can give my son a right to interfere. I am in possession of all my faculties, I hope."

"Father," I cried, "won't you listen to me? no one can say I have been undutiful or disrespectful. I am a man, with a right to speak my mind, and I have done so; but this is different. I am not here by my own will. Something that is stronger than I has brought me. There is something in your mind which disturbs—others. I don't know what I am saying. This is not what I meant to say: but you know the meaning better than I. Some one—who can speak to you only by me—speaks to you by me; and I know that you understand."

He gazed up at me, growing pale, and his under lip fell. I, for my part, felt that my message was delivered. My heart sank into a stillness so sudden that it made me faint. The light swam in my eyes: everything went

round with me. I kept upright only by my hold upon the chair; and in the sense of utter weakness that followed, I dropped on my knees I think first, then on the nearest seat that presented itself, and covering my face with my hands, had hard ado not to sob, in the sudden removal of that strange influence, the relaxation of the strain.

There was silence between us for some time; then he said, but with a voice slightly broken, "I don't understand you, Phil. You must have taken some fancy into your mind which my slower intelligence—— Speak out what you want to say. What do you find fault with? Is it all—all that woman Jordan?"

He gave a short forced laugh as he broke off, and shook me almost roughly by the shoulder, saying, "Speak out! what—what do you want to say?"

"It seems, sir, that I have said everything." My voice trembled more than his, but not in the same way. "I have told you that I did not come by my own will—quite otherwise. I resisted as long as I could: now all is said. It is for you to judge whether it was worth the trouble or not."

He got up from his seat in a hurried way. "You would have me as—mad as yourself," he said, then sat down again as quickly. "Come, Phil: if it will please you, not to make a breach, the first breach, between us, you shall have your way. I consent to your looking into that matter about the poor tenants.

Your mind shall not be upset about that, even though I don't enter into all your views."

"Thank you," I said; "but, father, that is not what it is."

"Then it is a piece of folly," he said, angrily. "I suppose you mean—but this is a matter in which I choose to judge for myself."

"You know what I mean," I said, as quietly as I could, "though I don't myself know; that proves there is good reason for it. Will you do one thing for me before I leave you? Come with me into the drawing-room——"

"What end," he said, with again the tremble in his voice, "is to be served by that?"

"I don't very well know; but to look at her, you and I together, will always do something for us, sir. As for breach, there can be no breach when we stand there."

He got up, trembling like an old man, which he was, but which he never looked like save at moments of emotion like this, and told me to take the light; then stopped when he had got half-way across the room. "This is a piece of theatrical sentimentality," he said. "No, Phil, I will not go. I will not bring her into any such—— Put down the lamp, and if you will take my advice, go to bed."

"At least," I said, "I will trouble you no more, father, to-night. So long as you understand, there need be no more to say."

He gave me a very curt "good-night," and turned back to his papers—the letters with the black edge, either by my imagination or in

reality, always keeping uppermost. I went to my own room for my lamp, and then alone proceeded to the silent shrine in which the portrait hung. I at least would look at her to-night. I don't know whether I asked myself, in so many words, if it were she who—or if it was any one—I knew nothing; but my heart was drawn with a softness—born, perhaps, of the great weakness in which I was left after that visitation—to her, to look at her, to see perhaps if there was any sympathy, any approval in her face. I set down my lamp on the table where her little work-basket still was: the light threw a gleam upward upon her,—she seemed more than ever to be stepping into the room, coming down towards me, coming back to her life. Ah no! her life was lost and vanished: all mine stood between her and the days she knew. She looked at me with eyes that did not change. The anxiety I had seen at first seemed now a wistful subdued question; but that difference was not in her look but in mine.

I need not linger on the intervening time. The doctor who attended us usually, came in next day "by accident," and we had a long conversation. On the following day a very impressive yet genial gentleman from town lunched with us—a friend of my father's, Dr Something; but the introduction was hurried, and I did not catch his name. He, too, had

a long talk with me afterwards—my father being called away to speak to some one on business. Dr —— drew me out on the subject of the dwellings of the poor. He said he heard I took great interest in this question, which had come so much to the front at the present moment. He was interested in it too, and wanted to know the view I took. I explained at considerable length that my view did not concern the general subject, on which I had scarcely thought, so much as the individual mode of management of my father's estate. He was a most patient and intelligent listener, agreeing with me on some points, differing in others; and his visit was very pleasant. I had no idea until after of its special object: though a certain puzzled look and slight shake of the head when my father returned, might have thrown some light upon it. The report of the medical experts in my case must, however, have been quite satisfactory, for I heard nothing more of them. It was, I think, a fortnight later when the next and last of these strange experiences came.

This time it was morning, about noon,—a wet and rather dismal spring day. The half-spread leaves seemed to tap at the window, with an appeal to be taken in; the primroses, that showed golden upon the grass at the roots of the trees, just beyond the smooth-shorn grass of the lawn, were all drooped and sodden among their sheltering leaves. The very growth seemed dreary—the sense of spring in the air making

the feeling of winter a grievance, instead of the natural effect which it had conveyed a few months before. I had been writing letters, and was cheerful enough, going back among the associates of my old life, with, perhaps, a little longing for its freedom and independence, but at the same time a not ungrateful consciousness that for the moment my present tranquillity might be best.

This was my condition—a not unpleasant one—when suddenly the now well-known symptoms of the visitation to which I had become subject suddenly seized upon me,—the leap of the heart; the sudden, causeless, overwhelming physical excitement, which I could neither ignore nor allay. I was terrified beyond description, beyond reason, when I became conscious that this was about to begin over again: what purpose did it answer, what good was in it? My father indeed understood the meaning of it, though I did not understand: but it was little agreeable to be thus made a helpless instrument without any will of mine, in an operation of which I knew nothing; and to enact the part of the oracle unwillingly, with suffering and such a strain as it took me days to get over. I resisted, not as before, but yet desperately, trying with better knowledge to keep down the growing passion. I hurried to my room and swallowed a dose of a sedative which had been given me to procure sleep on my first return from India. I saw Morpheus in the hall, and called him to talk to him, and cheat myself,

if possible, by that means. Morpew lingered, however, and, before he came, I was beyond conversation. I heard him speak, his voice coming vaguely through the turmoil which was already in my ears, but what he said I have never known. I stood staring, trying to recover my power of attention, with an aspect which ended by completely frightening the man. He cried out at last that he was sure I was ill, that he must bring me something; which words penetrated more or less into my maddened brain. It became impressed upon me that he was going to get some one—one of my father's doctors, perhaps—to prevent me from acting, to stop my interference,—and that if I waited a moment longer I might be too late. A vague idea seized me at the same time, of taking refuge with the portrait—going to its feet, throwing myself there, perhaps, till the paroxysm should be over. But it was not there that my footsteps were directed. I can remember making an effort to open the door of the drawing-room, and feeling myself swept past it, as if by a gale of wind. It was not there that I had to go. I knew very well where I had to go,—once more on my confused and voiceless mission to my father, who understood, although I could not understand.

Yet as it was daylight, and all was clear, I could not help noting one or two circumstances on my way. I saw some one sitting in the hall as if waiting—a woman, a girl, a black-shrouded figure, with a thick veil over her face: and asked

myself who she was, and what she wanted there? This question, which had nothing to do with my present condition, somehow got into my mind, and was tossed up and down upon the tumultuous tide like a stray log on the breast of a fiercely rolling stream, now submerged, now coming uppermost, at the mercy of the waters. It did not stop me for a moment, as I hurried towards my father's room, but it got upon the current of my mind. I flung open my father's door, and closed it again after me, without seeing who was there or how he was engaged. The full clearness of the daylight did not identify him as the lamp did at night. He looked up at the sound of the door, with a glance of apprehension; and rising suddenly, interrupting some one who was standing speaking to him with much earnestness and even vehemence, came forward to meet me. "I cannot be disturbed at present," he said quickly; "I am busy." Then seeing the look in my face, which by this time he knew, he too changed colour. "Phil," he said, in a low, imperative voice, "wretched boy, go away—go away; don't let a stranger see you——"

"I can't go away," I said. "It is impossible. You know why I have come. I cannot, if I would. It is more powerful than I——"

"Go, sir," he said; "go at once—no more of this folly. I will not have you in this room. Go—go!"

I made no answer. I don't know that I could have done so. There had never been

any struggle between us before ; but I had no power to do one thing or another. The tumult within me was in full career. I heard indeed what he said, and was able to reply ; but his words, too, were like straws tossed upon the tremendous stream. I saw now with my feverish eyes who the other person present was. It was a woman, dressed also in mourning similar to the one in the hall ; but this a middle-aged woman, like a respectable servant. She had been crying, and in the pause caused by this encounter between my father and myself, dried her eyes with a handkerchief, which she rolled like a ball in her hand, evidently in strong emotion. She turned and looked at me as my father spoke to me, for a moment with a gleam of hope, then falling back into her former attitude.

My father returned to his seat. He was much agitated too, though doing all that was possible to conceal it. My inopportune arrival was evidently a great and unlooked-for vexation to him. He gave me the only look of passionate displeasure I have ever had from him, as he sat down again : but he said nothing more.

"You must understand," he said, addressing the woman, "that I have said my last words on this subject. I don't choose to enter into it again in the presence of my son, who is not well enough to be made a party to any discussion. I am sorry that you should have had so much trouble in vain ; but you were warned beforehand, and you have only yourself to

blame. I acknowledge no claim, and nothing you can say will change my resolution. I must beg you to go away. All this is very painful and quite useless. I acknowledge no claim."

"Oh, sir," she cried, her eyes beginning once more to flow, her speech interrupted by little sobs. "Maybe I did wrong to speak of a claim. I'm not educated to argue with a gentleman. Maybe we have no claim. But if it's not by right, oh, Mr Canning, won't you let your heart be touched by pity? She don't know what I'm saying, poor dear. She's not one to beg and pray for herself, as I'm doing for her. Oh, sir, she's so young! She's so lone in this world—not a friend to stand by her, nor a house to take her in! You are the nearest to her of any one that's left in this world. She hasn't a relation—not one so near as you——oh!" she cried, with a sudden thought, turning quickly round upon me, "this gentleman's your son! Now I think of it, it's not your relation she is, but his, through his mother! That's nearer, nearer! Oh, sir! you're young; your heart should be more tender. Here is my young lady that has no one in the world to look to her. Your own flesh and blood: your mother's cousin—your mother's——"

My father called to her to stop, with a voice of thunder. "Philip, leave us at once. It is not a matter to be discussed with you."

And then in a moment it became clear to me what it was. It had been with difficulty

that I had kept myself still. My breast was labouring with the fever of an impulse poured into me, more than I could contain. And now for the first time I knew why. I hurried towards him, and took his hand, though he resisted, into mine. Mine were burning, but his like ice: their touch burnt me with its chill, like fire. "This is what it is?" I cried. "I had no knowledge before. I don't know now what is being asked of you. But, father—understand! You know, and I know now, that some one sends me—some one—who has a right to interfere."

He pushed me away with all his might. "You are mad," he cried. "What right have you to think——? Oh, you are mad—mad! I have seen it coming on——"

The woman, the petitioner, had grown silent, watching this brief conflict with the terror and interest with which women watch a struggle between men. She started and fell back when she heard what he said, but did not take her eyes off me, following every movement I made. When I turned to go away, a cry of indescribable disappointment and remonstrance burst from her, and even my father raised himself up and stared at my withdrawal, astonished to find that he had overcome me so soon and easily. I paused for a moment, and looked back on them, seeing them large and vague through the mist of fever. "I am not going away," I said. "I am going for another messenger—one you can't gainsay."

My father rose. He called out to me threateningly, "I will have nothing touched that is hers. Nothing that is hers shall be profaned——"

I waited to hear no more: I knew what I had to do. By what means it was conveyed to me I cannot tell; but the certainty of an influence which no one thought of calmed me in the midst of my fever. I went out into the hall, where I had seen the young stranger waiting. I went up to her and touched her on the shoulder. She rose at once, with a little movement of alarm, yet with docile and instant obedience, as if she had expected the summons. I made her take off her veil and her bonnet, scarcely looking at her, scarcely seeing her, knowing how it was: I took her soft, small, cool, yet trembling hand into mine; it was so soft and cool, not cold, it refreshed me with its tremulous touch. All through I moved and spoke like a man in a dream, swiftly, noiselessly, all the complications of waking life removed, without embarrassment, without reflection, without the loss of a moment. My father was still standing up, leaning a little forward as he had done when I withdrew, threatening, yet terror-stricken, not knowing what I might be about to do, when I returned with my companion. That was the one thing he had not thought of. He was entirely undefended, unprepared. He gave her one look, flung up his arms above his head, and uttered a distracted cry, so wild that

it seemed the last outcry of nature—"Agnes!" then fell back like a sudden ruin, upon himself, into his chair.

I had no leisure to think how he was, or whether he could hear what I said. I had my message to deliver. "Father," I said, labouring with my panting breath, "it is for this that heaven has opened, and one whom I never saw, one whom I know not, has taken possession of me. Had we been less earthly we should have seen her—herself, and not merely her image. I have not even known what she meant. I have been as a fool without understanding. This is the third time I have come to you with her message, without knowing what to say. But now I have found it out. This is her message. I have found it out at last."

There was an awful pause—a pause in which no one moved or breathed. Then there came a broken voice out of my father's chair. He had not understood, though I think he heard what I said. He put out two feeble hands. "Phil—I think I am dying—has she—has she come for me?" he said.

We had to carry him to his bed. What struggles he had gone through before I cannot tell. He had stood fast, and had refused to be moved, and now he fell—like an old tower, like an old tree. The necessity there was for thinking of him saved me from the physical consequences which had prostrated me on a former occasion. I had no leisure now for any consciousness of how matters went with myself.

His delusion was not wonderful, but most natural. She was clothed in black from head to foot, instead of the white dress of the portrait. She had no knowledge of the conflict, of nothing but that she was called for, that her fate might depend on the next few minutes. In her eyes there was a pathetic question, a line of anxiety in the lids, an innocent appeal in the looks. And the face the same: the same lips, sensitive, ready to quiver; the same innocent, candid brow; the look of a common race, which is more subtle than mere resemblance. How I knew that it was so, I cannot tell, nor any man. It was the other—the elder—ah no! not elder; the ever young, the Agnes to whom age can never come—she who they say was the mother of a man who never saw her—it was she who led her kinswoman, her representative, into our hearts.

My father recovered after a few days: he had taken cold, it was said, the day before—and naturally, at seventy, a small matter is enough to upset the balance even of a strong man. He got quite well; but he was willing enough afterwards to leave the management of that ticklish kind of property which involves human wellbeing in my hands, who could move about more freely, and see with my own eyes how things were going on. He liked home better, and had more pleasure in his per-

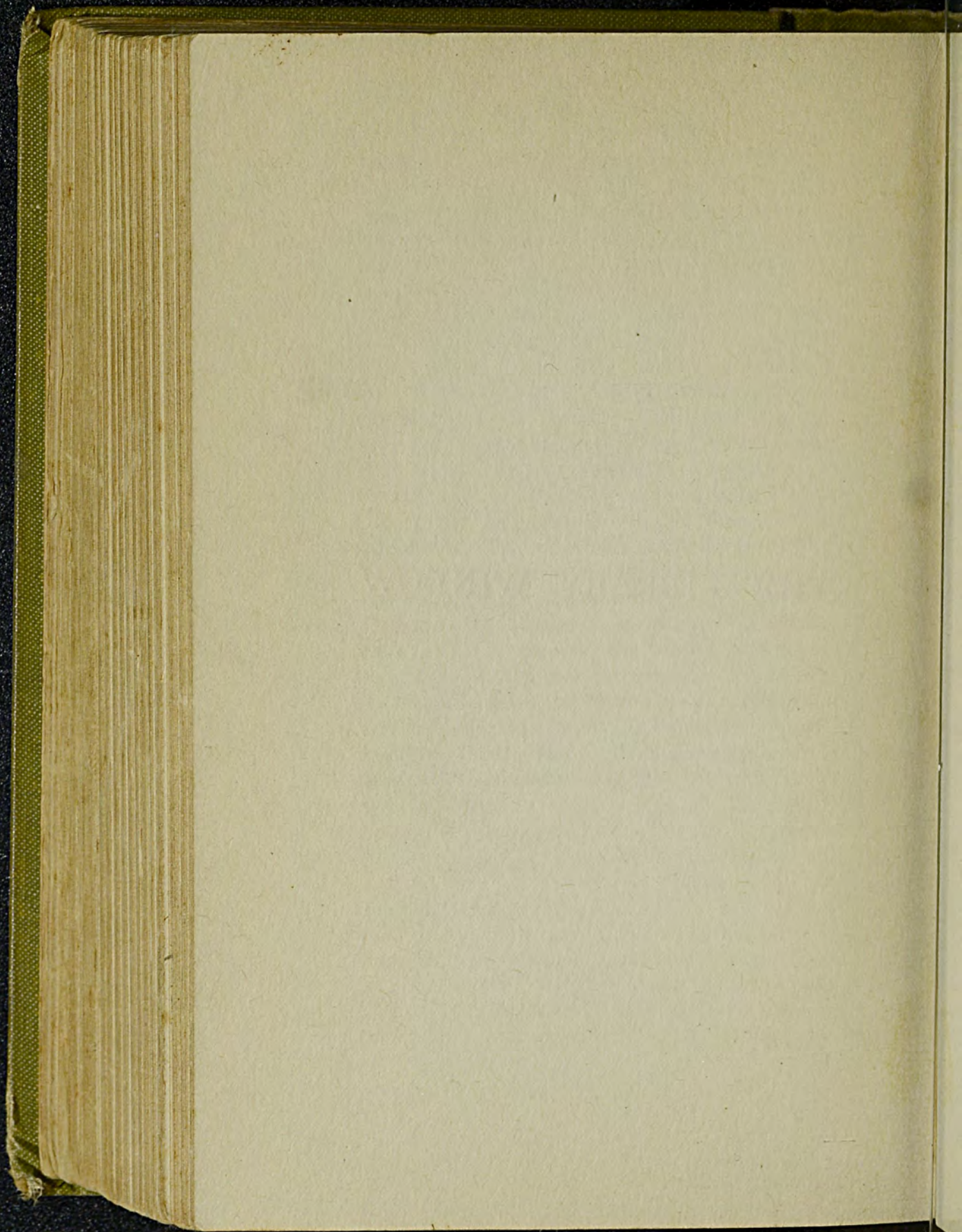
sonal existence in the end of his life. Agnes is now my wife, as he had, of course, foreseen. It was not merely the disinclination to receive her father's daughter, or to take upon him a new responsibility, that had moved him, to do him justice. But both these motives had told strongly. I have never been told, and now will never be told, what his griefs against my mother's family, and specially against that cousin, had been; but that he had been very determined, deeply prejudiced, there can be no doubt. It turned out after, that the first occasion on which I had been mysteriously commissioned to him with a message which I did not understand, and which for that time he did not understand, was the evening of the day on which he had received the dead man's letter, appealing to him—to him, a man whom he had wronged—on behalf of the child who was about to be left friendless in the world. The second time, further letters, from the nurse who was the only guardian of the orphan, and the chaplain of the place where her father had died, taking it for granted that my father's house was her natural refuge—had been received. The third I have already described, and its results.

For a long time after, my mind was never without a lurking fear that the influence which had once taken possession of me might return again. Why should I have feared to be influenced—to be the messenger of a blessed creature, whose wishes could be nothing but

heavenly? Who can say? Flesh and blood is not made for such encounters: they were more than I could bear. But nothing of the kind has ever occurred again.

Agnes had her peaceful domestic throne established under the picture. My father wished it to be so, and spent his evenings there in the warmth and light, instead of in the old library, in the narrow circle cleared by our lamp out of the darkness, as long as he lived. It is supposed by strangers that the picture on the wall is that of my wife; and I have always been glad that it should be so supposed. She who was my mother, who came back to me and became as my soul for three strange moments and no more, but with whom I can feel no credible relationship as she stands there, has retired for me into the tender regions of the unseen. She has passed once more into the secret company of those shadows, who can only become real in an atmosphere fitted to modify and harmonise all differences; and make all wonders possible—the light of the perfect day.

THE LIBRARY WINDOW



THE LIBRARY WINDOW.

I.

I WAS not aware at first of the many discussions which had gone on about that window. It was almost opposite one of the windows of the large old-fashioned drawing-room of the house in which I spent that summer, which was of so much importance in my life. Our house and the library were on opposite sides of the broad High Street of St Rule's, which is a fine street, wide and ample, and very quiet, as strangers think who come from noisier places; but in a summer evening there is much coming and going, and the stillness is full of sound—the sound of footsteps and pleasant voices, softened by the summer air. There are even exceptional moments when it is noisy: the time of the fair, and on Saturday night sometimes, and when there are excursion trains. Then even the softest sunny air of the evening will not smooth the harsh tones and the stumbling steps; but

at these unlovely moments we shut the windows, and even I, who am so fond of that deep recess where I can take refuge from all that is going on inside, and make myself a spectator of all the varied story out of doors, withdraw from my watch-tower. To tell the truth, there never was very much going on inside. The house belonged to my aunt, to whom (she says, Thank God!) nothing ever happens. I believe that many things have happened to her in her time; but that was all over at the period of which I am speaking, and she was old, and very quiet. Her life went on in a routine never broken. She got up at the same hour every day, and did the same things in the same rotation, day by day the same. She said that this was the greatest support in the world, and that routine is a kind of salvation. It may be so; but it is a very dull salvation, and I used to feel that I would rather have incident, whatever kind of incident it might be. But then at that time I was not old, which makes all the difference.

At the time of which I speak the deep recess of the drawing-room window was a great comfort to me. Though she was an old lady (perhaps because she was so old) she was very tolerant, and had a kind of feeling for me. She never said a word, but often gave me a smile when she saw how I had built myself up, with my books and my basket of work. I did very little work, I fear—now and then a few stitches when the spirit moved me, or when I had got well afloat in a dream, and was more

tempted to follow it out than to read my book, as sometimes happened. At other times, and if the book were interesting, I used to get through volume after volume sitting there, paying no attention to anybody. And yet I did pay a kind of attention. Aunt Mary's old ladies came in to call, and I heard them talk, though I very seldom listened; but for all that, if they had anything to say that was interesting, it is curious how I found it in my mind afterwards, as if the air had blown it to me. They came and went, and I had the sensation of their old bonnets gliding out and in, and their dresses rustling; and now and then had to jump up and shake hands with some one who knew me, and asked after my papa and mamma. Then Aunt Mary would give me a little smile again, and I slipped back to my window. She never seemed to mind. My mother would not have let me do it, I know. She would have remembered dozens of things there were to do. She would have sent me upstairs to fetch something which I was quite sure she did not want, or downstairs to carry some quite unnecessary message to the housemaid. She liked to keep me running about. Perhaps that was one reason why I was so fond of Aunt Mary's drawing-room, and the deep recess of the window, and the curtain that fell half over it, and the broad window-seat, where one could collect so many things without being found fault with for untidiness. Whenever we had anything the matter with us in

these days, we were sent to St Rule's to get up our strength. And this was my case at the time of which I am going to speak.

Everybody had said, since ever I learned to speak, that I was fantastic and fanciful and dreamy, and all the other words with which a girl who may happen to like poetry, and to be fond of thinking, is so often made uncomfortable. People don't know what they mean when they say fantastic. It sounds like Madge Wildfire or something of that sort. My mother thought I should always be busy, to keep nonsense out of my head. But really I was not at all fond of nonsense. I was rather serious than otherwise. I would have been no trouble to anybody if I had been left to myself. It was only that I had a sort of second-sight, and was conscious of things to which I paid no attention. Even when reading the most interesting book, the things that were being talked about blew in to me; and I heard what the people were saying in the streets as they passed under the window. Aunt Mary always said I could do two or indeed three things at once—both read and listen, and see. I am sure that I did not listen much, and seldom looked out, of set purpose—as some people do who notice what bonnets the ladies in the street have on; but I did hear what I couldn't help hearing, even when I was reading my book, and I did see all sorts of things, though often for a whole half-hour I might never lift my eyes.

This does not explain what I said at the

beginning, that there were many discussions about that window. It was, and still is, the last window in the row, of the College Library, which is opposite my aunt's house in the High Street. Yet it is not exactly opposite, but a little to the west, so that I could see it best from the left side of my recess. I took it calmly for granted that it was a window like any other till I first heard the talk about it which was going on in the drawing-room. "Have you never made up your mind, Mrs Balcarres," said old Mr Pitmilly, "whether that window opposite is a window or no?" He said Mistress Balcarres—and he was always called Mr Pitmilly, Morton: which was the name of his place.

"I am never sure of it, to tell the truth," said Aunt Mary, "all these years."

"Bless me!" said one of the old ladies, "and what window may that be?"

Mr Pitmilly had a way of laughing as he spoke, which did not please me; but it was true that he was not perhaps desirous of pleasing me. He said, "Oh, just the window opposite," with his laugh running through his words; "our friend can never make up her mind about it, though she has been living opposite it since——"

"You need never mind the date," said another; "the LeebRARY window! Dear me, what should it be but a window? up at that height it could not be a door."

"The question is," said my aunt, "if it is a

real window with glass in it, or if it is merely painted, or if it once was a window, and has been built up. And the oftener people look at it, the less they are able to say."

"Let me see this window," said old Lady Carnbee, who was very active and strong-minded; and then they all came crowding upon me—three or four old ladies, very eager, and Mr Pitmilly's white hair appearing over their heads, and my aunt sitting quiet and smiling behind.

"I mind the window very well," said Lady Carnbee; "ay: and so do more than me. But in its present appearance it is just like any other window; but has not been cleaned, I should say, in the memory of man."

"I see what ye mean," said one of the others. "It is just a very dead thing without any reflection in it; but I've seen as bad before."

"Ay, it's dead enough," said another, "but that's no rule; for these hizzies of women-servants in this ill age——"

"Nay, the women are well enough," said the softest voice of all, which was Aunt Mary's. "I will never let them risk their lives cleaning the outside of mine. And there are no women-servants in the Old Library: there is maybe something more in it than that."

They were all pressing into my recess, pressing upon me, a row of old faces, peering into something they could not understand. I had a sense in my mind how curious it was, the wall of old ladies in their old satin gowns all

glazed with age, Lady Carnbee with her lace about her head. Nobody was looking at me or thinking of me; but I felt unconsciously the contrast of my youngness to their oldness, and stared at them as they stared over my head at the Library window. I had given it no attention up to this time. I was more taken up with the old ladies than with the thing they were looking at.

"The framework is all right at least, I can see that, and pented black——"

"And the panes are pented black too. It's no window, Mrs Balcarres. It has been filled in, in the days of the window duties: you will mind, Leddy Carnbee."

"Mind!" said that oldest lady. "I mind when your mother was marriet, Jeanie: and that's neither the day nor yesterday. But as for the window, it's just a delusion: and that is my opinion of the matter, if you ask me."

"There's a great want of light in that muckle room at the college," said another. "If it was a window, the Leebrary would have more light."

"One thing is clear," said one of the younger ones, "it cannot be a window to see through. It may be filled in or it may be built up, but it is not a window to give light."

"And who ever heard of a window that was no to see through?" Lady Carnbee said. I was fascinated by the look on her face, which was a curious scornful look as of one who knew more than she chose to say: and then

my wandering fancy was caught by her hand as she help it up, throwing back the lace that drooped over it. Lady Carnbee's lace was the chief thing about her—heavy black Spanish lace with large flowers. Everything she wore was trimmed with it. A large veil of it hung over her old bonnet. But her hand coming out of this heavy lace was a curious thing to see. She had very long fingers, very taper, which had been much admired in her youth; and her hand was very white, or rather more than white, pale, bleached, and bloodless, with large blue veins standing up upon the back; and she wore some fine rings, among others a big diamond in an ugly old claw setting. They were too big for her, and were wound round and round with yellow silk to make them keep on: and this little cushion of silk, turned brown with long wearing, had twisted round so that it was more conspicuous than the jewels; while the big diamond blazed underneath in the hollow of her hand, like some dangerous thing hiding and sending out darts of light. The hand, which seemed to come almost to a point, with this strange ornament underneath, clutched at my half-terrified imagination. It too seemed to mean far more than was said. I felt as if it might clutch me with sharp claws, and the lurking, dazzling creature bite—with a sting that would go to the heart.

Presently, however, the circle of the old faces broke up, the old ladies returned to their seats, and Mr Pitmilly, small but very erect, stood up

in the midst of them, talking with mild authority like a little oracle among the ladies. Only Lady Carnbee always contradicted the neat, little old gentleman. She gesticulated, when she talked, like a Frenchwoman, and darted forth that hand of hers with the lace hanging over it, so that I always caught a glimpse of the lurking diamond. I thought she looked like a witch among the comfortable little group which gave such attention to everything Mr Pitmilley said.

"For my part, it is my opinion there is no window there at all," he said. "It's very like the thing that's called in scienteefic language an optical illusion. It arises generally, if I may use such a word in the presence of ladies, from a liver that is not just in the perfitt order and balance that organ demands—and then you will see things—a blue dog, I remember, was the thing in one case, and in another——"

"The man has gane gyte," said Lady Carnbee; "I mind the windows in the Auld Leebrary as long as I mind anything. Is the Leebrary itself an optical illusion too?"

"Na, na," and "No, no," said the old ladies; "a blue dogue would be a strange vagary: but the Library we have all kent from our youth," said one. "And I mind when the Assemblies were held there one year when the Town Hall was building," another said.

"It is just a great divert to me," said Aunt Mary: but what was strange was that she paused there, and said in a low tone, "now":

and then went on again, "for whoever comes to my house, there are aye discussions about that window. I have never just made up my mind about it myself. Sometimes I think it's a case of these wicked window duties, as you said, Miss Jeanie, when half the windows in our houses were blocked up to save the tax. And then, I think, it may be due to that blank kind of building like the great new buildings on the Earthen Mound in Edinburgh, where the windows are just ornaments. And then whiles I am sure I can see the glass shining when the sun catches it in the afternoon."

"You could so easily satisfy yourself, Mrs Balcarres, if you were to——"

"Give a laddie a penny to cast a stone, and see what happens," said Lady Carnbee.

"But I am not sure that I have any desire to satisfy myself," Aunt Mary said. And then there was a stir in the room, and I had to come out from my recess and open the door for the old ladies and see them downstairs, as they all went away following one another. Mr Pitmilley gave his arm to Lady Carnbee, though she was always contradicting him; and so the tea-party dispersed. Aunt Mary came to the head of the stairs with her guests in an old-fashioned gracious way, while I went down with them to see that the maid was ready at the door. When I came back Aunt Mary was still standing in the recess looking out. Returning to my seat she said, with a kind of wistful look, "Well, honey: and what is your opinion?"

"I have no opinion. I was reading my book all the time," I said.

"And so you were, honey, and no' very civil; but all the same I ken well you heard every word we said."

II.

It was a night in June; dinner was long over, and had it been winter the maids would have been shutting up the house, and my Aunt Mary preparing to go upstairs to her room. But it was still clear daylight, that daylight out of which the sun has been long gone, and which has no longer any rose reflections, but all has sunk into a pearly neutral tint—a light which is daylight yet is not day. We had taken a turn in the garden after dinner, and now we had returned to what we called our usual occupations. My aunt was reading. The English post had come in, and she had got her 'Times,' which was her great diversion. The 'Scotsman' was her morning reading, but she liked her 'Times' at night.

As for me, I too was at my usual occupation, which at that time was doing nothing. I had a book as usual, and was absorbed in it: but I was conscious of all that was going on all the same. The people strolled along the broad pavement, making remarks as they passed under the open window which came up into my story or my dream, and sometimes

made me laugh. The tone and the faint sing-song, or rather chant, of the accent, which was "a wee Fifeish," was novel to me, and associated with holiday, and pleasant; and sometimes they said to each other something that was amusing, and often something that suggested a whole story; but presently they began to drop off, the footsteps slackened, the voices died away. It was getting late, though the clear soft daylight went on and on. All through the lingering evening, which seemed to consist of interminable hours, long but not weary, drawn out as if the spell of the light and the outdoor life might never end, I had now and then, quite unawares, cast a glance at the mysterious window which my aunt and her friends had discussed, as I felt, though I dared not say it even to myself, rather foolishly. It caught my eye without any intention on my part, as I paused, as it were, to take breath, in the flowing and current of undistinguishable thoughts and things from without and within which carried me along. First it occurred to me, with a little sensation of discovery, how absurd to say it was not a window, a living window, one to see through! Why, then, had they never *seen* it, these old folk? I saw as I looked up suddenly the faint greyiness as of visible space within—a room behind, certainly—dim, as it was natural a room should be on the other side of the street—quite indefinite: yet so clear that if some one were to come to the window there would be nothing surprising

in it. For certainly there was a feeling of space behind the panes which these old half-blind ladies had disputed about whether they were glass or only fictitious panes marked on the wall. How silly! when eyes that could see could make it out in a minute. It was only a greyness at present, but it was unmistakable, a space that went back into gloom, as every room does when you look into it across a street. There were no curtains to show whether it was inhabited or not; but a room—oh, as distinctly as ever room was! I was pleased with myself, but said nothing, while Aunt Mary rustled her paper, waiting for a favourable moment to announce a discovery which settled her problem at once. Then I was carried away upon the stream again, and forgot the window, till somebody threw un-awares a word from the outer world, "I'm goin' hame; it'll soon be dark." Dark! what was the fool thinking of? it never would be dark if one waited out, wandering in the soft air for hours longer; and then my eyes, acquiring easily that new habit, looked across the way again.

Ah, now! nobody indeed had come to the window; and no light had been lighted, seeing it was still beautiful to read by—a still, clear, colourless light; but the room inside had certainly widened. I could see the grey space and air a little deeper, and a sort of vision, very dim, of a wall, and something against it; something dark, with the blackness that a solid

article, however indistinctly seen, takes in the lighter darkness that is only space—a large, black, dark thing coming out into the grey. I looked more intently, and made sure it was a piece of furniture, either a writing-table or perhaps a large bookcase. No doubt it must be the last, since this was part of the old library. I never visited the old College Library, but I had seen such places before, and I could well imagine it to myself. How curious that for all the time these old people had looked at it, they had never seen this before!

It was more silent now, and my eyes, I suppose, had grown dim with gazing, doing my best to make it out, when suddenly Aunt Mary said, "Will you ring the bell, my dear? I must have my lamp."

"Your lamp?" I cried, "when it is still daylight." But then I gave another look at my window, and perceived with a start that the light had indeed changed: for now I saw nothing. It was still light, but there was so much change in the light that my room, with the grey space and the large shadowy bookcase, had gone out, and I saw them no more: for even a Scotch night in June, though it looks as if it would never end, does darken at the last. I had almost cried out, but checked myself, and rang the bell for Aunt Mary, and made up my mind I would say nothing till next morning, when to be sure naturally it would be more clear.

Next morning I rather think I forgot all about it—or was busy: or was more idle than usual: the two things meant nearly the same. At all events I thought no more of the window, though I still sat in my own, opposite to it, but occupied with some other fancy. Aunt Mary's visitors came as usual in the afternoon; but their talk was of other things, and for a day or two nothing at all happened to bring back my thoughts into this channel. It might be nearly a week before the subject came back, and once more it was old Lady Carnbee who set me thinking; not that she said anything upon that particular theme. But she was the last of my aunt's afternoon guests to go away, and when she rose to leave she threw up her hands, with those lively gesticulations which so many old Scotch ladies have. "My faith!" said she, "there is that bairn there still like a dream. Is the creature bewitched, Mary Balcarres? and is she bound to sit there by night and by day for the rest of her days? You should mind that there's things about, uncanny for women of our blood."

I was too much startled at first to recognise that it was of me she was speaking. She was like a figure in a picture, with her pale face the colour of ashes, and the big pattern of the Spanish lace hanging half over it, and her hand held up, with the big diamond blazing at me from the inside of her uplifted palm. It was held up in surprise, but it looked as if it were raised in malediction; and the diamond threw

out darts of light and glared and twinkled at me. If it had been in its right place it would not have mattered; but there, in the open of the hand! I started up, half in terror, half in wrath. And then the old lady laughed, and her hand dropped. "I've wakened you to life, and broke the spell," she said, nodding her old head at me, while the large black silk flowers of the lace waved and threatened. And she took my arm to go downstairs, laughing and bidding me be steady, and no' tremble and shake like a broken reed. "You should be as steady as a rock at your age. I was like a young tree," she said, leaning so heavily that my willowy girlish frame quivered—"I was a support to virtue, like Pamela, in my time."

"Aunt Mary, Lady Carnbee is a witch!" I cried, when I came back.

"Is that what you think, honey? well: maybe she once was," said Aunt Mary, whom nothing surprised.

And it was that night once more after dinner, and after the post came in, and the 'Times,' that I suddenly saw the Library window again. I had seen it every day—and noticed nothing; but to-night, still in a little tumult of mind over Lady Carnbee and her wicked diamond which wished me harm, and her lace which waved threats and warnings at me, I looked across the street, and there I saw quite plainly the room opposite, far more clear than before. I saw dimly that it must be a large room, and

that the big piece of furniture against the wall was a writing-desk. That in a moment, when first my eyes rested upon it, was quite clear: a large old-fashioned *escritoire*, standing out into the room: and I knew by the shape of it that it had a great many pigeon-holes and little drawers in the back, and a large table for writing. There was one just like it in my father's library at home. It was such a surprise to see it all so clearly that I closed my eyes, for the moment almost giddy, wondering how papa's desk could have come here—and then when I reminded myself that this was nonsense, and that there were many such writing-tables besides papa's, and looked again—lo! it had all become quite vague and indistinct as it was at first; and I saw nothing but the blank window, of which the old ladies could never be certain whether it was filled up to avoid the window-tax, or whether it had ever been a window at all.

This occupied my mind very much, and yet I did not say anything to Aunt Mary. For one thing, I rarely saw anything at all in the early part of the day; but then that is natural: you can never see into a place from outside, whether it is an empty room or a looking-glass, or people's eyes, or anything else that is mysterious, in the day. It has, I suppose, something to do with the light. But in the evening in June in Scotland—then is the time to see. For it is daylight, yet it is not day, and there is a quality in it which I cannot

describe, it is so clear, as if every object was a reflection of itself.

I used to see more and more of the room as the days went on. The large *escritoire* stood out more and more into the space: with sometimes white glimmering things, which looked like papers, lying on it: and once or twice I was sure I saw a pile of books on the floor close to the writing-table, as if they had gilding upon them in broken specks, like old books. It was always about the time when the lads in the street began to call to each other that they were going home, and sometimes a shriller voice would come from one of the doors, bidding somebody to "cry upon the laddies" to come back to their suppers. That was always the time I saw best, though it was close upon the moment when the veil seemed to fall and the clear radiance became less living, and all the sounds died out of the street, and Aunt Mary said in her soft voice, "Honey! will you ring for the lamp?" She said honey as people say darling: and I think it is a prettier word.

Then finally, while I sat one evening with my book in my hand, looking straight across the street, not distracted by anything, I saw a little movement within. It was not any one visible—but everybody must know what it is to see the stir in the air, the little disturbance—you cannot tell what it is, but that it indicates some one there, even though you can see no one. Perhaps it is a shadow making just one flicker

in the still place. You may look at an empty room and the furniture in it for hours, and then suddenly there will be the flicker, and you know that something has come into it. It might only be a dog or a cat; it might be, if that were possible, a bird flying across; but it is some one, something living, which is so different, so completely different, in a moment from the things that are not living. It seemed to strike right through me, and I gave a little cry. Then Aunt Mary stirred a little, and put down the huge newspaper that almost covered her from sight, and said, "What is it, honey?" I cried "Nothing," with a little gasp, quickly, for I did not want to be disturbed just at this moment when somebody was coming! But I suppose she was not satisfied, for she got up and stood behind to see what it was, putting her hand on my shoulder. It was the softest touch in the world, but I could have flung it off angrily: for that moment everything was still again, and the place grew grey and I saw no more.

"Nothing," I repeated, but I was so vexed I could have cried. "I told you it was nothing, Aunt Mary. Don't you believe me, that you come to look—and spoil it all!"

I did not mean of course to say these last words; they were forced out of me. I was so much annoyed to see it all melt away like a dream: for it was no dream, but as real as—as real as—myself or anything I ever saw.

She gave my shoulder a little pat with her hand. "Honey," she said, "were you looking

at something? Is't that? is't that?" "Is it what?" I wanted to say, shaking off her hand, but something in me stopped me: for I said nothing at all, and she went quietly back to her place. I suppose she must have rung the bell herself, for immediately I felt the soft flood of the light behind me, and the evening outside dimmed down, as it did every night, and I saw nothing more.

It was next day, I think, in the afternoon that I spoke. It was brought on by something she said about her fine work. "I get a mist before my eyes," she said; "you will have to learn my old lace stitches, honey—for I soon will not see to draw the threads."

"Oh, I hope you will keep your sight," I cried, without thinking what I was saying. I was then young and very matter-of-fact. I had not found out that one may mean something, yet not half or a hundredth part of what one seems to mean: and even then probably hoping to be contradicted if it is anyhow against one's self.

"My sight!" she said, looking up at me with a look that was almost angry; "there is no question of losing my sight—on the contrary, my eyes are very strong. I may not see to draw fine threads, but I see at a distance as well as ever I did—as well as you do."

"I did not mean any harm, Aunt Mary," I said. "I thought you said—— But how can your sight be as good as ever when you are in doubt about that window? I can see into the

room as clear as——” My voice wavered, for I had just looked up and across the street, and I could have sworn that there was no window at all, but only a false image of one painted on the wall.

“Ah!” she said, with a little tone of keenness and of surprise: and she half rose up, throwing down her work hastily, as if she meant to come to me: then, perhaps seeing the bewildered look on my face, she paused and hesitated—“Ay, honey!” she said, “have you got so far ben as that?”

What did she mean? Of course I knew all the old Scotch phrases as well as I knew myself; but it is a comfort to take refuge in a little ignorance, and I know I pretended not to understand whenever I was put out. “I don’t know what you mean by ‘far ben,’” I cried out, very impatient. I don’t know what might have followed, but some one just then came to call, and she could only give me a look before she went forward, putting out her hand to her visitor. It was a very soft look, but anxious, and as if she did not know what to do: and she shook her head a very little, and I thought, though there was a smile on her face, there was something wet about her eyes. I retired into my recess, and nothing more was said.

But it was very tantalising that it should fluctuate so; for sometimes I saw that room quite plain and clear—quite as clear as I could see papa’s library, for example, when I shut my

eyes. I compared it naturally to my father's study, because of the shape of the writing-table, which, as I tell you, was the same as his. At times I saw the papers on the table quite plain, just as I had seen his papers many a day. And the little pile of books on the floor at the foot—not ranged regularly in order, but put down one above the other, with all their angles going different ways, and a speck of the old gilding shining here and there. And then again at other times I saw nothing, absolutely nothing, and was no better than the old ladies who had peered over my head, drawing their eyelids together, and arguing that the window had been shut up because of the old long-abolished window tax, or else that it had never been a window at all. It annoyed me very much at those dull moments to feel that I too puckered up my eyelids and saw no better than they.

Aunt Mary's old ladies came and went day after day while June went on. I was to go back in July, and I felt that I should be very unwilling indeed to leave until I had quite cleared up—as I was indeed in the way of doing—the mystery of that window which changed so strangely and appeared quite a different thing, not only to different people, but to the same eyes at different times. Of course I said to myself it must simply be an effect of the light. And yet I did not quite like that explanation either, but would have been better pleased to make out to myself that

it was some superiority in me which made it so clear to me, if it were only the great superiority of young eyes over old—though that was not quite enough to satisfy me, seeing it was a superiority which I shared with every little lass and lad in the street. I rather wanted, I believe, to think that there was some particular insight in me which gave clearness to my sight—which was a most impertinent assumption, but really did not mean half the harm it seems to mean when it is put down here in black and white. I had several times again, however, seen the room quite plain, and made out that it was a large room, with a great picture in a dim gilded frame hanging on the farther wall, and many other pieces of solid furniture making a blackness here and there, besides the great escritoire against the wall, which had evidently been placed near the window for the sake of the light. One thing became visible to me after another, till I almost thought I should end by being able to read the old lettering on one of the big volumes which projected from the others and caught the light; but this was all preliminary to the great event which happened about Midsummer Day—the day of St John, which was once so much thought of as a festival, but now means nothing at all in Scotland any more than any other of the saints' days: which I shall always think a great pity and loss to Scotland, whatever Aunt Mary may say.

III.

It was about midsummer, I cannot say exactly to a day when, but near that time, when the great event happened. I had grown very well acquainted by this time with that large dim room. Not only the *escritoire*, which was very plain to me now, with the papers upon it, and the books at its foot, but the great picture that hung against the farther wall, and various other shadowy pieces of furniture, especially a chair which one evening I saw had been moved into the space before the *escritoire*,—a little change which made my heart beat, for it spoke so distinctly of some one who must have been there, the some one who had already made me start, two or three times before, by some vague shadow of him or thrill of him which made a sort of movement in the silent space: a movement which made me sure that next minute I must see something or hear something which would explain the whole—if it were not that something always happened outside to stop it, at the very moment of its accomplishment. I had no warning this time of movement or shadow. I had been looking into the room very attentively a little while before, and had made out everything almost clearer than ever; and then had bent my attention again on my book, and read a chapter or two at a most exciting period of the story: and consequently

had quite left St Rule's, and the High Street, and the College Library, and was really in a South American forest, almost throttled by the flowery creepers, and treading softly lest I should put my foot on a scorpion or a dangerous snake. At this moment something suddenly calling my attention to the outside, I looked across, and then, with a start, sprang up, for I could not contain myself. I don't know what I said, but enough to startle the people in the room, one of whom was old Mr Pitmilly. They all looked round upon me to ask what was the matter. And when I gave my usual answer of "Nothing," sitting down again shamefaced but very much excited, Mr Pitmilly got up and came forward, and looked out, apparently to see what was the cause. He saw nothing, for he went back again, and I could hear him telling Aunt Mary not to be alarmed, for Missy had fallen into a doze with the heat, and had startled herself waking up, at which they all laughed: another time I could have killed him for his impertinence, but my mind was too much taken up now to pay any attention. My head was throbbing and my heart beating. I was in such high excitement, however, that to restrain myself completely, to be perfectly silent, was more easy to me then than at any other time of my life. I waited until the old gentleman had taken his seat again, and then I looked back. Yes, there he was! I had not been deceived. I knew then, when I looked across, that this was

what I had been looking for all the time—that I had known he was there, and had been waiting for him, every time there was that flicker of movement in the room—him and no one else. And there at last, just as I had expected, he was. I don't know that in reality I ever had expected him, or any one: but this was what I felt when, suddenly looking into that curious dim room, I saw him there.

He was sitting in the chair, which he must have placed for himself, or which some one else in the dead of night when nobody was looking must have set for him, in front of the *escritoire*—with the back of his head towards me, writing. The light fell upon him from the left hand, and therefore upon his shoulders and the side of his head, which, however, was too much turned away to show anything of his face. Oh, how strange that there should be some one staring at him as I was doing, and he never to turn his head, to make a movement! If any one stood and looked at me, were I in the soundest sleep that ever was, I would wake, I would jump up, I would feel it through everything. But there he sat and never moved. You are not to suppose, though I said the light fell upon him from the left hand, that there was very much light. There never is in a room you are looking into like that across the street; but there was enough to see him by—the outline of his figure dark and solid, seated in the chair, and the fairness of his head visible faintly, a clear spot against the

dimness. I saw this outline against the dim gilding of the frame of the large picture which hung on the farther wall.

I sat all the time the visitors were there, in a sort of rapture, gazing at this figure. I knew no reason why I should be so much moved. In an ordinary way, to see a student at an opposite window quietly doing his work might have interested me a little, but certainly it would not have moved me in any such way. It is always interesting to have a glimpse like this of an unknown life—to see so much and yet know so little, and to wonder, perhaps, what the man is doing, and why he never turns his head. One would go to the window—but not too close, lest he should see you and think you were spying upon him—and one would ask, Is he still there? is he writing, writing always? I wonder what he is writing! And it would be a great amusement: but no more. This was not my feeling at all in the present case. It was a sort of breathless watch, an absorption. I did not feel that I had eyes for anything else, or any room in my mind for another thought. I no longer heard, as I generally did, the stories and the wise remarks (or foolish) of Aunt Mary's old ladies or Mr Pitmilly. I heard only a murmur behind me, the interchange of voices, one softer, one sharper; but it was not as in the time when I sat reading and heard every word, till the story in my book, and the stories they were telling (what they said almost always shaped into

stories), were all mingled into each other, and the hero in the novel became somehow the hero (or more likely heroine) of them all. But I took no notice of what they were saying now. And it was not that there was anything very interesting to look at, except the fact that he was there. He did nothing to keep up the absorption of my thoughts. He moved just so much as a man will do when he is very busily writing, thinking of nothing else. There was a faint turn of his head as he went from one side to another of the page he was writing; but it appeared to be a long long page which never wanted turning. Just a little inclination when he was at the end of the line, outward, and then a little inclination inward when he began the next. That was little enough to keep one gazing. But I suppose it was the gradual course of events leading up to this, the finding out of one thing after another as the eyes got accustomed to the vague light: first the room itself, and then the writing-table, and then the other furniture, and last of all the human inhabitant who gave it all meaning. This was all so interesting that it was like a country which one had discovered. And then the extraordinary blindness of the other people who disputed among themselves whether it was a window at all! I did not, I am sure, wish to be disrespectful, and I was very fond of my Aunt Mary, and I liked Mr Pitmilly well enough, and I was afraid of Lady Carnbee. But yet to think of the—I know I ought not

to say stupidity—the blindness of them, the foolishness, the insensibility! discussing it as if a thing that your eyes could see was a thing to discuss! It would have been unkind to think it was because they were old and their faculties dimmed. It is so sad to think that the faculties grow dim, that such a woman as my Aunt Mary should fail in seeing, or hearing, or feeling, that I would not have dwelt on it for a moment, it would have seemed so cruel! And then such a clever old lady as Lady Carnbee, who could see through a millstone, people said—and Mr Pitmilly, such an old man of the world. It did indeed bring tears to my eyes to think that all those clever people, solely by reason of being no longer young as I was, should have the simplest things shut out from them; and for all their wisdom and their knowledge be unable to see what a girl like me could see so easily. I was too much grieved for them to dwell upon that thought, and half ashamed, though perhaps half proud too, to be so much better off than they.

All those thoughts flitted through my mind as I sat and gazed across the street. And I felt there was so much going on in that room across the street! He was so absorbed in his writing, never looked up, never paused for a word, never turned round in his chair, or got up and walked about the room as my father did. Papa is a great writer, everybody says: but he would have come to the window and

looked out, he would have drummed with his fingers on the pane, he would have watched a fly and helped it over a difficulty, and played with the fringe of the curtain, and done a dozen other nice, pleasant, foolish things, till the next sentence took shape. "My dear, I am waiting for a word," he would say to my mother when she looked at him, with a question why he was so idle, in her eyes; and then he would laugh, and go back again to his writing-table. But He over there never stopped at all. It was like a fascination. I could not take my eyes from him and that little scarcely perceptible movement he made, turning his head. I trembled with impatience to see him turn the page, or perhaps throw down his finished sheet on the floor, as somebody looking into a window like me once saw Sir Walter do, sheet after sheet. I should have cried out if this Unknown had done that. I should not have been able to help myself, whoever had been present; and gradually I got into such a state of suspense waiting for it to be done that my head grew hot and my hands cold. And then, just when there was a little movement of his elbow, as if he were about to do this, to be called away by Aunt Mary to see Lady Carnbee to the door! I believe I did not hear her till she had called me three times, and then I stumbled up, all flushed and hot, and nearly crying. When I came out from the recess to give the old lady my arm (Mr Pitmilley had gone away some

time before), she put up her hand and stroked my cheek. "What ails the bairn?" she said; "she's fevered. You must not let her sit her lane in the window, Mary Balcarres. You and me know what comes of that." Her old fingers had a strange touch, cold like something not living, and I felt that dreadful diamond sting me on the cheek.

I do not say that this was not just a part of my excitement and suspense; and I know it is enough to make any one laugh when the excitement was all about an unknown man writing in a room on the other side of the way, and my impatience because he never came to an end of the page. If you think I was not quite as well aware of this as any one could be! but the worst was that this dreadful old lady felt my heart beating against her arm that was within mine. "You are just in a dream," she said to me, with her old voice close at my ear as we went downstairs. "I don't know who it is about, but it's bound to be some man that is not worth it. If you were wise you would think of him no more."

"I am thinking of no man!" I said, half crying. "It is very unkind and dreadful of you to say so, Lady Carnbee. I never thought of—any man, in all my life!" I cried in a passion of indignation. The old lady clung tighter to my arm, and pressed it to her, not unkindly.

"Poor little bird," she said, "how it's strugglin' and flutterin'! I'm not saying but

what it's more dangerous when it's all for a dream."

She was not at all unkind; but I was very angry and excited, and would scarcely shake that old pale hand which she put out to me from her carriage window when I had helped her in. I was angry with her, and I was afraid of the diamond, which looked up from under her finger as if it saw through and through me; and whether you believe me or not, I am certain that it stung me again—a sharp malignant prick, oh full of meaning! She never wore gloves, but only black lace mittens, through which that horrible diamond gleamed. I ran upstairs—she had been the last to go—and Aunt Mary too had gone to get ready for dinner, for it was late. I hurried to my place, and looked across, with my heart beating more than ever. I made quite sure I should see the finished sheet lying white upon the floor. But what I gazed at was only the dim blank of that window which they said was no window. The light had changed in some wonderful way during that five minutes I had been gone, and there was nothing, nothing, not a reflection, not a glimmer. It looked exactly as they all said, the blank form of a window painted on the wall. It was too much: I sat down in my excitement and cried as if my heart would break. I felt that they had done something to it, that it was not natural, that I could not bear their unkindness—even Aunt Mary. They thought it not good

for me! not good for me! and they had done something—even Aunt Mary herself—and that wicked diamond that hid itself in Lady Carnbee's hand. Of course I knew all this was ridiculous as well as you could tell me; but I was exasperated by the disappointment and the sudden stop to all my excited feelings, and I could not bear it. It was more strong than I.

I was late for dinner, and naturally there were some traces in my eyes that I had been crying when I came into the full light in the dining-room, where Aunt Mary could look at me at her pleasure, and I could not run away. She said, "Honey, you have been shedding tears. - I'm loth, loth that a bairn of your mother's should be made to shed tears in my house."

"I have not been made to shed tears," cried I; and then, to save myself another fit of crying, I burst out laughing and said, "I am afraid of that dreadful diamond on old Lady Carnbee's hand. It bites—I am sure it bites! Aunt Mary, look here."

"You foolish lassie," Aunt Mary said; but she looked at my cheek under the light of the lamp, and then she gave it a little pat with her soft hand. "Go away with you, you silly bairn. There is no bite; but a flushed cheek, my honey, and a wet eye. You must just read out my paper to me after dinner when the post is in: and we'll have no more thinking and no more dreaming for to-night."

"Yes, Aunt Mary," said I. But I knew what would happen; for when she opens up her 'Times,' all full of the news of the world, and the speeches and things which she takes an interest in, though I cannot tell why—she forgets. And as I kept very quiet and made not a sound, she forgot to-night what she had said, and the curtain hung a little more over me than usual, and I sat down in my recess as if I had been a hundred miles away. And my heart gave a great jump, as if it would have come out of my breast; for he was there. But not as he had been in the morning—I suppose the light, perhaps, was not good enough to go on with his work without a lamp or candles—for he had turned away from the table and was fronting the window, sitting leaning back in his chair, and turning his head to me. Not to me—he knew nothing about me. I thought he was not looking at anything; but with his face turned my way. My heart was in my mouth: it was so unexpected, so strange! though why it should have seemed strange I know not, for there was no communication between him and me that it should have moved me; and what could be more natural than that a man, wearied of his work, and feeling the want perhaps of more light, and yet that it was not dark enough to light a lamp, should turn round in his own chair, and rest a little, and think—perhaps of nothing at all? Papa always says he is thinking of nothing at all. He says things blow

through his mind as if the doors were open, and he has no responsibility. What sort of things were blowing through this man's mind? or was he thinking, still thinking, of what he had been writing and going on with it still? The thing that troubled me most was that I could not make out his face. It is very difficult to do so when you see a person only through two windows, your own and his. I wanted very much to recognise him afterwards if I should chance to meet him in the street. If he had only stood up and moved about the room, I should have made out the rest of his figure, and then I should have known him again; or if he had only come to the window (as papa always did), then I should have seen his face clearly enough to have recognised him. But, to be sure, he did not see any need to do anything in order that I might recognise him, for he did not know I existed; and probably if he had known I was watching him, he would have been annoyed and gone away.

But he was as immovable there facing the window as he had been seated at the desk. Sometimes he made a little faint stir with a hand or a foot, and I held my breath, hoping he was about to rise from his chair—but he never did it. And with all the efforts I made I could not be sure of his face. I puckered my eyelids together as old Miss Jeanie did who was shortsighted, and I put my hands on each side of my face to concentrate the light

on him: but it was all in vain. Either the face changed as I sat staring, or else it was the light that was not good enough, or I don't know what it was. His hair seemed to me light—certainly there was no dark line about his head, as there would have been had it been very dark—and I saw, where it came across the old gilt frame on the wall behind, that it must be fair: and I am almost sure he had no beard. Indeed I am sure that he had no beard, for the outline of his face was distinct enough; and the daylight was still quite clear out of doors, so that I recognised perfectly a baker's boy who was on the pavement opposite, and whom I should have known again whenever I had met him: as if it was of the least importance to recognise a baker's boy! There was one thing, however, rather curious about this boy. He had been throwing stones at something or somebody. In St Rule's they have a great way of throwing stones at each other, and I suppose there had been a battle. I suppose also that he had one stone in his hand left over from the battle, and his roving eye took in all the incidents of the street to judge where he could throw it with most effect and mischief. But apparently he found nothing worthy of it in the street, for he suddenly turned round with a flick under his leg to show his cleverness, and aimed it straight at the window. I remarked without remarking that it struck with a hard sound and without any breaking of glass, and fell straight down on the

pavement. But I took no notice of this even in my mind, so intently was I watching the figure within, which moved not nor took the slightest notice, and remained just as dimly clear, as perfectly seen, yet as indistinguishable, as before. And then the light began to fail a little, not diminishing the prospect within, but making it still less distinct than it had been.

Then I jumped up, feeling Aunt Mary's hand upon my shoulder. "Honey," she said, "I asked you twice to ring the bell; but you did not hear me."

"Oh, Aunt Mary!" I cried in great penitence, but turning again to the window in spite of myself.

"You must come away from there: you must come away from there," she said, almost as if she were angry: and then her soft voice grew softer, and she gave me a kiss: "never mind about the lamp, honey; I have rung myself, and it is coming; but, silly bairn, you must not aye be dreaming—your little head will turn."

All the answer I made, for I could scarcely speak, was to give a little wave with my hand to the window on the other side of the street.

She stood there patting me softly on the shoulder for a whole minute or more, murmuring something that sounded like, "She must go away, she must go away." Then she said, always with her hand soft on my shoulder, "Like a dream when one awaketh." And

when I looked again, I saw the blank of an opaque surface and nothing more.

Aunt Mary asked me no more questions. She made me come into the room and sit in the light and read something to her. But I did not know what I was reading, for there suddenly came into my mind and took possession of it, the thud of the stone upon the window, and its descent straight down, as if from some hard substance that threw it off: though I had myself seen it strike upon the glass of the panes across the way.

IV.

I am afraid I continued in a state of great exaltation and commotion of mind for some time. I used to hurry through the day till the evening came, when I could watch my neighbour through the window opposite. I did not talk much to any one, and I never said a word about my own questions and wonderings. I wondered who he was, what he was doing, and why he never came till the evening (or very rarely); and I also wondered much to what house the room belonged in which he sat. It seemed to form a portion of the old College Library, as I have often said. The window was one of the line of windows which I understood lighted the large hall; but whether this room belonged to the library itself, or how its occupant gained access

to it, I could not tell. I made up my mind that it must open out of the hall, and that the gentleman must be the Librarian or one of his assistants, perhaps kept busy all the day in his official duties, and only able to get to his desk and do his own private work in the evening. One has heard of so many things like that—a man who had to take up some other kind of work for his living, and then when his leisure-time came, gave it all up to something he really loved—some study or some book he was writing. My father himself at one time had been like that. He had been in the Treasury all day, and then in the evening wrote his books, which made him famous. His daughter, however little she might know of other things, could not but know that! But it discouraged me very much when somebody pointed out to me one day in the street an old gentleman who wore a wig and took a great deal of snuff, and said, That's the Librarian of the old College. It gave me a great shock for a moment; but then I remembered that an old gentleman has generally assistants, and that it must be one of them.

Gradually I became quite sure of this. There was another small window above, which twinkled very much when the sun shone, and looked a very kindly bright little window, above that dulness of the other which hid so much. I made up my mind this was the window of his other room, and that these two chambers at the end of the beautiful hall were

really beautiful for him to live in, so near all the books, and so retired and quiet, that nobody knew of them. What a fine thing for him! and you could see what use he made of his good fortune as he sat there, so constant at his writing for hours together. Was it a book he was writing, or could it be perhaps Poems? This was a thought which made my heart beat; but I concluded with much regret that it could not be Poems, because no one could possibly write Poems like that, straight off, without pausing for a word or a rhyme. Had they been Poems he must have risen up, he must have paced about the room or come to the window as papa did—not that papa wrote Poems: he always said, “I am not worthy even to speak of such prevailing mysteries,” shaking his head—which gave me a wonderful admiration and almost awe of a Poet, who was thus much greater even than papa. But I could not believe that a poet could have kept still for hours and hours like that. What could it be then? perhaps it was history; that is a great thing to work at, but you would not perhaps need to move nor to stride up and down, or look out upon the sky and the wonderful light.

He did move now and then, however, though he never came to the window. Sometimes, as I have said, he would turn round in his chair and turn his face towards it, and sit there for a long time musing when the light had begun to fail, and the world was full of that strange

day which was night, that light without colour, in which everything was so clearly visible, and there were no shadows. "It was between the night and the day, when the fairy folk have power." This was the after-light of the wonderful, long, long summer evening, the light without shadows. It had a spell in it, and sometimes it made me afraid: and all manner of strange thoughts seemed to come in, and I always felt that if only we had a little more vision in our eyes we might see beautiful folk walking about in it, who were not of our world. I thought most likely he saw them, from the way he sat there looking out: and this made my heart expand with the most curious sensation, as if of pride that, though I could not see, he did, and did not even require to come to the window, as I did, sitting close in the depth of the recess, with my eyes upon him, and almost seeing things through his eyes.

I was so much absorbed in these thoughts and in watching him every evening—for now he never missed an evening, but was always there—that people began to remark that I was looking pale and that I could not be well, for I paid no attention when they talked to me, and did not care to go out, nor to join the other girls for their tennis, nor to do anything that others did; and some said to Aunt Mary that I was quickly losing all the ground I had gained, and that she could never send me back to my mother with a white face like that. Aunt Mary had begun to look at me anxiously

for some time before that, and, I am sure, held secret consultations over me, sometimes with the doctor, and sometimes with her old ladies, who thought they knew more about young girls than even the doctors. And I could hear them saying to her that I wanted diversion, that I must be diverted, and that she must take me out more, and give a party, and that when the summer visitors began to come there would perhaps be a ball or two, or Lady Carnbee would get up a picnic. "And there's my young lord coming home," said the old lady whom they called Miss Jeanie, "and I never knew the young lassie yet that would not cock up her bonnet at the sight of a young lord."

But Aunt Mary shook her head. "I would not lippen much to the young lord," she said. "His mother is sore set upon siller for him; and my poor bit honey has no fortune to speak of. No, we must not fly so high as the young lord; but I will gladly take her about the country to see the old castles and towers. It will perhaps rouse her up a little."

"And if that does not answer we must think of something else," the old lady said.

I heard them perhaps that day because they were talking of me, which is always so effective a way of making you hear—for latterly I had not been paying any attention to what they were saying; and I thought to myself how little they knew, and how little I cared about even the old castles and curious houses, having something else in my mind. But just about

that time Mr Pitmilly came in, who was always a friend to me, and, when he heard them talking, he managed to stop them and turn the conversation into another channel. And after a while, when the ladies were gone away, he came up to my recess, and gave a glance right over my head. And then he asked my Aunt Mary if ever she had settled her question about the window opposite, "that you thought was a window sometimes, and then not a window, and many curious things," the old gentleman said.

My Aunt Mary gave me another very wistful look; and then she said, "Indeed, Mr Pitmilly, we are just where we were, and I am quite as unsettled as ever; and I think my niece she has taken up my views, for I see her many a time looking across and wondering, and I am not clear now what her opinion is."

"My opinion!" I said, "Aunt Mary." I could not help being a little scornful, as one is when one is very young. "I have no opinion. There is not only a window but there is a room, and I could show you——" I was going to say, "show you the gentleman who sits and writes in it," but I stopped, not knowing what they might say, and looked from one to another. "I could tell you—all the furniture that is in it," I said. And then I felt something like a flame that went over my face, and that all at once my cheeks were burning. I thought they gave a little glance at each other, but that may have been folly. "There is a

great picture, in a big dim frame," I said, feeling a little breathless, "on the wall opposite the window——"

"Is there so?" said Mr Pitmilly, with a little laugh. And he said, "Now I will tell you what we'll do. You know that there is a conversation party, or whatever they call it, in the big room to-night, and it will be all open and lighted up. And it is a handsome room, and two-three things well worth looking at. I will just step along after we have all got our dinner, and take you over to the party, madam—Missy and you——"

"Dear me!" said Aunt Mary. "I have not gone to a party for more years than I would like to say—and never once to the Library Hall." Then she gave a little shiver, and said quite low, "I could not go there."

"Then you will just begin again to-night, madam," said Mr Pitmilly, taking no notice of this, "and a proud man will I be leading in Mistress Balcarres that was once the pride of the ball."

"Ah, once!" said Aunt Mary, with a little laugh and then a sigh. "And we'll not say how long ago;" and after that she made a pause, looking always at me: and then she said, "I accept your offer, and we'll put on our brows; and I hope you will have no occasion to think shame of us. But why not take your dinner here?"

That was how it was settled, and the old gentleman went away to dress, looking quite

pleased. But I came to Aunt Mary as soon as he was gone, and besought her not to make me go. "I like the long bonnie night and the light that lasts so long. And I cannot bear to dress up and go out, wasting it all in a stupid party. I hate parties, Aunt Mary!" I cried, "and I would far rather stay here."

"My honey," she said, taking both my hands, "I know it will maybe be a blow to you,—but it's better so."

"How could it be a blow to me?" I cried; "but I would far rather not go."

"You'll just go with me, honey, just this once: it is not often I go out. You will go with me this one night, just this one night, my honey sweet."

I am sure there were tears in Aunt Mary's eyes, and she kissed me between the words. There was nothing more that I could say; but how I grudged the evening! A mere party, a *conversazione* (when all the College was away, too, and nobody to make conversation!), instead of my enchanted hour at my window and the soft strange light, and the dim face looking out, which kept me wondering and wondering what was he thinking of, what was he looking for, who was he? all one wonder and mystery and question, through the long, long, slowly fading night!

It occurred to me, however, when I was dressing—though I was so sure that he would prefer his solitude to everything—that he might perhaps, it was just possible, be there. And

when I thought of that, I took out my white frock—though Janet had laid out my blue one—and my little pearl necklace which I had thought was too good to wear. They were not very large pearls, but they were real pearls, and very even and lustrous though they were small; and though I did not think much of my appearance then, there must have been something about me—pale as I was but apt to colour in a moment, with my dress so white, and my pearls so white, and my hair all shadowy—perhaps, that was pleasant to look at: for even old Mr Pitmilly had a strange look in his eyes, as if he was not only pleased but sorry too, perhaps thinking me a creature that would have troubles in this life, though I was so young and knew them not. And when Aunt Mary looked at me, there was a little quiver about her mouth. She herself had on her pretty lace and her white hair very nicely done, and looking her best. As for Mr Pitmilly, he had a beautiful fine French cambric frill to his shirt, plaited in the most minute plaits, and with a diamond pin in it which sparkled as much as Lady Carnbee's ring; but this was a fine frank kindly stone, that looked you straight in the face and sparkled, with the light dancing in it as if it were pleased to see you, and to be shining on that old gentleman's honest and faithful breast: for he had been one of Aunt Mary's lovers in their early days, and still thought there was nobody like her in the world.

I had got into quite a happy commotion of mind by the time we set out across the street in the soft light of the evening to the Library Hall. Perhaps, after all, I should see him, and see the room which I was so well acquainted with, and find out why he sat there so constantly and never was seen abroad. I thought I might even hear what he was working at, which would be such a pleasant thing to tell papa when I went home. A friend of mine at St Rule's—oh, far, far more busy than you ever were, papa!—and then my father would laugh as he always did, and say he was but an idler and never busy at all.

The room was all light and bright, flowers wherever flowers could be, and the long lines of the books that went along the walls on each side, lighting up wherever there was a line of gilding or an ornament, with a little response. It dazzled me at first all that light: but I was very eager, though I kept very quiet, looking round to see if perhaps in any corner, in the middle of any group, he would be there. I did not expect to see him among the ladies. He would not be with them,—he was too studious, too silent: but perhaps among that circle of grey heads at the upper end of the room—perhaps——

No: I am not sure that it was not half a pleasure to me to make quite sure that there was not one whom I could take for him, who was at all like my vague image of him. No: it was absurd to think that he would be here,

amid all that sound of voices, under the glare of that light. I felt a little proud to think that he was in his room as usual, doing his work, or thinking so deeply over it, as when he turned round in his chair with his face to the light.

I was thus getting a little composed and quiet in my mind, for now that the expectation of seeing him was over, though it was a disappointment, it was a satisfaction too—when Mr Pitmilly came up to me, holding out his arm. “Now,” he said, “I am going to take you to see the curiosities.” I thought to myself that after I had seen them and spoken to everybody I knew, Aunt Mary would let me go home, so I went very willingly, though I did not care for the curiosities. Something, however, struck me strangely as we walked up the room. It was the air, rather fresh and strong, from an open window at the east end of the hall. How should there be a window there? I hardly saw what it meant for the first moment, but it blew in my face as if there was some meaning in it, and I felt very uneasy without seeing why.

Then there was another thing that startled me. On that side of the wall which was to the street there seemed no windows at all. A long line of bookcases filled it from end to end. I could not see what that meant either, but it confused me. I was altogether confused. I felt as if I was in a strange country, not knowing where I was going, not knowing

what I might find out next. If there were no windows on the wall to the street, where was my window? My heart, which had been jumping up and calming down again all the time, gave a great leap at this, as if it would have come out of me—but I did not know what it could mean.

Then we stopped before a glass case, and Mr Pitmilley showed me some things in it. I could not pay much attention to them. My head was going round and round. I heard his voice going on, and then myself speaking with a queer sound that was hollow in my ears; but I did not know what I was saying or what he was saying. Then he took me to the very end of the room, the east end, saying something that I caught—that I was pale, that the air would do me good. The air was blowing full on me, lifting the lace of my dress, lifting my hair, almost chilly. The window opened into the pale daylight, into the little lane that ran by the end of the building. Mr Pitmilley went on talking, but I could not make out a word he said. Then I heard my own voice speaking through it, though I did not seem to be aware that I was speaking. "Where is my window?—where, then, is my window?" I seemed to be saying, and I turned right round, dragging him with me, still holding his arm. As I did this my eye fell upon something at last which I knew. It was a large picture in a broad frame, hanging against the farther wall.

What did it mean? Oh, what did it mean? I turned round again to the open window at the east end, and to the daylight, the strange light without any shadow, that was all round about this lighted hall, holding it like a bubble that would burst, like something that was not real. The real place was the room I knew, in which that picture was hanging, where the writing-table was, and where he sat with his face to the light. But where was the light and the window through which it came? I think my senses must have left me. I went up to the picture which I knew, and then I walked straight across the room, always dragging Mr Pitmilly, whose face was pale, but who did not struggle but allowed me to lead him, straight across to where the window was—where the window was not;—where there was no sign of it. “Where is my window?—where is my window?” I said. And all the time I was sure that I was in a dream, and these lights were all some theatrical illusion, and the people talking; and nothing real but the pale, pale, watching, lingering day standing by to wait until that foolish bubble should burst.

“My dear,” said Mr Pitmilly, “my dear! Mind that you are in public. Mind where you are. You must not make an outcry and frighten your Aunt Mary. Come away with me. Come away, my dear young lady! and you’ll take a seat for a minute or two and compose yourself; and I’ll get you an ice or a little wine.” He kept patting my hand,

which was on his arm, and looking at me very anxiously. "Bless me! bless me! I never thought it would have this effect," he said.

But I would not allow him to take me away in that direction. I went to the picture again and looked at it without seeing it: and then I went across the room again, with some kind of wild thought that if I insisted I should find it. "My window—my window!" I said.

There was one of the professors standing there, and he heard me. "The window!" said he. "Ah, you've been taken in with what appears outside. It was put there to be in uniformity with the window on the stair. But it never was a real window. It is just behind that bookcase. Many people are taken in by it," he said.

His voice seemed to sound from somewhere far away, and as if it would go on for ever; and the hall swam in a dazzle of shining and of noises round me; and the daylight through the open window grew greyer, waiting till it should be over, and the bubble burst.

V.

It was Mr Pitmilly who took me home; or rather it was I who took him, pushing him on a little in front of me, holding fast by his arm, not waiting for Aunt Mary or any one. We came out into the daylight again outside, I,

without even a cloak or a shawl, with my bare arms, and uncovered head, and the pearls round my neck. There was a rush of the people about, and a baker's boy, that baker's boy, stood right in my way and cried, "Here's a braw ane!" shouting to the others: the words struck me somehow, as his stone had struck the window, without any reason. But I did not mind the people staring, and hurried across the street, with Mr Pitmilly half a step in advance. The door was open, and Janet standing at it, looking out to see what she could see of the ladies in their grand dresses. She gave a shriek when she saw me hurrying across the street; but I brushed past her, and pushed Mr Pitmilly up the stairs, and took him breathless to the recess, where I threw myself down on the seat, feeling as if I could not have gone another step farther, and waved my hand across to the window. "There! there!" I cried. Ah! there it was—not that senseless mob—not the theatre and the gas, and the people all in a murmur and clang of talking. Never in all these days had I seen that room so clearly. There was a faint tone of light behind, as if it might have been a reflection from some of those vulgar lights in the hall, and he sat against it, calm, wrapped in his thoughts, with his face turned to the window. Nobody but must have seen him. Janet could have seen him had I called her upstairs. It was like a picture, all the things I knew, and the same attitude, and the atmosphere, full of quiet-

ness, not disturbed by anything. I pulled Mr Pitmilley's arm before I let him go,—“You see, you see!” I cried. He gave me the most bewildered look, as if he would have liked to cry. He saw nothing! I was sure of that from his eyes. He was an old man, and there was no vision in him. If I had called up Janet, she would have seen it all. “My dear!” he said. “My dear!” waving his hands in a helpless way.

“He has been there all these nights,” I cried, “and I thought you could tell me who he was and what he was doing; and that he might have taken me in to that room, and showed me, that I might tell papa. Papa would understand, he would like to hear. Oh, can't you tell me what work he is doing, Mr Pitmilley? He never lifts his head as long as the light throws a shadow, and then when it is like this he turns round and thinks, and takes a rest!”

Mr Pitmilley was trembling, whether it was with cold or I know not what. He said, with a shake in his voice, “My dear young lady—my dear——” and then stopped and looked at me as if he were going to cry. “It's peetiful, it's peetiful,” he said; and then in another voice, “I am going across there again to bring your Aunt Mary home; do you understand, my poor little thing, my—— I am going to bring her home—you will be better when she is here.” I was glad when he went away, as he could not see anything: and I sat alone in

the dark which was not dark, but quite clear light—a light like nothing I ever saw. How clear it was in that room! not glaring like the gas and the voices, but so quiet, everything so visible, as if it were in another world. I heard a little rustle behind me, and there was Janet, standing staring at me with two big eyes wide open. She was only a little older than I was. I called to her, “Janet, come here, come here, and you will see him,—come here and see him!” impatient that she should be so shy and keep behind. “Oh, my bonnie young leddy!” she said, and burst out crying. I stamped my foot at her, in my indignation that she would not come, and she fled before me with a rustle and swing of haste, as if she were afraid. None of them, none of them! not even a girl like myself, with the sight in her eyes, would understand. I turned back again, and held out my hands to him sitting there, who was the only one that knew. “Oh,” I said, “say something to me! I don’t know who you are, or what you are: but you’re lonely and so am I; and I only—feel for you. Say something to me!” I neither hoped that he would hear, nor expected any answer. How could he hear, with the street between us, and his window shut, and all the murmuring of the voices and the people standing about? But for one moment it seemed to me that there was only him and me in the whole world.

But I gasped with my breath, that had

almost gone from me, when I saw him move in his chair! He had heard me, though I knew not how. He rose up, and I rose too, speechless, incapable of anything but this mechanical movement. He seemed to draw me as if I were a puppet moved by his will. He came forward to the window, and stood looking across at me. I was sure that he looked at me. At last he had seen me: at last he had found out that somebody, though only a girl, was watching him, looking for him, believing in him. I was in such trouble and commotion of mind and trembling, that I could not keep on my feet, but dropped kneeling on the window-seat, supporting myself against the window, feeling as if my heart were being drawn out of me. I cannot describe his face. It was all dim, yet there was a light on it: I think it must have been a smile; and as closely as I looked at him he looked at me. His hair was fair, and there was a little quiver about his lips. Then he put his hands upon the window to open it. It was stiff and hard to move; but at last he forced it open with a sound that echoed all along the street. I saw that the people heard it, and several looked up. As for me, I put my hands together, leaning with my face against the glass, drawn to him as if I could have gone out of myself, my heart out of my bosom, my eyes out of my head. He opened the window with a noise that was heard from the West Port to the Abbey. Could any one doubt that?

And then he leaned forward out of the window, looking out. There was not one in the street but must have seen him. He looked at me first, with a little wave of his hand, as if it were a salutation—yet not exactly that either, for I thought he waved me away; and then he looked up and down in the dim shining of the ending day, first to the east, to the old Abbey towers, and then to the west, along the broad line of the street where so many people were coming and going, but so little noise, all like enchanted folk in an enchanted place. I watched him with such a melting heart, with such a deep satisfaction as words could not say; for nobody could tell me now that he was not there,—nobody could say I was dreaming any more. I watched him as if I could not breathe—my heart in my throat, my eyes upon him. He looked up and down, and then he looked back to me. I was the first, and I was the last, though it was not for long: he did know, he did see, who it was that had recognised him and sympathised with him all the time. I was in a kind of rapture, yet stupor too; my look went with his look, following it as if I were his shadow; and then suddenly he was gone, and I saw him no more.

I dropped back again upon my seat, seeking something to support me, something to lean upon. He had lifted his hand and waved it once again to me. How he went I cannot tell, nor where he went I cannot tell; but in a moment he was away, and the window standing

open, and the room fading into stillness and dimness, yet so clear, with all its space, and the great picture in its gilded frame upon the wall. It gave me no pain to see him go away. My heart was so content, and I was so worn out and satisfied—for what doubt or question could there be about him now? As I was lying back as weak as water, Aunt Mary came in behind me, and flew to me with a little rustle as if she had come on wings, and put her arms round me, and drew my head on to her breast. I had begun to cry a little, with sobs like a child. "You saw him, you saw him!" I said. To lean upon her, and feel her so soft, so kind, gave me a pleasure I cannot describe, and her arms round me, and her voice saying "Honey, my honey!"—as if she were nearly crying too. Lying there I came back to myself, quite sweetly, glad of everything. But I wanted some assurance from them that they had seen him too. I waved my hand to the window that was still standing open, and the room that was stealing away into the faint dark. "This time you saw it all?" I said, getting more eager. "My honey!" said Aunt Mary, giving me a kiss: and Mr Pitmilly began to walk about the room with short little steps behind, as if he were out of patience. I sat straight up and put away Aunt Mary's arms. "You cannot be so blind, so blind!" I cried. "Oh, not to-night, at least not to-night!" But neither the one nor the other made any reply. I shook myself quite

free, and raised myself up. And there, in the middle of the street, stood the baker's boy like a statue, staring up at the open window, with his mouth open and his face full of wonder—breathless, as if he could not believe what he saw. I darted forward, calling to him, and beckoned him to come to me. "Oh, bring him up! bring him, bring him to me!" I cried.

Mr Pitmilley went out directly, and got the boy by the shoulder. He did not want to come. It was strange to see the little old gentleman, with his beautiful frill and his diamond pin, standing out in the street, with his hand upon the boy's shoulder, and the other boys round, all in a little crowd. And presently they came towards the house, the others all following, gaping and wondering. He came in unwilling, almost resisting, looking as if we meant him some harm. "Come away, my laddie, come and speak to the young lady," Mr Pitmilley was saying. And Aunt Mary took my hands to keep me back. But I would not be kept back.

"Boy," I cried, "you saw it too: you saw it: tell them you saw it! It is that I want, and no more."

He looked at me as they all did, as if he thought I was mad. "What's she wantin' wi' me?" he said; and then, "I did nae harm, even if I did throw a bit stane at it—and it's nae sin to throw a stane."

"You rascal!" said Mr Pitmilley, giving him

a shake; "have you been throwing stones? You'll kill somebody some of these days with your stones." The old gentleman was confused and troubled, for he did not understand what I wanted, nor anything that had happened. And then Aunt Mary, holding my hands and drawing me close to her, spoke. "Laddie," she said, "answer the young lady, like a good lad. There's no intention of finding fault with you. Answer her, my man, and then Janet will give ye your supper before you go."

"Oh speak, speak!" I cried; "answer them and tell them! you saw that window opened, and the gentleman look out and wave his hand?"

"I saw nae gentleman," he said, with his head down, "except this wee gentleman here."

"Listen, laddie," said Aunt Mary. "I saw ye standing in the middle of the street staring. What were ye looking at?"

"It was naething to make a wark about. It was just yon windy yonder in the library that is nae windy. And it was open—as sure's death. You may laugh if you like. Is that a' she's wantin' wi' me?"

"You are telling a pack of lies, laddie," Mr Pitmilley said.

"I'm tellin' nae lees—it was standin' open just like ony ither windy. It's as sure's death. I couldna believe it mysel'; but it's true."

"And there it is," I cried, turning round and pointing it out to them with great triumph in my heart. But the light was all grey, it had

faded, it had changed. The window was just as it had always been, a sombre break upon the wall.

I was treated like an invalid all that evening, and taken upstairs to bed, and Aunt Mary sat up in my room the whole night through. Whenever I opened my eyes she was always sitting there close to me, watching. And there never was in all my life so strange a night. When I would talk in my excitement, she kissed me and hushed me like a child. "Oh, honey, you are not the only one!" she said. "Oh whisht, whisht, bairn! I should never have let you be there!"

"Aunt Mary, Aunt Mary, you have seen him too?"

"Oh whisht, whisht, honey!" Aunt Mary said: her eyes were shining—there were tears in them. "Oh whisht, whisht! Put it out of your mind, and try to sleep. I will not speak another word," she cried.

But I had my arms round her, and my mouth at her ear. "Who is he there?—tell me that and I will ask no more——"

"Oh honey, rest, and try to sleep! It is just—how can I tell you?—a dream, a dream! Did you not hear what Lady Carnbee said?—the women of our blood——"

"What? what? Aunt Mary, oh Aunt Mary——"

"I canna tell you," she cried in her agitation, "I canna tell you! How can I tell you, when I know just what you know and no

more? It is a longing all your life after—it is a looking—for what never comes.”

“He will come,” I cried. “I shall see him to-morrow—that I know, I know!”

She kissed me and cried over me, her cheek hot and wet like mine. “My honey, try if you can sleep—try if you can sleep: and we’ll wait to see what to-morrow brings.”

“I have no fear,” said I; and then I suppose, though it is strange to think of, I must have fallen asleep—I was so worn-out, and young, and not used to lying in my bed awake. From time to time I opened my eyes, and sometimes jumped up remembering everything; but Aunt Mary was always there to soothe me, and I lay down again in her shelter like a bird in its nest.

But I would not let them keep me in bed next day. I was in a kind of fever, not knowing what I did. The window was quite opaque, without the least glimmer in it, flat and blank like a piece of wood. Never from the first day had I seen it so little like a window. “It cannot be wondered at,” I said to myself, “that seeing it like that, and with eyes that are old, not so clear as mine, they should think what they do.” And then I smiled to myself to think of the evening and the long light, and whether he would look out again, or only give me a signal with his hand. I decided I would like that best: not that he should take the trouble to come forward and open it again, but just a turn of his head and a wave of his hand.

It would be more friendly and show more confidence,—not as if I wanted that kind of demonstration every night.

I did not come down in the afternoon, but kept at my own window upstairs alone, till the tea-party should be over. I could hear them making a great talk; and I was sure they were all in the recess staring at the window, and laughing at the silly lassie. Let them laugh! I felt above all that now. At dinner I was very restless, hurrying to get it over; and I think Aunt Mary was restless too. I doubt whether she read her 'Times' when it came; she opened it up so as to shield her, and watched from a corner. And I settled myself in the recess, with my heart full of expectation. I wanted nothing more than to see him writing at his table, and to turn his head and give me a little wave of his hand, just to show that he knew I was there. I sat from half-past seven o'clock to ten o'clock: and the daylight grew softer and softer, till at last it was as if it was shining through a pearl, and not a shadow to be seen. But the window all the time was as black as night, and there was nothing, nothing there.

Well: but other nights it had been like that; he would not be there every night only to please me. There are other things in a man's life, a great learned man like that. I said to myself I was not disappointed. Why should I be disappointed? There had been other nights when he was not there. Aunt Mary watched me, every movement I made, her eyes shining, often

wet, with a pity in them that almost made me cry: but I felt as if I were more sorry for her than for myself. And then I flung myself upon her, and asked her, again and again, what it was, and who it was, imploring her to tell me if she knew? and when she had seen him, and what had happened? and what it meant about the women of our blood? She told me that how it was she could not tell, nor when: it was just at the time it had to be; and that we all saw him in our time—"that is," she said, "the ones that are like you and me." What was it that made her and me different from the rest? but she only shook her head and would not tell me. "They say," she said, and then stopped short. "Oh, honey, try and forget all about it—if I had but known you were of that kind! They say—that once there was one that was a Scholar, and liked his books more than any lady's love. Honey, do not look at me like that. To think I should have brought all this on you!"

"He was a Scholar?" I cried.

"And one of us, that must have been a light woman, not like you and me—— But maybe it was just in innocence; for who can tell? She waved to him and waved to him to come over: and yon ring was the token: but he would not come. But still she sat at her window and waved and waved—till at last her brothers heard of it, that were stirring men; and then——oh, my honey, let us speak of it no more!"

"They killed him!" I cried, carried away.

And then I grasped her with my hands, and gave her a shake, and flung away from her. "You tell me that to throw dust in my eyes—when I saw him only last night: and he as living as I am, and as young!"

"My honey, my honey!" Aunt Mary said.

After that I would not speak to her for a long time; but she kept close to me, never leaving me when she could help it, and always with that pity in her eyes. For the next night it was the same; and the third night. That third night I thought I could not bear it any longer. I would have to do something—if only I knew what to do! If it would ever get dark, quite dark, there might be something to be done. I had wild dreams of stealing out of the house and getting a ladder, and mounting up to try if I could not open that window, in the middle of the night—if perhaps I could get the baker's boy to help me; and then my mind got into a whirl, and it was as if I had done it; and I could almost see the boy put the ladder to the window, and hear him cry out that there was nothing there. Oh, how slow it was, the night! and how light it was, and everything so clear—no darkness to cover you, no shadow, whether on one side of the street or on the other side! I could not sleep, though I was forced to go to bed. And in the deep midnight, when it is dark dark in every other place, I slipped very softly downstairs, though there was one board on the landing-place that creaked—and opened the door and stepped

out. There was not a soul to be seen, up or down, from the Abbey to the West Port: and the trees stood like ghosts, and the silence was terrible, and everything as clear as day. You don't know what silence is till you find it in the light like that, not morning but night, no sun-rising, no shadow, but everything as clear as the day.

It did not make any difference as the slow minutes went on: one o'clock, two o'clock. How strange it was to hear the clocks striking in that dead light when there was nobody to hear them! But it made no difference. The window was quite blank; even the marking of the panes seemed to have melted away. I stole up again after a long time, through the silent house, in the clear light, cold and trembling, with despair in my heart.

I am sure Aunt Mary must have watched and seen me coming back, for after a while I heard faint sounds in the house; and very early, when there had come a little sunshine into the air, she came to my bedside with a cup of tea in her hand; and she, too, was looking like a ghost. "Are you warm, honey—are you comfortable?" she said. "It doesn't matter," said I. I did not feel as if anything mattered; unless if one could get into the dark somewhere—the soft, deep dark that would cover you over and hide you—but I could not tell from what. The dreadful thing was that there was nothing, nothing to look for, nothing to hide from—only the silence and the light.

That day my mother came and took me home. I had not heard she was coming ; she arrived quite unexpectedly, and said she had no time to stay, but must start the same evening so as to be in London next day, papa having settled to go abroad. At first I had a wild thought I would not go. But how can a girl say I will not, when her mother has come for her, and there is no reason, no reason in the world, to resist, and no right ! I had to go, whatever I might wish or any one might say. Aunt Mary's dear eyes were wet ; she went about the house drying them quietly with her handkerchief, but she always said, "It is the best thing for you, honey—the best thing for you !" Oh, how I hated to hear it said that it was the best thing, as if anything mattered, one more than another ! The old ladies were all there in the afternoon, Lady Carnbee looking at me from under her black lace, and the diamond lurking, sending out darts from under her finger. She patted me on the shoulder, and told me to be a good bairn. "And never lippen to what you see from the window," she said. "The eye is deceitful as well as the heart." She kept patting me on the shoulder, and I felt again as if that sharp wicked stone stung me. Was that what Aunt Mary meant when she said yon ring was the token ? I thought afterwards I saw the mark on my shoulder. You will say why ? How can I tell why ? If I had known, I should have been contented, and it would not have mattered any more.

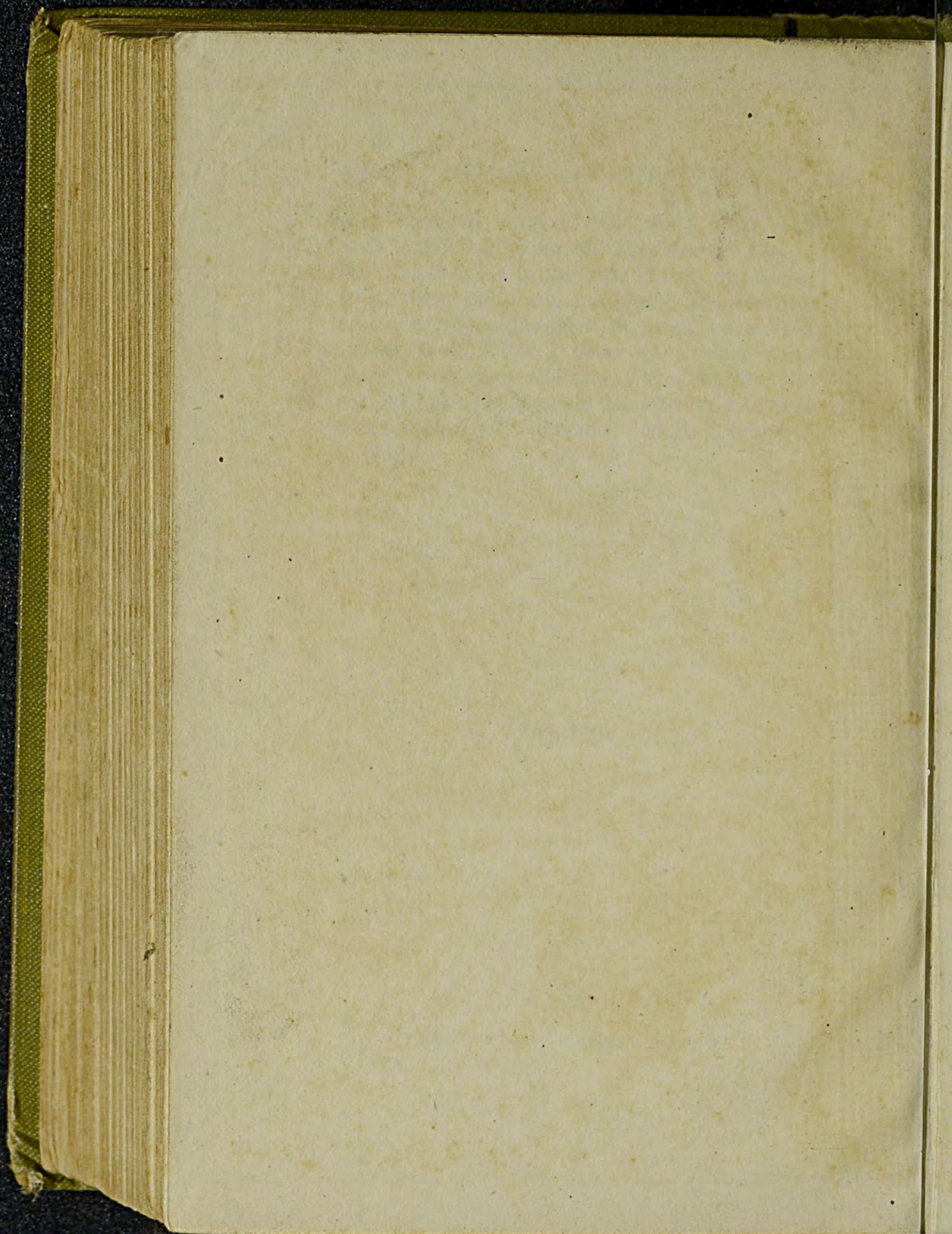
I never went back to St Rule's, and for years of my life I never again looked out of a window when any other window was in sight. You ask me did I ever see him again? I cannot tell: the imagination is a great deceiver, as Lady Carnbee said: and if he stayed there so long, only to punish the race that had wronged him, why should I ever have seen him again? for I had received my share. But who can tell what happens in a heart that often, often, and so long as that, comes back to do its errand? If it was he whom I have seen again, the anger is gone from him, and he means good and no longer harm to the house of the woman that loved him. I have seen his face looking at me from a crowd. There was one time when I came home a widow from India, very sad, with my little children: I am certain I saw him there among all the people coming to welcome their friends. There was nobody to welcome me,—for I was not expected: and very sad was I, without a face I knew: when all at once I saw him, and he waved his hand to me. My heart leaped up again: I had forgotten who he was, but only that it was a face I knew, and I landed almost cheerfully, thinking here was some one who would help me. But he had disappeared, as he did from the window, with that one wave of his hand.

And again I was reminded of it all when old Lady Carnbee died—an old, old woman—and it was found in her will that she had left me

that diamond ring. I am afraid of it still. It is locked up in an old sandal-wood box in the lumber-room in the little old country-house which belongs to me, but where I never live. If any one would steal it, it would be a relief to my mind. Yet I never knew what Aunt Mary meant when she said, "Yon ring was the token," nor what it could have to do with that strange window in the old College Library of St Rule's.

THE END.

6



7/

7/87
Rof

