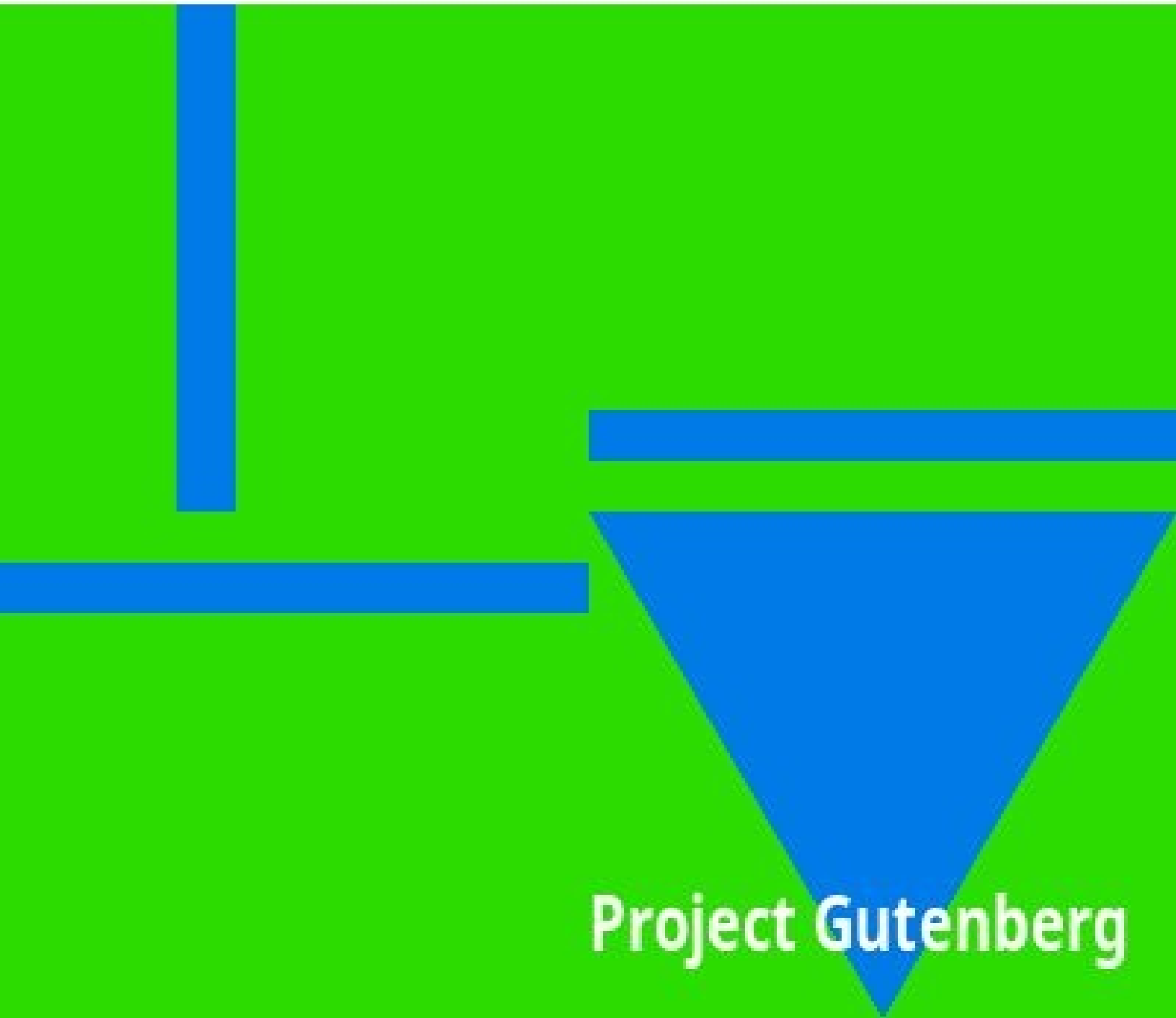
Bressant

A Novel

Julian Hawthorne



Title: Bressant

Author: Julian Hawthorne

Release Date: April 9, 2005 [eBook #15596]

Language: English

Character set encoding: ISO-8859-1

START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BRESSANT

E-text prepared by Marilynda Fraser-Cunliffe, Mary Meehan, and the Project Gutenberg Online Distributed Proofreading Team from page images generously made available by the Digital & Multimedia Center, Michigan State University Libraries

Note: Images of the original pages are available through Making of America Collection, University of Michigan Libraries. See http://www.hti.umich.edu/m/moagrp/

BRESSANT

A NOVEL

by

JULIAN HAWTHORNE

1873

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

HOW PROFESSOR VALEYON LOSES HIS HANDKERCHIEF.

One warm afternoon in June—the warmest of the season thus far—Professor Valeyon sat, smoking a black clay pipe, upon the broad balcony, which extended all across the back of his house, and overlooked three acres of garden, inclosed by a solid stone-wall. All the doors in the house were open, and most of the windows, so that any one passing in the road might have looked up through the gabled porch and the passage-way, which divided the house, so to speak, into two parts, and seen the professor's brown-linen legs, and slippers down at the heel, projecting into view beyond the framework of the balcony-door. Indeed—for the professor was an elderly man, and, in many respects, a creature of habit—precisely this same phenomenon could have been observed on any fine afternoon during the summer, even to the exact amount of brown-linen leg visible.

Why the old gentleman's chair should always have been so placed as to allow a view of so much of his anatomy and no more is a question of too subtle and abstruse conditions to be solved here. One reason doubtless lay in the fact that, by craning forward over his knees, he could see down the passage-way, through the porch, and across the grass-plot which intervened between the house and the fence, to the road, thus commanding all approaches from that direction, while his outlook on either side, and in front, remained as good as from any other position whatsoever. To be sure, the result would have been more easily accomplished had the chair been moved two feet farther forward, but that would have made the professor too much a public spectacle, and, although by no means backward in appearing, at the fitting time, before his fellow-men, he enjoyed and required a certain amount of privacy.

Moreover, it was not toward the road that Professor Valeyon's eyes were most often turned. They generally wandered southward, over the ample garden, and across the long, winding valley, to the range of rough-backed hills, which abruptly invaded the farther horizon. It was a sufficiently varied and vigorous

prospect, and one which years had endeared to the old gentleman, as if it were the features of a friend. Especially was he fond of looking at a certain open space, near the summit of a high, wooded hill, directly opposite. It was like an oasis among a desert of trees. Had it become overgrown, or had the surrounding timber been cut away, the professor would have taken it much to heart. A voluntary superstition of this kind is not uncommon in elderly gentlemen of more than ordinary intellectual power. It is a sort of half-playful revenge they wreak upon themselves for being so wise. Probably Professor Valeyon would have been at a loss to explain why he valued this small green spot so much; but, in times of doubt or trouble, be seemed to find help and relief in gazing at it.

The entire range of hills was covered with a dense and tangled timber-growth, save where the wood-cutters had cleared out a steep, rectangular space, and dotted it with pale-yellow lumber-piles, that looked as if nothing less than a miracle kept them from rolling over and over down to the bottom of the valley, or where the gray, irregular face of a precipice denied all foothold to the boldest roots. There was nothing smooth, swelling, or graceful, in the aspect of the range. They seemed, hills though they were, to be inspired with the souls of mountains, which were ever seeking to burst the narrow bounds that confined them. And, for his part, the professor liked them much better than if they had been mountains indeed. They gave an impression of greater energy and vitality, and were all the more comprehensible and lovable, because not too sublime and vast.

In another way, his garden afforded as much pleasure to the professor as his hills. From having planned and, in a great measure, made it himself, he took in it a peculiar pride and interest. He knew just the position of every plant and shrub, tree and flower, and in what sort of condition they were as regarded luxuriance and vigor. Sitting quietly in his chair, his fancy could wander in and out along the winding paths, mindful of each new opening vista or backward scene—of where the shadow fell, and where the sunshine slept hottest; could inhale the fragrance of the tea-rose bush, and pause beneath the branches of the elm-tree; the material man remaining all the while motionless, with closed eyelids, or, now and then, half opening them to verify, by a glance, some questionable recollection. This utilization, by the mental faculties alone, of knowledge acquired by physical experience, always produces an agreeable sub-consciousness of power—the ability to be, at the same time, active and indolent.

In about the centre of the garden, flopped and tinkled a weak-minded little fountain. The shrubbery partly hid it from view of the balcony, but the small,

irregular sound of its continuous fall was audible in the quiet of the summer afternoons. Weak-minded though it was, Professor Valeyon loved to listen to it. It suited him better than the full-toned rush and splash of a heavier water-power; there was about it a human uncertainty and imperfection which brought it nearer to his heart. Moreover, weak and unambitious though it was, the fountain must have been possessed of considerable tenacity of purpose, to say the least, otherwise, doing so little, it would not have been persistent enough to keep on doing it at all. It was really wonderful, on each recurring year, to behold this poor little water-spout effecting neither more nor less than the year before, and with no signs of any further aspirations for the future.

A flight of five or six granite steps led up from the garden to the balcony, and, although they were quite as old as the rest of the house, they looked nearly as fresh and crude as when they were first put down. The balcony itself was strongly built of wood, and faced by a broad and stout railing, darkened by sun and rain, and worn smooth by much leaning and sitting. Overhead spread an ample roof, which kept away the blaze of the noonday sun, but did not deny the later and ruddier beams an entrance. On either side the door-way, the windows of the dining-room and of the professor's study opened down nearly to the floor. Every thing in the house seemed to have some reference to the balcony, and, in summer, it was certainly the most important part of all.

From the balcony to the front door extended, as has already been said, a straight passage-way, into which the stairs descended, and on which opened the doors of three rooms. It was covered with a deeply-worn strip of oil-cloth, the pattern being quite undistinguishable in the middle, and at the entrances of the doors and foot of the stairs, but appearing with tolerable clearness for a distance of several inches out along the walls. A high wainscoting ran along the sides; at the front door stood an old-fashioned hat-tree, with no hats upon it; for the professor had a way of wearing his hat into the house, and only taking it off when he was seated at his study-table.

The gabled porch was wide and roomy, but had seen its best days, and was rather out of repair. The board flooring creaked as you stepped upon it, and the seams of the roof admitted small rills of water when it rained hard, which, falling on the old brown mat, hastened its decay not a little. A large, arched window opened on either side, so that one standing in the porch could be seen from the upper and lower front windows of the house. The outer woodwork and roof of the porch were covered by a woodbine, trimmed, however, so as to leave the openings clear. A few rickety steps, at the sides and between the cracks of which

sprouted tall blades of grass, led down to the path which terminated in the gate. This path was distinguished by an incongruous pavement of white limestone slabs, which were always kept carefully clean. The gate was a rattle-boned affair, hanging feebly between two grandfatherly old posts, which hypocritically tried to maintain an air of solidity, though perfectly aware that they were wellnigh rotted away at the base. The action of this gate was assisted—or more correctly encumbered—by the contrivance of a sliding ball and chain, creating a most dismal clatter and flap as often as it was opened. The white-washed picket fence, scaled and patched by the weather, kept the posts in excellent countenance; and inclosed a moderate grass-plot, adorned with a couple of rather barren black cherry-trees, and as many firs, with low-spread branches.

Above the house and the road rose a rugged eminence, sparely clothed with patches of grass, brambles, and huckleberry-bushes, the gray knots of rock pushing up here and there between. On the summit appeared against the sky the outskirts of a sturdy forest, paradise of nuts and squirrels. The rough road ran between rude stone-fences and straggling apple-trees to the village, lying some two miles to the southeast. About two hundred yards beyond the Parsonage—so Professor Valeyon's house was called, he, in times past, having officiated as pastor of the village—it made a sharp turn to the left around a spur of the hill, bringing into view the tall white steeple of the village meeting-house, relieved against the mountainous background beyond.

They dined in the Parsonage at two o'clock. At about three the professor was wont to cross the entry to his study, take his pipe from its place on the high wooden mantel-piece, fill it from the brown earthen-ware tobacco-box on the table, and stepping through the window on to the balcony, takes his place in his chair. Here he would sit sometimes till sundown, composed in body and mind; dreaming, perhaps, over the rough pathway of his earlier life, and facilitating the process by exhaling long wreaths of thinnest smoke-layers from his mouth, and ever and anon crossing and recrossing his legs.

On the present afternoon it was really very hot. Professor Valeyon, occupying his usual position, had nearly finished his second pipe. He had thrown off the light linen duster he usually wore, and sat with his waistcoat open, displaying a somewhat rumpled, but very clean white shirt-bosom; and his sturdy old neck was swathed in the white necktie which was the only visible relic of his ministerial career. He had covered his bald head with a handkerchief, for the double purpose of keeping away the flies, and creating a cooling current of air. One of his down-trodden slippers had dropped off, and lay sole-upward on the

floor. There was no symptom of a breeze in the still, warm valley, nor even on the jagged ridges of the opposing hills. The professor, with all his appliances for coolness and comfort, felt the need of one strongly.

Mellowed by the distance, the long shriek of the engine, on its way from New York, streamed upon his ears and set him thinking. A good many years since he had been to New York!—nine, positively nine—not since the year after his wife's death. It hardly seemed so long, looking back upon it. He wondered whether time had passed as silently and swiftly to his daughters as to him. At all events, they had grown in the interval from little girls into young ladies—Cornelia nineteen, and Sophie not more than a year younger. "Bless me!" murmured the professor aloud, taking the pipe from his mouth, and bringing his heavy eyebrows together in a thoughtful frown.

He would scarcely have believed, in his younger years, that he would have remained anywhere so long, without even a thought of changing the scene. But then, his society days were over long ago, and he had seen all he ever intended to see of the world. Here he had his house, and his daily newspaper, and his books, and his garden, and the love and respect of his daughters and fellow-townspeople. Was not that enough—was it not all he could desire? But here, insensibly, the professor's eyes rested upon the vacant spot at the summit of the hill opposite.

Very few people, be they never so old, or their circumstances never so good, would find it impossible to mention something which they believe they would be the happier for possessing. Perhaps Professor Valeyon was not one of the exceptions, and was haunted by the idea that, were some certain event to come to pass, life would be more pleasant and gracious to him than it was now. Doubtless, however, an ideal aspiration of some kind, even though it be never realized, is itself a kind of happiness, without which we might feel at a loss. If the professor's solitary wish had been fulfilled, and there had been no longer cause for him to say, "If I had but this, I should be satisfied," might it not still happen that in some unguarded, preoccupied moment he should start and blush to find his lips senselessly forming themselves into the utterance of the old formula? Would it not be a sad humiliation to acknowledge that the treasure he had all his life craved, did not so truly fill and occupy his heart as the mere act of yearning after it had done?

In indulging in these speculations, however, we are pretending to a deeper knowledge of Professor Valeyon's private affairs than is at present authorizable.

After a while he withdrew his eyes from the hill-tops, sighed, as those do whose thoughts have been profoundly absorbed, and knocked the ashes out of his pipe. He began to debate within himself—for the mind, unless strictly watched, is apt to waver between light thoughts and grave—whether or no it was worth while to make a second journey into the study after more tobacco. Perhaps Cornelia was within call, and would thus afford a means of cutting the Gordian knot at once. No! he remembered now that she had walked over to the village for the afternoon mail, and would not be back for some time yet. And Sophie—poor child! she would not leave her room for two weeks to come, at least.

"I wonder whether they ever want to see any thing of the outside world?" said the old gentleman to himself, elevating his chin, and scratching his short, white beard. "Reasonable to suppose they could appreciate something better than the society hereabouts! A picnic once in a while—sleigh-ride in winter—sewing-bees—dance at—at Abbie's; and all in the company of a set of country bumpkins, like Bill Reynolds, and awkward farmers' daughters!

"It won't do—must be attended to! The good education I was at such pains to give them—it'll only make them miserable if they're to wear their lives out here. I'm getting old and selfish—that's the truth of the matter. I want to sit here, and have my girls take care of me! Pshaw!

"Sophie, now—well, perhaps she don't need it so much, yet; she's younger than her sister, and has a good deal more internal resource: besides, she's too delicate at present. But Neelie—Neelie ought to go at once—this very summer. She needs an enormous deal of action and excitement, bodily and mental both, to keep her in wholesome condition. Has that same restless, feverish devil in her that I used to have; never do to let it feed upon itself! must get her absorbed in outside things!

"But what am I to do?" resumed the professor, sitting up in his chair, and shaking out his shirt-sleeves—for the heat of his meditations had brought on a perspiration; "what can I do—eh? Sophie not in condition to travel—can't leave her to take Cornelia—no one else to take her—and she can't go alone, that's certain! Humph!"

Professor Valeyon paused in his soliloquy, like a man who has turned into a closed court under the impression that it is a thoroughfare, and stared down with upwrinkled forehead at the sole of the kicked-off slipper, indulging the while in a mental calculation of how many days it would take for the hole near the toe to

work down to the hole under the instep, and thus render problematical the possibility of keeping the shoe on at all. It might take three weeks, or, say at the utmost, a month; one month from the present time. It was at the present time about the 15th of June, the 14th or the 15th, say the 15th! Well, then, on the 15th of July the slipper would be worn out; in all human probability the weather would be even hotter then than it was now; and yet, in the face of that heat he would be obliged to go over to the village, get Jonas Hastings to fit him with a new pair, and then go through the long agony of breaking them in! At the thought, great drops formed on the old gentleman's nose, and ran suddenly down into his white mustache.

But this digression of thought was but superficial, and the sense that something serious underlaid it remained always latent. The professor leaned back in his chair, and sighed again heavily. It was true that he was growing old, and now that he contemplated action, he felt that in the last nine years the inertia of age had gained upon him. Besides, he greatly loved his daughters, and though it is easy to say that the greatest love is the greatest unselfishness, yet do we find a weakness in our hearts which we cannot believe wholly wrong, strongly prompting us to yearn and cling—even unwisely—to those who have our best affection. "And what seems wise to-day may be proved folly to-morrow," is our argument, "so let us cling to the good we have."

And Professor Valeyon well knew that what time his daughters departed to visit the outer world was likely to be the beginning of a longer journey than to Boston or New York. They were attractive, and, it was to be supposed, liable to be attracted; he would not be so weak as to imagine that their love for their father could long remain supreme. But this old man, who had kept abreast of the learning of the world, and was scarred with many a bruise and stab received during his life's journey; who had filled a pulpit, too, and preached Christian humility to his fellow townspeople, had yet so much human heat and pride glowing like embers in his old heart as to feel strong within him a bitter jealousy and sense of wrong toward whatever young upstarts should intrude themselves, and venture to brag of a love for his flesh and blood which might claim precedence over his own. Doubtless the feeling was unworthy of him, and he would, when the time came, play his part generously and well; but, so long as the matter was purely imaginary, we may allow him some natural ebullition of feeling.

So powerful, indeed, was the effect produced upon Professor Valeyon by the succession and conflict of gloomy and painful emotions, that he laid down his

black clay-pipe upon the broad arm of the easy-chair, and began to search in all directions for his handkerchief: indulging himself meanwhile with the base reflection that as there was no present probability of depriving himself of his daughters, that ceremony must, for a time at least, be postponed. While yet the handkerchief-hunt was in full cry, the professor's ears caught the rattle and flap of the opening gate, and following it the quick, vigorous tap of small boot-heels upon the marble flagstones. Next came a light, rustling spring up the creaking porch-steps, and ere the old gentleman could get his head far enough over his knees to see down the entry, a fresh-looking young woman appeared smiling in the door-way, dressed in a tawny summer-suit, and holding up in one hand a long, slender envelop, sealed with a conspicuous monogram, and stamped with the New York post-mark.

CHAPTER II.

SIGNS OF A THUNDER-SHOWER.

Before the delivery of the letter, a very pretty little ceremony took place. The professor had stretched forth his hand to receive it, when, by a sudden turn of the wrist and arm, the young lady whisked it out of his reach and behind her back, and in place of it brought down her fresh, sweet face with its fragrant mouth to within two inches of his own wrinkled and bristly visage. A moment after, the ceremony was completed, the letter delivered, and the postman, stepping over her father's fallen slipper, leaned against the balcony-railing, and waited for further developments.

The professor took his spectacles from his waistcoat pocket, placed them carefully upon his strongly-marked nose, and scrutinized in turn the direction, post-mark, and seal. With a sniff of surprise, he then tore open the envelop, and became immediately absorbed in the contents of the inclosure, indicating his progress by much pursing and biting of his lips, wrinkling of his forehead, and drawing together of his heavy eyebrows. Having at length reached the end of the last page, he turned it sharply about, and went through it once more, with half-articulate grunts of comment; and finally, folding the letter carefully up, and replacing it in the torn envelop, he caught the spectacles off his nose, and, with them in one hand and the paper in the other, fixed his eyes upon the vacant spot at the summit of the hill.

His daughter meanwhile had taken off her brown straw-hat, and was using it as a fan, keeping up a light tattoo with one foot upon the plank flooring. Her face was glowing with her four-mile walk in the hot sun, but she showed no signs of weariness. The position in which she stood was easy and graceful, but there was nothing statuesque or imposing about it; it was evident that at the very next instant she might shift into another equally as happy. Her eyes wandered from one object to another with the absence of concentration of one whose mind is not fixed upon any thing in particular. From the letter between the professor's finger and thumb, they traveled upward to his thoughtful countenance; thence took a leap to the decrepit water-spout which depended weakly from the corner of the balcony-roof, and thence again ascended to a great, solid, white cloud, with

turreted outline clear against the blue, which was slowly sliding across the sky from the westward, and threatened soon to cut off the afternoon sunshine.

The professor restlessly altered the position of his legs, thereby drawing his daughter's attention once more to himself. Thinking she had waited as long as was requisite for the maintenance of her dignity as a non-inquisitive person, she transferred herself lightly to the arm of her father's chair, grasping his beard in her plump, slender hand, and turned his face up toward hers.

"Well, papa! aren't you going to tell what the news is? Is it nice?"

"Very nice!" said papa, taking her irreverent hand into his own, and keeping it there. "At least you will think so," he added, looking half playful and half wistful.

Cornelia brought her lips into a pout, all ready to say, "what?" but did not say it, and gazed at her father with round, interrogating eyes.

"You'd be very glad to go away and leave me, of course," continued the professor, assuming an air of studied unconcern.

"Papa!" exclaimed the young lady, with an emphatic intonation of affection, indignation, and bewilderment.

"What! not be glad to go to New York, and to all the fashionable watering-places, and be introduced to all the best society?" queried the old gentleman, in hypocritical astonishment.

"Papa!" again exclaimed the young lady; but this time in a tone which the tumult of delight, anticipation, and a fear lest there should be a mistake somewhere, softened almost into a whisper. She had risen from the arm of the chair to her feet, and stood with her hands clasped together beneath her chin.

The professor laughed a short and rather unnatural laugh. "I thought you wouldn't be obstinate about it, when you came to think it over," said he, dryly. He folded up his spectacles and put them back in his waistcoat pocket with, unusual elaboration of manner. "So you would really like to have a change, would you? Well, I trust you will not be disappointed in your expectations of society and watering-places. At all events, you may learn to appreciate home more!" Here the professor laughed again, as if he considered it a joke.

Cornelia was too much entranced by the new idea to have any notion of what he

was talking about; she was already hundreds of miles away, living in stately houses, driving in magnificent carriages, sweeping in gorgeous silks and laces through gilded and illuminated ballrooms, and listening to courtly compliments from handsome and immaculate gentlemen. But when, presently, her scattered faculties began to return to a more normal state, an unquenchable curiosity to know how the miracle was to be worked, seized upon her. She dropped on her knees beside her father's chair, took his hand in both of hers, and looked up in his face.

"But how is it to be, papa, dear? I mean, whom am I to go with? and when am I to go?—dear me, I haven't a thing to wear! Shall I have time to get any thing ready? Isn't Sophie invited too? How strange it all seems! I can hardly realize it, somehow. From whom is the letter?"

"Can you remember when you were about nine years old?" inquired the professor.

"I don't know, I am sure," replied Cornelia, in some surprise at the irrelevancy of the question. "Nothing particular. Oh! I know! we were in New York!" said she, beginning to see some connection, and breaking into a smile.

"Do you remember seeing a lady there," continued the professor, talking and looking straight at nothing, "who made a great deal of you and Sophie, and asked you to call her Aunt Margaret?"

"Oh—I believe—I do—," said Cornelia, slowly; "I think I didn't like her much, because she was deaf or something, and talked in such a high voice. She wasn't really our aunt, was she? Did she write the letter?"

"Yes, she did, my dear, and invites you and Sophie to spend the summer with her. You don't dislike her so much as to refuse, I suppose, do you?"

"O papa!" exclaimed his daughter, deprecatingly; for the old gentleman had spoken rather in a tone of reproof. "I'm sure she's as kind and good as she can be; I was only telling what I especially remembered about her, you know. How did she come to think of us after so long?"

"I used to know her quite well, long before you were born, my dear," replied the professor, tapping with his fingers on the arm of the chair; "and at that time I should not have been surprised at her offering me any kindness. I *am* surprised now," he added, with a good deal of feeling; "she's a better friend than I

thought."

Cornelia remained silent for several moments, because, not in the least comprehending what sort of ground her papa was walking on, she feared that the questions and remarks she was anxious to advance might jar with his mood. At length, a sufficient time having elapsed to warrant, in her opinion, the introduction of intelligible topics, she looked up and spoke again.

"How soon, papa—how soon did you say—am I to go?"

"First of July, Aunt Margaret says. Will that give you time enough to make yourself fine?"

"Now, papa, you're making fun of me," exclaimed the young lady, delighted that he should be in the humor to do so, yet speaking in that semi-reproachful tone which ladies sometimes adopt when the other sex makes their costume the object of remark, "I can make myself as fine as I can be by that time, of course! But how is it about Sophie? Won't she be able to go too?"

Papa shook his head, and combed his bristly white beard with his fingers. "Sophie has been very ill," said he; "it wouldn't be safe to have her go anywhere this summer. We can't take too much care of her. Typhoid pneumonia is a dangerous thing, and though she's on the way to recovery now, she might easily relapse. And then," added the old gentleman, in a more inward tone, "she would recover no more."

Although he mumbled this sentence to himself, Cornelia caught his meaning, more, probably, from his manner than from any thing she heard; and being of an emotional and warmly-tender disposition, she began to cry. She loved her sister very much; and something must also be allowed to the fact that, having a great happiness in prospect for herself, she could afford to expend more sympathy on those less fortunate. As for the professor, he, for a second time that afternoon, gave evidence of possessing disgracefully little control over himself. He began another fruitless search after his handkerchief, and finally asked Cornelia, with some heat, whether she knew what had become of it.

"Why, it's on your head, papa!" warbled she, brightly changing a laugh for her tears; and papa, putting up his hand in great confusion, and finding that it was indeed so, laughed also, and this time in a perfectly natural manner; but he blew his nose very resoundingly, for all that.

The atmosphere being serene once more, the joy of the future became again strong in Cornelia's heart, and coupled with it, an earnest longing to disburden herself to some one, and who but her sister should be her confidant? So she rose from her knees, and picked up her brown straw hat, which, in the excitement, had fallen to the floor.

"Is there any thing you'd like to do, papa dear?" asked she, laying her forefinger caressingly upon his bald head. "Because if there isn't, I, I should like—I think I'd better go to Sophie."

Professor Valeyon nodded his head, being in truth desirous of taking solitary counsel with himself. The letter contained a good deal more than the invitation he had communicated to Cornelia, and he could not feel at ease until he had more thoroughly analyzed and digested it. So when his daughter had vanished through the door, with a smile and a kiss of the hand, he mounted his spectacles again, and spread the letter open on his knee.

After reading a while in silence, he spoke; though his voice was audible only to his own mental ears.

"There was a time," said he, "when I wouldn't have believed I could ever hear the news of that man's death, and take it so quietly! And now he sends me his son!—as it were bequeaths him to me. Can it be as a hostage for forgiveness, though so late? or is it merely because he knew I could not but feel a vital interest in the boy, and would instruct and treat him as my own? He was a shrewd judge of human nature—and yet, I must not judge him harshly now."

Here Professor Valeyon happened again to catch sight of his slipper, and interrupted his soliloquy to extend his stockinged toe, fork it toward himself, and having, with some trouble, got it right side uppermost, to put it on. And then he referred once more to the letter.

"I should like to know whether he was aware that Abbie was here, or that she was alive at all! Margaret says nothing about it in her letter. If he did, of course he must have written to her, or, if he was determined to die as for these last twenty years and more he has lived, he would never *knowingly* have sent the boy where she was, on any consideration. Well, well, I can easily find out how that is, from either Abbie or the boy. By-the-way, I wonder whether this *incognito* of his may have any thing to do with it? Hum! Margaret says it's only so that he may not be interrupted in his studies by acquaintances. Well, that's likely enough —that's likely enough!"

"By-the-way, where's the young man to stay? At Abbie's, of course, if—Margaret says, at some good boarding-house. Well, Abbie's is the only one in town. It's a singular coincidence, certainly, if it *is* a coincidence! Perhaps I'd better go down at once and see Abbie, and have the whole matter cleared up. I shall have time enough before supper, if I harness Dolly now."

As Professor Valeyon arrived at this conclusion, he uplifted himself, with some slight signs of the rustiness of age, from his chair, took his brown-linen duster from the balcony railing across which it had been thrown, and put it on, with laborious puffings, and a slight increase of perspiration. Then, first turning round, to make sure that he had all his belongings with him, he entered the hall-door, and passed through into his study.

The rooms in which we live seem to imbibe something of our characteristics, and the examination of a dwelling-place may not infrequently throw some light upon the inner nature of its occupant. The professor's study was of but moderate size, carpeted with a red-and-white check straw matting, considerably frayed and defaced in the region of the table, and faded where the light from the windows fell upon it. The four walls were hidden, to a height of about seven feet from the floor, with rows upon rows of books, of all sizes and varieties of binding, no small proportion being novels, and even those not invariably of a classical standard. The only picture was a stained engraving of the Transfiguration, over the mantel-piece, in a faded and fly-be-spotted gilt frame. In the centre of the room, occupying, indeed, a pretty large share of all the available space, stood an ample study-table, covered with green baize, darkened, for a considerable space around the inkstand, by innumerable spatterings of ink. It supported a confused medley of natural and unnatural accompaniments to reading and writing. A ponderous ebony inkstand, with solid cut-glass receptacles, one being intended for powder, though none was ever put in it, a mighty dictionary, which, being too heavy to be considered movable, occupied one corner of the table by itself: the earthen tobacco-jar, with a small piece chipped from the cover; pamphlets and books, standing or lying upon one another; heaps of rusty steel and blunted quill pens; a quire or two of blue and white letter-paper; a paper-knife, loose in the handle, but smooth of edge; a box of lucifer matches, and several burnt ends; an extra pipe or two; the professor's straw hat; a brass rack for holding letters and cards; and a great deal of pink blotting-paper scattered about everywhere.

Opposite the table stood a chair, straight-backed and severe, in which Professor Valeyon always sat when at work. He had a theory that it was not well to be too much at bodily ease when intellectually occupied. Directly behind the chair,

upon the shelf of a bookcase, stood a plaster cast of Shakespeare's face, the nose of which was most unaccountably darkened and polished. It is doubtful whether even the professor himself could have cleared up the mystery of this deepened color in the immortal bard's nose. But whoever, during those hours set apart by the old gentleman for solitary labor and meditation, had happened to peep in at the window, would, ten to one, have beheld him tilted thoughtfully back in his chair, abstractedly tweaking, with the forefinger and thumb of his right hand, the sacred feature in question. He had done it every day, for many years past, and never once found himself out, and, doubtless, the great poet was far too broad-minded ever to think of resenting the liberty, especially as it was only in his most thoughtful moments that the professor meddled with him.

The room contained little else in the way of furniture, except a few extra chairs, and a malacca-joint cane, with an ivory head, which stood in a corner near the door. It produced an impression at once of cleanliness and disorder, therein bearing a strong analogy to the professor's own person and habits; and the disorder was of such a kind, that, although no rule or system in the arrangement of any thing was perceptible, Professor Valeyon would have been at once and almost instinctively aware of any alteration that might have been made, however slight.

On entering the study, the old gentleman first shuffled up to the fireplace, flapping the heels of his slippers behind him as he went, and deposited his pipe on the mantel-piece. Next, he put on his straw hat, and, turning to the engraving of the Transfiguration, which had served him as a looking-glass almost ever since it had hung there, he put himself to rights, with his usual fierce scowlings, liftings of the chin, and jerkings at collar and stock. When every thing seemed in proper trim, he took his ivory-headed cane from its place in the corner, and made his way along the entry to the front door.

"Bless me!" ejaculated the professor, as he emerged upon the porch, shading his eyes from the white dazzle of the road; "how hot it is, sure enough!" Scarcely had he spoken, however, when the sun, which had been coquetting for the last half-hour with the majestic white cloud which Cornelia had idly watched from the balcony, suddenly plunged his burning face right into its cool, soft bosom, and immediately a clear, gray shadow gently took possession of the landscape.

"Humph!" grunted the professor again, turning a sharp, wise eye to the westward, "we shall have a thunder-shower before long. I must take the covered wagon. But how's this? I declare I've forgotten to change my slippers! I'm

growing old—I'm growing old, that's certain!"

As the old gentleman stood, shaking his head over this new symptom of approaching senility, he happened to turn his eyes in the direction of the village, and descried a figure approaching rapidly from the turn in the road, which at once arrested his attention.

"Who can that be?" muttered he to himself, frowning to assist his vision. "None of the town boys, that's certain. Never saw such a figure but once before! If any thing, this is the better man of the two. By-the-way, what if it should be—! Humph! I believe it is, sure enough."

By this time the stranger, a very tall and broadly built young man, with a close brown beard, and quick, comprehensive eyes, had arrived opposite the house, and stood with one hand on the gate.

"Is this the parsonage?" demanded he, speaking with great rapidity of utterance, and turning his head half sideways as he spoke, without, however, removing his eyes from the professor's face.

The old gentleman nodded his head, "It is known by that name, sir!" said he.

With the almost impatient quickness which marked every thing he did—a quickness which did not seem in any way allied to slovenliness or inaccuracy, however—the young man pushed through the gate, which protested loudly against such rough usage, and walked hastily up to the porch-steps. He paused a moment ere ascending.

"Are you Professor Valeyon?" he asked.

Again the professor bowed his head in assent. "And are you—?" began he.

The young man sprang up the steps, and grasping the other's half-extended hand, gave it a brief, hard shake.

"I'm Bressant," said he.

CHAPTER III.

SOPHIE AND CORNELIA ENTER INTO A COVENANT.

When Cornelia left her father on the balcony, she danced up-stairs, and chasséed on tiptoe up to the door of Sophie's room. There she stopped and knocked.

Somehow or other, nobody ever went into that room without knocking. It never entered any one's head to burst in unannounced. The door was an unimposing-looking piece of deal, grained by some village artist into the portraiture of an as yet undiscovered kind of wood, and considerably impaired in various ways by time. It could not have been the door, therefore. Nor was the bolt ever drawn, save at certain hours of the morning and night. Sophie was not an ogre, either. Cornelia, who was very trying at times, would have found it hard to recall an occasion when Sophie had answered or addressed her sharply or crossly. If she exerted any influence, or wielded any power, it was not of the kind which attends a violent or morose temper. But no vixen or shrew, how terrible soever she may be, can hope at all times or from all people to meet with respect or consideration; while to Sophie Valeyon the world always put on its best face and manner, secretly wondering at itself the while for being so well-behaved.

As to the affair of knocking, Sophie herself had never said a word about it, one way or another. She always took it as a matter of course; indeed, had she been loquacious on the subject, or insisted upon the observance, Cornelia for one would have been very likely to laugh to scorn and disregard her, therein acting upon a principle of her own, which prompted her to measure her strength against any thing which seemed to challenge her, and never to give up if she could help it. But she had never had a trial of strength with Sophie, and possibly was quite contented that it should be so. She would have shrunk from thwarting or crossing her sister as she would from committing a secret sin: there might be no material or visible ill-consequence, but the stings of conscience would be all the sharper.

So Cornelia knocked and entered, and the quiet, cool room in which her sister lay seemed to glow and become enlivened by the joyous reflection of her presence. Yet the effect of the room upon Cornelia was at least as marked. She hushed herself, as it were, and tried, half unconsciously, to adapt herself to the tone of her surroundings; for, although her physical nature was sound and

healthy, almost to boisterousness, her perceptions remained very keen and delicate, and occasionally rallied her upon the redundancy of her animal well-being with something like reproof.

It was singular, with how few and how simple means was created the impression of purity and repose that this chamber produced! It brought to mind the pearly interior of a shell, and a fanciful person might have listened for the sea-music whispering through. The walls were papered with pale gray, relieved by a light pink tracery, and the white-muslin curtains were set off by a pink lining. A bunch of wild-flowers and grasses, which Cornelia had gathered that morning, and Sophie had arranged, stood on the mantel-piece. There were four or five pictures —one, a bass-relief of Endymion, deep asleep, yet conscious in his dream that the moon is peeping shyly over his polished shoulder, had been copied from a famous original by Sophie herself. She had painted it in a pale-brown mezzotint, which was like nothing in nature, but seemed suitable of all others for the embodiment of the classic fable. This picture hung over the mantel-piece. Opposite Sophie's bed was an illumination of the Lord's Prayer, with clear gold lettering, and capitals and border of celestial colors. The dressing-table was covered with a white cloth, on which reposed a comb and brush and a pink pin-cushion with a muslin cover, and over which hung a crayon of the cherub of the Sistine Madonna, who leans his chin upon his hand.

Within reach of Sophie's hand as she lay, were suspended a couple of hanging shelves, which held her books. There were not a great many of them, but they all bore signs of having been well read, and there was at the same time a certain neatness and spotlessness in their appearance which no merely new books could ever possess, but which was communicated solely by Sophie's pure finger-touches. On the opposite side of the bed stood a small table, on which ticked a watch; and beside the watch was a work-basket, full of those multifarious little articles that only a woman knows how to get together.

Looking around the room, and noting the delicate nicety and precision of its condition and arrangement, one would have supposed that Sophie's own hands must have been very lately at work upon it. But it was many weeks since she had even sat in the easy-chair that stood in the rosy-curtained window; and, although now far advanced in convalescence, she had taken no part in the care of her room since her illness. Why it had still continued to retain its immaculateness was one of many similar mysteries which must always surround a character like Sophie's. Every thing she accomplished seemed not so much to be done, as to take place, in accordance with her idea or resolve; and there were always, in her

manifestations of whatever kind, more spiritual than material elements.

When Cornelia entered, Sophie laid down her sewing, and looked up-with a smile in her eyes, which were large and gray, and the only regularly beautiful part of her face. She had a way of confining a smile to them, when wishing merely to express good-will or pleasure, which was peculiar to herself, and very effective. Cornelia walked quite soberly up to the bedside, kissed her sister, and then stood silent for several moments.

Compared with her recent exhilaration, this was very extraordinary behavior. She had rushed up-stairs intent upon pouring into Sophie's ears the whole gorgeous tale of her hopes and anticipations for the coming summer. Yet no sooner was she within the door than her excitement seemed to die out, and her enthusiasm ebb away. Extraordinary as it appeared, it was by no means a rare occurrence. Cornelia alone could have told how common; if, indeed, she ever reflected upon the matter. She was very quick to feel a divergence of interests between her sister and herself, and always inferred that Sophie could not sympathize with any thing for which she had no personal taste. In the present instance, it had all at once occurred to her that her sister would not be likely to care half so much about the gayeties of fashionable watering-places and city-life as she did, and might therefore treat with indifference what was to her an affair of the greatest moment; and a snub being one of those things which Cornelia found it most difficult, even in the mildest form, to endure, she had resolved, on the spur of the moment, to approach the topic of her proposed departure with the same coolness which she expected Sophie to manifest when she heard about it.

"Have you kept at that sewing ever since I went away?" asked she, idly examining the work which Sophie had laid down.

"I believe so," replied Sophie, stroking her chin to a point between her forefinger and thumb. "It's so pleasant to be able to sew again at all that I should consider it no hardship to have to sew all day."

Cornelia's thoughts immediately reverted to the dresses which the next two weeks must see made.

"You wouldn't be strong enough to do that, though, would you? I mean to sew on dresses, and all that sort of thing?"

"Dresses?" said Sophie, looking up inquiringly into her sister's face. "Oh, you mean your dress for Abbie's Fourth-of-July party? I thought you were going to

wear your—"

"Oh, no, not that; I wasn't thinking of that," interrupted Miss Valeyon, with a gesture as if deprecating the idea of having ever entertained ideas so lowly. "I shall hardly be in town on the Fourth," she added, reflectively, as if calculating her engagements.

Sophie looked amazed, though it would have taken a keener observer than Cornelia was at the moment to detect the slight contraction of the under eyelids, and the barely perceptible droop of the corners of the mouth. She saw that her sister had something of moment to tell her, and was, for some reason, coquettish about bringing it out. Cornelia was often entertaining to Sophie when she least had intention of being so; but Sophie was far too tender of the young lady's feelings knowingly to let her suspect it.

"Not be in town?" repeated she, demurely taking up her work; "why, where are you going, dear?"

"Oh!" said Cornelia, with one of those little half-yawns wherewith we cover our nervousness or suspense, "I didn't tell you, did I? Papa received a letter from a lady in New York, the one who wanted us to call her 'Aunt Margaret' when we were there ever so long ago—the year after mamma died, you know—asking me to come to her house there, and go round with her to Saratoga and all the fashionable watering-places. The invitation was for about the first of July, so—"

Cornelia, speaking with a breathless rapidity which she intended for *sang froid*, had got thus far, when Sophie, who had dropped her work again, and had been regarding her with a beautiful expression of surprise, joy, and affection in her eyes, stretched forth her arms, cooed out a tender little cry of happy congratulation and sympathy, and hugged her sister around the neck for a few moments in a very eloquent silence.

"Why, Sophie!" murmured Cornelia, covered with an astonishment of smiles and tears, "how sweet you are! I didn't think you'd care; I thought you'd think it foolish in me to be glad, dear Sophie!"

"My darling!" said Sophie, with another hug. She felt rebuked and remorseful; for if, as Cornelia's words unconsciously implied, her sympathy was unexpected, it would appear she had gained a reputation for coldness and indifference which she was far from coveting. It often happens, certainly, that those whom we consider intellectually beneath us, and whom, supposing them too dull to

comprehend the evolutions of our minds, we occasionally use for our amusement, possess an instinctive insight far keener than that of experience, enabling them to read our very souls with an accuracy which puts our self-knowledge to the blush, and might quite turn the tables upon us, could they themselves but appreciate their power.

"But tell me all about it," resumed Sophie; "all the particulars. And then we'll discuss the dresses. Dear me! I long to get to work upon them."

As a matter of fact, Cornelia had very few particulars to tell: all she knew was the simple fact she had already stated. But it needed only a small spark to enkindle her imagination; she plunged at once into a perfect flower-garden of bright thoughts and rainbow fancies; foreshadowed her whole journey from the arrival in New York to the latest grand ball and conquest; glowed over the horses, the houses, and the people; speculated profoundly in possible romances and romantic possibilities, and became so eloquent in a pretty, half-childish, half-womanish way she had, that Sophie's eyes shone, and she told herself that Neelie was the dearest, cunningest sister in the world.

From these glorious imaginings they descended—or ascended, perhaps—to the dresses, and then Sophie's low, steady voice mingled with Cornelia's rich, strenuous one, like pure water with red wine. Cornelia paced the little room backward and forward—she could never keep still when she was talking about what interested her, and now paused by the window, now before the mantel-piece, now leaned for a moment on the foot-board of Sophie's bed. She was very happy; indeed, this may have been the happiest hour of her life, past or to come. We all have our happiest hour, probably; and not always shall we find that happiness to have been caused by higher or less selfish considerations than those which animated Cornelia Valeyon.

During one of her visits to the window, she was arrested by the vision of an unknown young man coining up the road. She at once became silent.

"What is it?" demanded Sophie, presently.

"Some man—a new one—a gentleman—awfully big!" reported Cornelia, in detached sentences, with a look between each one.

"As big as Bill Reynolds?" asked Sophie, with a twinkle in her face.

"How absurd, Sophie! Bill Reynolds, indeed! He isn't up to this man's shoulder.

Besides, this is a gentleman, and—oh!" exclaimed Cornelia, breaking off suddenly, and drawing back a step from the window.

"Has the gentleman had an accident?" inquired Sophie, still twinkling.

"He's stopped here—speaking to somebody—father, I believe; he's coming in—there! do you hear?" cried Cornelia, turning round with large eyes and her finger at her mouth, and speaking in a thrilling whisper. The sound of the quick, irregular tread of Mr. Bressant, following the professor into the study, was audible from below.

"Who can he be?" resumed she presently, as Sophie said nothing.

"If he's a gentleman, we don't need to know any more, do we?" replied her sister, from behind her sewing.

"Well, he is one," rejoined Cornelia, uncertain whether she was being made fun of or not. "He was dressed like one; not *bandboxy*, you know, but nicely and easily; and he stands and moves well; and then his face—"

"Is he handsome?" asked Sophie, as Cornelia paused.

"Oh! he has that refined look—I can't describe it—better than handsome," said she, giving a little wave with her hand to carry out her meaning.

"It's lucky he was so big," remarked Sophie, very innocently, "or you might not have been able to see so much of him in such a little time."

"Sophie!" said Cornelia, after a silence of some moments, speaking with tragic deliberation, "you're making fun of me; I think you're very unkind. I don't see what there is to laugh at in what I said; and if there was any thing, I think *you* might not laugh."

"O Neelie—dear Neelie!" exclaimed Sophie, coloring with regret and shame; "I didn't think you'd mind it; it was only my foolishness. Don't think I meant to be unkind to you, dear. I wish the man had never come here, whoever he is, if he is to come between us in any way. Won't you forgive me, darling?" and she held out her hand to Cornelia with a wistful, beseeching look in her eyes that thawed her sister's resentment immediately, and after a very brief struggle to preserve her dignity, she subsided with her face upon the pillow beside her sister's.

"We won't ever quarrel or any thing again, will we, Sophie?" said she, after a

while.

"Never about that gentleman, at all events!" answered Sophie; and then they both laughed and kissed each other to seal the bargain.

Once, long afterward, Cornelia remembered that kiss, and the words that had accompanied it; and pondered over the bitter significance with which the simple act and playful agreement had become fraught.

But now, the subject was soon forgotten, and they fell to talking about the dresses once more; nor was the topic by any means exhausted when they were interrupted by the professor's voice calling to them from below.

CHAPTER IV.

A BUSINESS TRANSACTION.

Professor Valeyon led the way to the study, stood his cane in the corner, and placed a chair for his guest, in silence. "Just like his father!" said he to himself, as he repaired to the mantel-piece for his pipe; "not a bit of his mother about him. Who'd have thought so sickly a baby as they said he was, would have grown into such a giant?—Smoke?" he added, aloud.

"You must talk loud to me—I'm deaf," said the young man, with his hand to his ear.

"Pleasant thing in a pupil, that!" muttered the old gentleman, as he filled his pipe and lit it. "How it reminds one of his father—that bright questioning look, when he leans forward! One might know who he was by that and nothing else!" He sat down in his chair, and ruminated a moment.

"Hardly expected you up here so soon after your loss," observed he, in as kindly a tone and manner as was comportable with speaking in a very loud key.

"Loss! I've had no loss!" returned Bressant, with a look of perplexity. "Oh! you mean my father!" he exclaimed, suddenly, throwing his head back with a half-smile. He very seldom laughed aloud. "There was nothing to do. The funeral was the day before yesterday. I did all the business before then. Yesterday I packed up, and here I am!"

"Death couldn't have been unexpected, I presume?" said the professor, on whom Bressant's manner made an impression of resignation to his loss rather too complete.

"The hour of death can only be a matter of guess-work at any time," returned the young man. "My father had been expecting to die for some months past; but he'd been mistaken once or twice before, and I thought he might be this time. But he happened to guess right."

"Filial way of talking, that," thought Professor Valeyon, rather taken aback. "Didn't get that from his father; he was soft spoken enough, in all conscience!

Queer now, this matter of resemblance! there's a certain something in his style of speaking, and in the way he looks just after he has spoken, that reminds me of Mrs. Margaret. Deaf people are all something alike, though; and he's been with her a great deal, I suppose. Well, well! as to the way he spoke about his father, what looked like indifference may have been merely embarrassment, or an attempt to disguise feeling; or perhaps it was but a deaf man's peculiarity. At all events, it can do no harm to suppose so."

"Were you with him during his last moments?" asked he.

"Oh, yes! I saw him die," answered Bressant, nodding, and pulling his close-cut brown beard.

Professor Valeyon smoked for a while in silence, occasionally casting puzzled and searching glances at the young man, who took up a book from the table—it happened to be a volume of Celestial Mechanics—and began to read it with great apparent interest. His face was an open and certainly not unpleasant one; very mobile, however, and vivid in its expressions; the eyebrows straight and delicate, and the eyes bright and powerful. The forehead was undeniably fine, prominently and capaciously developed. Nevertheless—and this was what puzzled the professor—there was a very evident lack of something in the face, in no way interfering with its intellectual aspect, but giving it, at times, an unnatural and even uncanny look. In meeting the young man's eyes, the old gentleman was ever and anon conscious of a disposition to recoil and shudder, and, at the same time, felt impelled, by what resembled a magnetic attraction, to gaze the harder. Did the very fact that some universal human characteristic was omitted from this person's nature endow him with an exceptional and peculiar power? There was an uncertainty, in talking and associating with him, as to what he would do or say; an ignorance of what might be his principles and points of view; an impossibility of supposing him governed by common laws. Such, at least, was the professor's fancy concerning him.

But again, turning his eyes to his pipe, or out of the window, was it not fancy altogether? Beyond that he was unusually tall and broad across the shoulders, and of a very intelligent cast of features, what was there or was there not in this young man different from any other? He had the muffled irregular voice, and alert yet unimpressible manner, peculiar to deafness. But was there any thing more? The professor took another look at him. He was reading, and certainly there were no signs of any thing strange in his appearance, more than that, at such a time, he should be reading at all. It was when speaking of his father that

the uncanny expression had been especially noticeable. "Suppose," said Professor Valeyon to himself, "we try him on another subject."

"You've been educated at home, I understand," began he, from beneath his heavy eyebrows.

"Oh, yes!" replied Bressant, shutting his book on his knee, and returning the professor's look with one of exceeding keenness and comprehensiveness. "Educated to develop faculties of body and mind, not according to the ordinary school and college system." He drew himself up, with an air of such marvelous intellectual and physical efficiency, that it seemed to the professor as if each one of his five senses might equal the whole capacity of a common man. And then it occurred to him that he remembered, many years ago, having heard some one mention a theory of education which aimed rather to give the man power in whatever direction he chose to exercise it, than to store his mind with greater or less quantities of particular forms of knowledge. The only faculty to be left uncultivated, according to this theory, was that of human love—this being considered destructive, or, at least, greatly prejudicial, to progress and efficiency in any other direction. The professor could not at the moment recall who it was had evolved this scheme, but it became involuntarily connected in his mind with Bressant's peculiarities.

"According to the letter I received to-day, you come here to be trained to the ministry," resumed he. "Has all your previous education had this in view?"

"The education would have been the same, understand, whatever the end was to be," explained the young man, with a shrewd smile in his sharp eyes. "I am as well prepared to study theology as if I had been aiming at it all my life; but I might take up engineering or medicine as well as that. About a year ago, I decided to become a minister."

"And what led you to do that?" demanded the old gentleman, with rather a stern frown. He did not like the idea of approaching religion in other than a reverent and self-searching attitude.

"My father first suggested it," replied Bressant, on whom the frown produced no sort of impression. "At the time, it surprised me, especially from him. Afterward, I concluded I could not do better. No one has such a chance to move the world as a minister. I thought of Christ, and Paul, and Luther, and many before and since. They were all ministers, and who had greater power? I felt I had the ability, and I decided that it was as a minister I could best use it."

"But what are you going to use it for?" questioned the professor, settling his spectacles on his nose, and leaning across the table in his earnestness.

"The men I have mentioned used theirs to invent, or confirm, or overthrow, religious sects, and perhaps they couldn't have done better in their age. Their names are as well known now as ever, and that's the best test. But I hope I may discover a better method. I shall have the advantage of their experience and mistakes. Perhaps I shall develop and carry out to its conclusion the dogma of Christianity. That would be well as a beginning."

"Very well, that's certain!" assented the professor, dryly. "It's all I shall be able to give you any assistance in, too, so we needn't discuss what the next step will be. By-the-way, did you ever hear of doing any thing for the glory of God, and for the love of your fellow-men?"

"Oh, yes! they're pass-words of the profession, and have their use," returned Bressant, with another of his keen smiles. "If you want to climb above the world, the rounds in your ladder must be made of common woods that everybody knows the names of. The Bible is full of such, and some of them are works of genius in themselves. After all, it is the people who must immortalize us, and we must feed them with what they are in the habit of eating."

"What induced you to come here, sir?" asked the professor, abruptly.

"I never should have come of myself," answered the young man, with entire frankness. "I never heard your name mentioned until less than a year ago. It was the first time my father was expecting to die. He told me you were a wise man, and learned besides; he had known you when you were young; you would have some interest in teaching me; he would feel more at ease to die, if he knew you were directing me. I thought it over, as I said, and decided to come. Understand, I knew of no one except you, and I didn't want to go to a theological school."

"Humph!" grunted the professor, who was by no means well satisfied with the prospect, yet had reasons of his own for taking up the matter if possible. He smoked for a while longer, and Bressant resumed his book.

"By-the-way, about this *incognito* of yours," said the former at length, laying aside his pipe, and taking off his straw hat: he had forgotten to remove it on entering, and it had been oppressing him with a sense of vague inconvenience ever since. "What is the meaning of it? Do you mean to keep it strict? Is the idea you own?"

"Oh, no! I heard nothing of it till after my father was dead. It was Mrs. Vanderplanck—she who wrote you the letter—who first spoke to me of it, and said he had desired it. I don't know what the necessity of it is, but it must be kept a strict secret. Should any one besides you know who I am, I stand in danger of losing my fortune."

"Ah, ha! lose your fortune!" exclaimed the professor, frowning so portentously as to unseat his spectacles. "How does that happen, sir?"

Bressant looked considerably amused at the old gentleman's evident emotion; the more as he saw no occasion for it. "I never had the curiosity to ask how," said he, pulling at his beard. "I shall run no risks with my fortune. I'm satisfied to know there might be danger; there's no difficulty in keeping silence about a name."

Professor Valeyon rose from his chair and walked to the window. A mighty host of gray clouds, piled thickly one upon another, and torn and tunneled by feverish wind-gusts, were hastening swiftly and silently across the sky from the west. Beyond, where they were thickest and angriest, a yellowish, lurid tint was reflected against them. The valley darkened like a frowning face, and the summits of the western hills were blotted out of sight. A lightning-flash shivered brightly through the air, and then came the first growling, leaping, accumulating peal of thunder. A sudden, rustling breath swept through the garden, and, following it, in big, quick drops, and soon in an unintermittent myriad-footed tramp, the rustling, perpendicular down-pelting of the rain.

In less than a minute, a gray, wet veil had been drawn across the farther side of the valley, hiding it from the professor's sight. Even the outer limits of the garden grew indistinct. The leaves of the trees bobbed ceaselessly up and down, and glistened and dripped; the shrubs and flowers seemed to lift themselves higher from the earth, and stretch out their green fingers to the plenteous shower. The tinkle of the fountain was quite obliterated, and the ordinarily smooth surface of the basin sprang upward in thousands of tiny pyramids, as if madly welcoming the impact of the rain-drops. Small cataracts tore in desperate haste down the slope of the garden-paths, laying bare in their pigmy fury the lower strata of rough gravel and pebbles. Upon the roof of the balcony was maintained an evenly sonorous monotone of drubbing, as if innumerable fairy carpenters were nailing on the shingles. The invalid water-spout had a hard time of it; it was racked, shaken, and bullied, and continually choked itself with the volubility of its fluent utterances, which were instantly swallowed up in the bottomless depths of the waste-barrel. A strong, cool, earthy odor rose from the garden, and was

wafted past the professor's nostrils, and into the heated house. The moist brown flower-beds exhaled a fragrant thankfulness, and the grass-blades looked twice as green and twice as tall as before. Meanwhile the heavy, regular pulse of the thunder had been beating intermittently overhead, and bounding ponderously from hill-side to hill-side; and ever and anon the lightning had showed startlingly in dazzling zigzags through the omnipresent shadow. But now it seemed that there was a little less weight in the fall, and gloom in the air. The pervading freshness of the breeze made itself more unmistakably perceptible. The west began to lighten, and the rain and darkness drifted to the east. As for Professor Valeyon, if his thoughts had been in a tumult, like the elements, might they not become quiet again also?

"After all," said the old gentleman to himself, "it's not the young fellow's fault. If his father was a heartless scoundrel, it doesn't follow that he knows it. Well, the man is dead—it can't be helped now, that's certain. But what a cunningly-contrived plot it is! Shuts my mouth by confiding to me the *incognito* and sending me the son to educate; destroys the last hope of setting an old wrong right; takes advantage, for base ends, of the deepest feelings of human hearts: not to speak of preventing the young man himself from being party to a noble and generous action. Did ever man carry such a load down to the grave!

"Suppose Margaret—no! it isn't likely she would know any thing about it. He wasn't the man to make confidants of women. She gave the message to the son, not knowing what it meant, probably. Why, he wouldn't have dared to tell her! And then inviting Cornelia—no, no! I've had some acquaintance with Margaret, and, with all her nonsense, I believe she's honest. Besides, what interest could she have to be otherwise? To be sure, she didn't give me the true reason for the *incognito*; but that's nothing; she's just the woman to tell a useless fib, and reserve the truth for important occasions only—or what she thinks such."

The professor remained a while longer at the window, abstractedly staring at the drops which hastened after one another from the wet eaves. Suddenly he turned around, and walked up to the table, flapping his slipper-heels, and settling his spectacles, as he went.

"Did any one ever speak to you of your mother, sir?" demanded he in the ear of the reading Bressant. "Confound the fellow!" passed at the same time through his mind; "does he think I'm a chair or a table?"

"My mother?" repeated the young man, looking up, and appearing somewhat surprised at the idea of his ever having possessed the article. "Oh, yes! my father once told me she was dead. It was long ago. I'd almost forgotten it."

"Told you she was dead, hey? Humph! just what I expected!" growled the old gentleman, who seemed, however, to become additionally wrathful at the intelligence. After a moment's scowl straight at his would-be pupil, he shuffled up to his chair, and sat solidly down in it. Bressant (to whom the professor had probably appeared to the full as peculiar as he to the professor), seeing signs of an approach to business in his action and attitude, tossed his book on the table, leaned forward with his elbows on his knees, and fixed his eyes directly upon the old gentleman's glasses.

"You seem to be in the habit of speaking your own mind freely, sir," observed the latter; "and I shall do the same, on this occasion at least I'm going to accept you as a pupil, and shall do my best for you; but you must understand it's by no means on your own account I do it. As far as I have seen them, I don't like your principles, your beliefs, or your nature. You're the last man I should pick out for a minister, or for any other responsible position. In every respect, except intelligence and an unlimited confidence in yourself, you seem to me unfit to be trusted. In training you for the ministry, I shall do it with the hope—not the expectation—of instilling into you some true and useful ideas and elevated thoughts. If I succeed, I shall have done the work of a whole churchful of missionaries. If I fail, I shan't recommend you to be ordained. And never forget that you will be indebted for all this to some one you've never known, and who, I am at present happy to say, don't know you. Whether or not you'll ever become acquainted is known to God alone, and I'm very glad that the matter lies entirely in His hands. Now, sir, what have you to say?"

Bressant, who had been looking steadily and curiously at the professor during the whole of this long speech, now passed his hand from his forehead down over his face and beard—a common trick of his—smiled meditatively, and said:

"I'm glad you agree to take me. I don't care for your recommendation if I have your instruction. Shall we begin to-morrow?"

There followed a discussion relative to hours, methods, and materials, which lasted very nearly until tea-time. Then, as there was still some rain falling, the professor extended to his pupil an invitation to supper, on his accepting which the old gentleman shuffled out into the entry, and called to Cornelia to come down and make the necessary preparations.

CHAPTER V.

BRESSANT PICKS A TEA-ROSE.

Supper was ready: Cornelia surveyed the table for the last time, to make sure it was all right. It was an extension-table, but the spare leaves had been removed, and it was reduced to a circle. A mellow western light from that portion of the sky unswathed in clouds streamed through the window, and did duty as a lamp. The cloth was white, and tapered down in soft folds at the corners; a pleasant profusion of sparkling china and silver, and of savory eatables, filled the circumference of the board, leaving just space enough to operate in, and no more. In the centre of the table, and perceptible both to eyes and nose on entering the room, was a tall glass dish, lined with wet green leaves, and pyramided with red strawberries. A comfortable steam ascended from the nose of the tea-pot, and vanished upward in the gloom of the ceiling; the brown toast seemed crackling to be eaten; the smooth-cut slices of marbled beef lay overlapping one another in silent plenteousness; and the knives and forks glistened to begin. Cornelia opened the entry-door, and called across to her papa in the study that supper was ready. Then she took up her position behind her chair, with one hand resting on its back, and a silent determination that the visitor, whoever he was, should be impressed with her dignity, condescension, and good looks.

"This is my daughter Cornelia. Mr. Bressant is going to be a pupil of mine, my dear," said the professor, as he and Bressant advanced into the room.

He gave his hand an introductory wave in Cornelia's direction as he spoke, but probably did not speak loud enough to be distinctly beard by his guest. Nevertheless, seeing the motion and the lady, Bressant inclined forward his shoulders with an elastic readiness of bearing which was customary with him, in spite of his unusual stature, and then took his place at the table without bestowing any further attention upon her. It passed through Cornelia's mind, as she lifted the tea-pot, that Mr. Bressant was outrageously conceited, and should be taken down at the first opportunity. She had made a very graceful courtesy, and it was not to be overlooked in that way with impunity.

"Milk and sugar, sir?" said she, interrogatively, raising her eyes to the young

man's face with a somewhat gratuitous formality of manner, and holding a piece of sugar suspended over the cup.

Bressant had certainly been looking in her direction as she spoke; he had the opposite place to her at table; but instead of replying, even with a motion of the head, he, after a moment, turned to Professor Valeyon, who was gently oscillating himself in the rocking-chair he always occupied at meals, and asked him whether he knew any thing about a place in town called "Abbie's Boarding-house."

Cornelia laid down the sugar and tongs, and looked very insulted and flushed. What sort of a creature was this her papa had brought to his supper-table? Papa, who had noticed the awkward turn, and was tickled by the humor thereof, could not forbear to give evidence of amusement, insomuch that his daughter, who was by no means of a lymphatic temperament, was almost ready to leave the table, or burst into tears with injured and astonished dignity.

Bressant, with that exceeding quickness of perception which most persons with his infirmity possess under such circumstances, transferred his glance from the professor to the young lady, and at once arrived at a pretty correct understanding of the difficulty. He was not embarrassed, for it had probably never occurred to him that his deafness was so much a defect as a difference of organization, and he lost no time in explaining matters in his customary way.

"I'm deaf; when you talk to me you must speak loud," said he, looking full at Cornelia's disturbed face.

Miss Valeyon had never been so thoroughly discomfited. She was smitten on three sides at once. Bad enough to be insulted; worse, having become properly angry, to find no insult was meant; and, worst of all, to have been the means of drawing attention, by her bad temper, to a physical infirmity in her papa's guest. She abandoned upon the instant all intention of being ceremonious and imposing, and only thought how she might atone, to her papa and to Bressant, for her ill-behavior.

He would not take tea—nothing but water; and, as Cornelia proceeded in silence to pour out her papa's cup, the latter answered Bressant's question about the boarding-house.

"Know it very well, sir. Very good house. What have you heard about it?"

"Nothing more than that; I asked a man at the depot. My trunk has been taken there. I'm satisfied if the woman 'Abbie' is respectable, and gives me enough to eat." The young man had accepted Cornelia's tender of a slice of beef, and seemed fully equal to doing it again.

"The 'woman Abbie' respectable, sir!" exclaimed the professor in half-muzzled ire; but he checked himself suddenly, and tried to be contented with shoving his plate, tumbler, and tea-cup, to and fro before him. "I could not have recommended you to a better person," he added presently, evidently putting a restraint upon himself. "I have the highest—I hold her in very high estimation, sir."

Bressant nodded, and presently took some more of the beef.

"Have you seen Abbie yet, Mr. Bressant?" inquired Cornelia in a timid tone, which, however, was deprived of all melody by the effort to suit it to the young man's ears. But it was necessary to say something.

"Oh, no!" he replied, smiling at her in the pure good-nature of physical complacency, and noticing for the first time that she was an agreeable spectacle. He judged absolutely and primitively, never having had that experience of women which might have enabled him to make comparison the base of his opinion. "I came right up here from the depot. My trunk was sent to the boarding-house; it will hire a room for me, I suppose."

At this sally, Cornelia smiled very graciously, though ten minutes before she would have snubbed it promptly. She had had some experience with the young men of the village—easy victims—and had acquired a rather good opinion of her satirical powers. But Bressant was a peculiar case; his deafness enlisted her compassion and forbearance, and her own late rudeness made her gentle. Perhaps the young gentleman was not so far out of the way in failing to consider his infirmity a disadvantage.

Meanwhile, Professor Valeyon was swinging backward and forward, ever and anon pausing to take a bite or a sup, and eying the stem of the strawberry-dish, in deepest contemplation. Cornelia, who from a combination of causes, felt more embarrassed than ever in her remembrance, devoutly wished that he would rouse himself, and make some conversation. She did all she could, in the way of supplying the guest with eatables, and making little remarks upon them, to fill up awkward pauses; but she was conscious she was being stupid; and even when she thought of a good thing to say, the reflection that it must needs be shouted

aloud made her pause until the available moment had gone by. It was some relief that Bressant ate well, and seemed in no way shy or cast down himself. There was a freshness and vivacity in his enjoyment of his supper which was pleasing to Cornelia for several reasons: it was evidently very far from being affected, was consequently indirectly complimentary to her, and showed a certain boyishness in him which contrasted very agreeably, or, as Cornelia would have said, "cunningly," with his mature and intellectual aspect. In fact, Bressant was in a particularly happy mood. The cool air and pleasant room, and the gratification of a healthy appetite, caused his senses to expand, and, as it were, sun themselves. Cornelia's beauty could not have been presented under more favorable auspices, especially as woman's loveliness had heretofore been an unturned page in the young man's life. True, it pleased him in the same way as, and probably not to a greater degree than, would the symmetrical elegance of a vase, or the tinted beauty of a flower; but he had not yet known the limitless additional charm given by life, variety, and emotion. Would he ever know it? or was he so profoundly ignorant of the matter as to run in danger of finding it out unexpectedly, and perhaps too late?

The strawberry pyramid sank and disappeared. Cornelia began anxiously to wonder what was to be done now. Bressant sat enjoying his sensations, and Professor Valeyon, who appeared to have arrived at some definite conclusion after his meditations, rolled up his napkin and shoved it into the ring, previous to setting it down with that peculiar tap which announced that the meal was over.

On leaving the table, Bressant sauntered out of the room and on to the balcony, with a disregard of what other people might intend, which caused Cornelia to recollect her first impression of him. Nevertheless, not knowing what else she could do, she followed, and found him leaning over the railing, and looking about him with serene enjoyment. The clouds had been mostly dispersed; a fresh air moved in the damp garden; and Cornelia was soon aware that the mosquitoes were abroad. Her muslin-covered arms and shoulders began to suffer.

Bressant raised himself at her approach, and stood with one hand against the railing, looking down upon her with a half-smile of interest and satisfaction, which made Cornelia feel not so much like a human being, as some rare natural curiosity which he was glad to have the opportunity of examining.

"You are one of the daughters?" said he, with the sudden scrutinizing contraction of the eyebrows that often accompanied his questions. "There are two, aren't there? Which one are you?"

"I'm Cornelia," replied she, provoked, as the words left her mouth, that she had not said "Miss Valeyon." But the question had surprised her out of her presence of mind, and the necessity of speaking loud, if nothing else, hindered her from making the correction.

"Is the other any thing like you?" resumed he, after a moment's more contemplation, which, spite of its directness, had in it a certain element of unsophisticatedness that prevented it from seeming rude.

"Who, Sophie?" exclaimed the young lady, bursting forth into an unexpected gurgle of laughter, to which Bressant at once responded in kind, though having no idea what the merriment was about. "I wish you could see her! There couldn't be a greater difference if I was a negro!"

The laugh died away in Bressant's eyes, and he pressed his hand rapidly down over his face, as if to sharpen his wits, or clear away cobwebs.

"That's natural," he remarked, reflectively. "I never saw any thing like you."

"If he'd said 'any *body*,'" thought Cornelia, "I should have said he meant to compliment. How funny he is! just like a boy in some ways. I believe I know more than he does, after all!"

"Have you any sisters, Mr. Bressant?" asked she aloud, looking up at him with more cordiality and confidence than she had yet felt or shown.

"Not any. I should think it would be a good thing. Do you like it?"

"Of course; but then I am a sister myself, so it don't apply," said Cornelia, with the sunshine of another laugh. It was delightful to look at her at such times; every part of her partook of the merriment, so that her hands, feet, and waist, might all be said to laugh for themselves. Cornelia could express a great deal more in a bodily than in a spiritual way. Her material self, indeed, seemed so completely and bounteously endowed as to leave little place or occasion for a soul. The warm, rounded, fragrant, wholesome personality which met the eye, satisfied it; the harmonious tumult of life, that thrilled in every movement, was contentment to the other perceptions; the thought of a soul, bringing with it that other of death, was cold and inconsistent. Such mortal perfection loses its full effect, unless we can look upon it as physically immortal: as soon as we begin to refine our ideas into the abstract, we sully our enjoyment.

"But your mother must have given you some idea of what a sister would be,"

continued Cornelia, presently.

"Would she? I wish I had one!" said the young man, unconscious that no such desire had ever entered his head till now, and yet at a loss to account for its presence. "Mine died more than twenty years ago," he explained.

"The poor boy! I believe he don't know what a woman is!" murmured Cornelia to herself, perhaps not displeased at the reflection that it lay with her to enlighten him. "No wonder he looked at me as if I were a mammoth squash, or something. I'm going down in the garden to pluck a tea-rose bud," added she aloud. "Won't you come?"

"Yes," said Bressant, following her down the glistening granite steps with an air of half-puzzled admiration. He liked his new sensations very much, but knew not what to make of them; and so had a sense of adventurous uncertainty, which was perhaps a pleasure in itself.

Cornelia walked down the path in front of him, picking her dainty steps to avoid stray spears of grass or weeds, and gathering up her light skirts in one hand, out of the way of the bushes which leaned lovingly forward to drop a tear upon her. At length she reached the tea-rose bush, and paused there. Bressant came up and stood beside her.

It was just dark enough to make the difference between a perfect and an imperfect bud a matter of some doubt. Cornelia peeped cautiously about, putting aside the wet twigs gingerly, and lifting up one flower after another; desisting every once in a while to slap at the fine sting of a mosquito on her arms or neck.

"Oh! there's one that looks nice!" exclaimed she, disposing her drapery to reach across the bush for a distant bud which looked in every respect satisfactory. But Bressant saw it, and plucked it without effort, drawing blood from his finger as he did so, however. He smelt it, and looked from it to Cornelia, apparently trying to identify an idea.

"Aren't you going to give me my bud?" demanded Miss Valeyon. "What's the matter, sir?"

"In some way it reminds me of you," replied he, giving it to her with a shake of the head. "I don't see how, but it does!"

Cornelia gave him a sharp side-look, to make out if he was sincere; but his face at the moment was in shadow.

"Perhaps because it pricked your finger," said she.

She had not spoken loud, and was almost startled when his reply showed he had heard her. There was again that expression of marvellous efficiency and power in his face and bearing, but combined with one partly doubt and partly shrewd scrutiny.

"I plucked the bud all the same," he remarked. Cornelia, for some reason, felt a little provoked and a little frightened. He wasn't entirely unsophisticated after all; and she felt quite uncertain where the ignorance ended and the knowledge began. She put the bud in her hair, and they walked on, Bressant being now at her side, instead of behind. The path was hardly wide enough for two, and now and then she felt her shoulder touch his arm. Every time this happened, she fancied her companion gave a kind of involuntary start, and looked around at her with a quick, inquiring expression—fancied, for she did not meet his look, being herself conscious of a sort of irregularity of the breath and pulse attending these contacts, which she could not understand, and did not feel altogether at ease about. Certainly, there was something odd in this Bressant! Cornelia hardly knew whether he strongly repelled or powerfully attracted her. She had half a mind to run back to the house.

At this moment, however, they arrived at the fountain, and stood silently contemplating its weak, persistent struggles. The heavy rain had not raised its spirits a whit; but neither had it lessened its sense of duty to be performed. It labored just as hard if not harder than ever.

Presently Bressant walked round to the opposite side of the basin, shook himself and stamped his feet, like one overcoming a feeling of drowsiness, and then, stooping down, put his hand in the water and brought some up to his forehead. It passed through Cornelia's mind that she had read in her "Natural Philosophy," at school, that water was a good conductor of electricity, but she could not establish any clear connection between her remembrance of this fact and Bressant's action. The results of thoughts often present themselves to us when the processes remain invisible.

"What an absurd little fountain!" observed he, coming round again to Cornelia, and looking down upon her with a smile that seemed to call for a responsive one from her. "What is the use of it?"

"Oh, we're used to it, you know; and then that little sound it makes is pleasant to listen to."

"Is it?" said Bressant, apparently struck by the idea. "I should like to hear it. 'A pleasant sound!' I never thought of a sound being pleasant."

"Poor fellow!" thought Cornelia again, with a strong impulse of compassion and kindliness. "What a dreary life, not even to know that sounds were beautiful! I suppose all the voices he hears must be harsh and unnatural, and those are the only kinds of sounds he would attend to." Looking at him from this new point of view, the feeling of mistrust and uncertainty of a few minutes before was forgotten. Standing near the margin of the basin was a rustic bench fantastically made of curved and knotted branches, the back and arms contrived in rude scroll-work, and the seat made of round transverse pieces, through whose interstices the rain-water had passed, leaving it comparatively dry. Cornelia sat down upon it and motioned Bressant to take his place by her side. As he did so, she could not help a slight thrill of dismay. He was so very big, and took up so much room!

Bressant sat looking straight before him, and said nothing. Stealing a side-glance at him, Cornelia was possessed by an absurd fancy that he was alarmed at his position. The idea of being able to scare such a giant excited the young lady's risibilities so powerfully that she could not contain herself, but, to her great horror, broke suddenly forth into a warbling ecstasy of laughter. Bressant looked around, in great surprise. It was an occasion for presence of mind. Something must be done at once.

"Hush! hold perfectly still! It was so absurd to see you sitting there, and not knowing! There—now—still!" *Spat!*

A mosquito, which, after considerable reconnoitring, had settled upon Bressant's broad hand, had sacrificed its life to rescue Cornelia from her dilemma.

Bressant felt the soft, warm fingers strike smartly, and then begin to remove, cautiously and slowly, because the mosquito was possibly not dead after all. What was the matter with the young man? His blood and senses seemed to quiver and tingle with a sensation at once delicious and confusing. In the same instant, he had seized the soft, warm fingers in both his hands, and pressed them convulsively and almost fiercely. Cornelia very naturally cried out, and sprang to her feet. Bressant, it would seem not so naturally, did the same thing, and with the air of being to the full as much astonished and startled as she.

"What do you mean, sir? how dare you—?" she said, paling after her first deep flush.

He looked at her, and then at his own hand, on which the accommodating mosquito was artistically flattened, and then at her again, with a slight, interrogative frown.

"How did it happen? What was it? I didn't mean it!"

Cornelia was quite at a loss what to do or say under such extraordinary circumstances. She felt short of breath and indignant; but she had never heard of a young man's questioning a lady as to how he had come to take a liberty with her. As she stood thus confounded, her unfortunate perception of the ludicrous betrayed her once more; but this time her recent shock played a part in it, and came very near producing a bad fit of hysterics. Bressant looked on without a word or a motion.

In less than a minute, for Cornelia's nerves were very strong, and had never been overtaxed, she had regained command of herself. Bressant was standing between her and the house, and she pointed up the path.

"Please go home as quickly as possible."

Off he walked, with every symptom of readiness and relief. Cornelia followed after, but, when she reached the house, she found her papa staring inquiringly out of his study-door; the uncanny pupil in divinity had disappeared.

CHAPTER VI.

CORNELIA BEGINS TO UNDO A KNOT.

Bressant, to do him justice—for he was, on the whole, rather apt to be polite than otherwise, in his way—entirely forgot the professor's existence for the time being. He was too self-absorbed to think of other people. He thought he was bewitched, and felt a strong and healthy impulse to throw off the witchery before doing any thing else. He sprang up the steps, across the balcony, traversed the hall with a quick tramp that shook the house, snatched his hat from the old hat-tree, came down upon the porch-step (which creaked in a paroxysm of reproach at his unaccustomed weight), and, in another moment, stood outside the Parsonage-gate, which, to save time, he had leaped, instead of opening.

The road was white no longer, but brown and moist. The sky overhead was deep purple, and full of stars. The air wafted about hither and thither in little, cool, damp puffs, which were a luxury to inhale. Bressant drew in two or three long lungfuls; then, setting his round straw hat more firmly on his head, he leaned slightly forward, and launched himself into a long, swinging run.

To run gracefully and well is a rare accomplishment, for it demands a particularly well-adjusted physical organization, great strength, and a deep breath-reservoir. Bressant's body poised itself lightly between the hips, and swayed slightly, but easily, from side to side at each spring. The knees alternately caught the weight without swerving, and shifted it, with an elastic toss, from one to the other. The feet came down sharp and firm, and springily spurned the road in a rapid though rhythmical succession. In a few moments, the turn around the spur of the hill was reached, and the runner was well settled down to his pace.

The stone-fences, the occasional apple-trees, the bushes and bits of rock bordering the road, slipped by half seen. The full use of the eyes was required for the path in front, rough as it was with loose stones, and seamed with irregular ruts. Easy work enough, however, as long as it remained level, and open to the starlight. But, some distance beyond, there dipped a pretty abrupt slope, and here was need for care and quickness. Sometimes a step fell short, or struck one side, to avoid a stone, or lengthened out to overpass it. The whole body was thrown

more back, and the heels dug solidly into the earth, at each downward leap. Here and there, where the incline was steeper, four or five foot-tramps followed rapidly upon each other; and then, gathering himself up, with a sudden, strong clutch, as it were, the young man continued on as before. Thus the slope was left behind; and now began a low, long stretch, lying between meadows, overshadowed by a bordering of willow-trees, and studded with lengths of surreptitious puddles, for the ground was clayey, and the rain was unabsorbed. As Bressant entered upon it, he felt the cold moisture of the air meet his warm face refreshingly; he was breathing deep and regularly, and now let himself out to a yet swifter pace than before.

The willow-trees started suddenly from the forward darkness, and vanished past in a dusky twinkling. The road seemed drawn in swift, smooth lines from beneath his feet, he moving as in a mighty treadmill. The breeze softly smote his forehead, and whispered past his ears. Now he rose lightly in the air over an unexpected puddle, striking the farther side with feet together, and so on again. Twice or thrice, his steps sounded hollowly over a plank bridging. At a distance, steadily approaching, appeared the outlet, light against the dark willow setting. When it was reached, ensued a rough acclivity, hard for knees and lungs, winding upward for a considerable distance. Up the runner went, with seemingly untired activity, and the stones and sand spurted from beneath his ascending feet. The air became drier and warmer again as he mounted, and the meadows slept beneath him in their clammy darkness.

Near the brow of the hill stood a farm-house, black against the sky. Bressant marked the light through the curtained window, dimly bringing out a transverse strip of road; the pump standing over its trough with uplifted arm and dangling cup; the rambling shed, with the wagon half hidden beneath it; the barn, with blank windowless front, and shingled roof. A dog barked sharply at him, as he echoed by, but inaudibly to Bressant's ears. Presently a raised sidewalk divided off from the road, affording a smoother course; the outlying houses of the village slipped past one after another; a white picket-fence twittered indistinguishably by. The runner was nearing the end of his journey, and now leaned a little farther forward, and his feet fell in a quicker rhythm than ever.

At the beginning of the village street stood the corner grocery; a wooden awning in front, some men loafing at the door, who looked up as the sound of Bressant's passing struck their ears; within, an indistinct vision of barrels of produce, hams pendent from the dusky ceiling, some brooms in a corner, and a big cheese upon the counter. Next succeeded the series of adjoining shop-fronts, with their

various windows, signs, and styles; all wooden and clap-boarded, however, except the fire-engine house, of red brick, with its wide central door and boarded slope to the street. Bressant's steps echoed closely back from between the buildings; once he clattered sharply over a stretch of brick sidewalk; once dodged aside to avoid overrunning a dark-figured man. The village was left behind; yonder stood the boarding-house, dimly white and irregular of outline; he remembered it from the glimpse he had had in passing on his way from the depot. In a few quick moments more he stood before the door, glowing warm, from head to foot, drawing his deep breath easily, his blood flowing in full, steady beats through heart and veins. He took off his hat, passed his handkerchief over forehead and face, and then pulled the tinkling door-bell. A fat Irish girl presently appeared, and ushered him in with a stare and a grin, wiping her hands upon her apron.

Meanwhile Cornelia, having said a few words to her father to excuse Bressant's unceremonious departure—she refrained instinctively from letting him know what had actually taken place—bade him good-night, and went up-stairs with a more sober step than was her wont. She tapped at Sophie's door, and stayed just long enough to make the necessary arrangements for the night. Sophie, being drowsy, asked but few questions, and received brief replies. When Cornelia reached her own room, she closed the door with a feeling of relief. It had never been her habit to fasten her door; but to-night, after advancing a few paces into the chamber, she hesitated, turned back, and drew the bolt. Then, having hastily pulled down the curtains, she seemed for the first time to be free from a sensation of restraint.

She walked up to the dressing-table, which was covered with a disorderly medley of a young lady's toilet articles—comb and brush, a paper of pins, ribbons, a brooch, little vase for rings, an open purse, a soiled handkerchief—and began mechanically to undo her hair, and shake out the braids. It was dark-brown hair, not soft and delicately fine like Sophie's, but vigorous and crisp, each hair seeming to be distinct, and yet harmonizing with the rest. As it was loosened and fell voluminously spreading over her shoulders, she paused, resting against the table, and looked at her face in the glass with critical earnestness. The candle, standing at one side of the mirror, cast soft and deep shadows beneath the darkly-defined eyebrows, and against the straight line of the nose, and around the clear, short curves of the mouth and upper lip. The light rested tenderly on her firm, oval cheeks, so deep-toned, yet pale, and brought out an almost invisible dimple on each cheek-bone beneath the eye, usually only to be

distinguished when she laughed or smiled. The forehead, so far as it could be seen beneath the hair, was smooth and straight, neither high nor especially wide. The ears were small and white, but rather too much cut away below to be in perfect proportion. Over all seemed spread a mellow, rich, transparent, laughing medium, that was better than beauty, and without which beauty would have seemed cold and tame, or at least passionless. There was a delicate mystery in the face, too, not conscious or self-woven, but of that impalpable and involuntary sort which sometimes looks from the eyes of young unmarried women, whose natures have developed sweetly and freely, without warping or forcing. It has nothing to do with religion, nor with what we commonly understand by spirit. It is not to be described or analyzed; like the blue of heaven, it is the infinitely elusive property which is the very secret and necessity of its existence.

Cornelia looked searchingly at this face, and, though much of its subtlest charm must necessarily have been lost upon her, she saw a great deal that gave her pleasure. She had never been subjected to that awakening but coarsening process which teaches a girl to call herself a beauty; but there is a certain amount of instinctive perception, in these matters, and she could not but know that what had virtue to gratify her would not lack in effect over others. Nor was she in the habit of taking stock of herself in the looking-glass; only to-night she seemed to have an especial motive in making or renewing her own acquaintance.

At length she dropped her eyes, and, with nimble fingers and swiftly-applied hair-pins, wound up her hair into its nocturnal knot. She removed her ear-rings and rings, and put them into the vase; but here reverie overtook her once more, and held her in a meditative half-smile, until consciousness revived, and startled the blood into her cheeks. She walked over to her little sofa, with dispatch and business in her step, and sat down to unlace her boots.

There is something in these little ever-recurring actions, however—these things which we do so often as to do them unconsciously—which predisposes to thought and reflection. Cornelia, having untied the knot, had not got farther than the fourth hole from the top, her eyes meanwhile wandering slowly around the picturesque but rather disorderly little room, before she became dreamily interested in watching the shadow of a neck-scarf she had hung upon the support of the looking-glass, projected upon the wall by the flickering light of the candle. As she looked, her fingers began to labor upon the boot-lace, and her eyes grew gradually larger and darker. Occasionally there were little quiverings of the upper and under lids, barely perceptible movements of the tip of the nose and the

nostrils, and twitching at the mouth-corners. By-and-by the twitchings resolved themselves into a smile, very faint and far away at first, but broadening and brightening every moment; now, the dimples were visible at half a glance, and now, upon the still air of the chamber, there rippled forth—

Cornelia put her hand to her mouth, and gave a quick, furtive glance over her shoulder, as if in fear lest some one might have overheard her. She recollected with some relief that the door was locked at any rate, and the curtains down. But, for all that, as she realized what she had been thinking about, and how very far her papa or Sophie would be from laughing if they were told about it, she felt her cheeks tingle, and could not be busy enough with that boot-lace!

There! that was off; now for the other. What a queer man he was, though! Could all that have been put on in the garden—pretending he didn't know! (This was such a tiresome old knot!) If she only hadn't been such a goose and laughed—what must he think? What could have been the reason he rushed off in such a hurry? Probably was afraid she'd tell papa, and then he couldn't be his pupil. Suppose she should tell! that would be mean, though. Perhaps he didn't intend it, after all. He seemed nice in some ways, though he was so queer. Very likely it was only a sort of spasm—an electric, magnetic thing—she had heard of something of the sort. Yes, and she had felt funny herself that evening—a numb, quivery, prickly kind of sensation: it may have been the thunder-storm! It was strange, though; she never remembered to have felt it before. She wondered whether Mr. Bressant ever had. Perhaps deaf people were more subject to it. What a pity he should be deaf! It made it so awfully embarrassing to talk to him sometimes. It must be dreadful for them to be in love with anybody. Imagine having to talk in that way to a deaf person! or being—

This time it was the candle which took upon itself the task of warning and censorship. It flickered, flared, gasped, and went out. It was a very pathetic, and, it is to be hoped, effective way of remonstrance. But the last thing seen of Cornelia, she was sitting on the sofa, leaning carelessly forward, one hand holding her curved, little, booted foot, the knot still untied, her eyes fixed dreamily on nothing, the half-smile flickering on her lips, and the womanly contours of her figure doubtfully lighted and darkly shaded by the uncertain candle-light.

CHAPTER VII.

PROFESSOR VALEYON MAKES A CALL.

The morning following Bressant's arrival was clear and cool. Professor Valeyon looked out of the window of his bedroom, which was at the garden-end of the house, and opposite Cornelia's, and saw the cold, white mists lying in the valley, and the rough hills, like islands, lifting their dark shoulders above it.

As he looked, the sun, having climbed a few inches above the eastern uplands, let a bright glance fall right upon the open spot at the summit of the professor's favorite hill. A few minutes afterward he poured a golden flood into the valley, carrying consternation to the delaying vapors, insomuch that they straightway put themselves into commotion preparatory to departure. No spare time was allowed them; some were bundled off into the dark gullies and passes of the hills; others betook themselves hastily to that side of the valley which was yet in shadow, to sleep a few moments beyond the legitimate time; others still, finding escape impossible, rose heavenward like a mighty incense, and were by the sun converted into something wellnigh as glorious as himself.

"Good simile for a sermon, that! turning persecution into a means of glorification!" thought the professor, recurring to the days of his pastorship.

As may be inferred, the old gentleman was in the habit of getting up early; a praiseworthy practice, but one so universal with elderly people as to suggest a doubt of its being entirely a voluntary virtue. Be that as it may, the professor was up, and proceeded to set his blood in motion over a wash-bowl. His toilet was not so intricate and serious a matter as it might have been forty years or so previous, but was nevertheless a duty most scrupulously and conscientiously performed, from June to December, and round again. The last thing attended to before putting on his coat was always carefully to brush and dispose his hair. Until within two or three years, he had been able to keep up appearances by coaxing a gray rift across the top of the bald place; but it had grown month by month thinner and grayer, and more difficult to keep in position, until at last he had bravely told himself it was a vanity and a delusion, and had consigned it to obscurity and oblivion among the rusty side-locks which still sturdily surrounded the naked and inaccessible summit. Since that time he had occasionally allowed

his thoughts to revert to it regretfully, though not bitterly nor rebelliously.

But, on this particular morning, he stood, brush in hand, before his looking-glass with an expression upon his elderly features at once undecided, wistful, and shame-faced; detached, after a short search, a few frosty spears from the assortment at the left side of his head; scrutinized them anxiously for a moment, and then, by the aid of a little water, and cautious brushing and pulling, succeeded in spatting them down into their long-abandoned place.

"I'm an old fool, that's certain!" muttered he, as, after a final surreptitious sort of glance at the unaccustomed embellishment, he turned away. "But then I don't go out calling every day!"

He slipped on his coat, opened his door, and descended the stairs with his usual solid deliberation. As he emerged upon the balcony, the sunshine had just lighted up the tree-tops in the garden, but a little nest of white mist still rested upon the fountain, whose indefatigably small gabble could be heard proceeding mysteriously from the centre thereof. A few large, thin mosquitoes, cold and portentously hungry from their all-night's fast, came swooping at the professor with shrieks of dismal tenuity, intending to get a warm breakfast out of him. But he had had large experience in dealing with such gentry, and, so far from standing treat, he slew several and threw the rest into confusion.

"And now," said he to himself, as he descended the steps, "I'll take a look at Dolly; Michael hasn't let out Lady Bountiful or the hens yet, I suspect."

The barn lay in a separate enclosure to the west of the garden; it was a primitive structure enough, but had been refitted within so as to afford accommodation for the family steed and the cow. The former, Dolly, was a well-preserved bay, neatly put together, and, had the professor been so inclined, she might have become a celebrity in her day. As it was, she had seen no more stirring duty than to convey her owner to and from church, during the years of his ministrations there; to draw the plow and the hay-cart occasionally, and to gallop over the rough country roads beneath the side-saddle, for the benefit of Cornelia or Sophie. She was at this time about fifteen years old, but still retained much of the spirit of her best days, and not unfrequently gave the professor some pains to keep her within bounds.

He threw open the barn-door, and forth upon the crisp air floated the close, sweet smell of hay and cow's breath. Some swallows twittered and glanced up near the dark roof, as smart and wide-awake as if they had not just been startled out of

bed. The sun, shining through the cracks and knot-holes into the dusky interior, drew lines of dusty light across the darkness. A hen, that had escaped from the coop and got up into the hay-loft to lay an egg, set up a strongly-remonstrative cackle against being disturbed in so interesting a proceeding. Lady Bountiful lowed argumentatively, and Dolly stamped, wagged her head knowingly up and down, and then shook it with a whinny. The professor patted her neck and smoothed down her nose.

"Need some exercise, don't you, old girl?" quoth he, looking pleasantly upon her. "All right! we'll go down-town after breakfast. Yes! we'll make a call on Abbie." So saying, he pulled down some fresh hay, and left her to champ it; then, picking his way across the uneven floor to where the white and horned countenance of Lady Bountiful was thrust through the bars of her stall, he slipped her halter and let her out into the meadow. Having examined the wagon, to make sure it was in proper order, he concluded his labors by throwing open the hen-coop, out of which immediately hastened a troop of indignant and astonished fowls, led by a rooster, who seemed always to be vacillating between insufferable masculine arrogance and an effeminate curiosity and avarice.

By the time Professor Valeyon had remounted the granite steps, he was quite ready to do justice to his breakfast. Cornelia came singing down-stairs, with a full-blown tea-rose in her hair, and looking as if she had already breakfasted upon the greater part of the day's sunshine. She reported Sophie to be awake and comfortable, so the gentleman climbed up-stairs and shuffled into her peaceful, rose-colored room to give her a morning kiss. The Lord's Prayer glowed forth as brightly from the wall as if it had been pronounced for the first time that day.

"Well, heard all about my new pupil from Cornelia, I suppose?" said papa, when the kiss had been given, sitting down by the bedside, and holding his daughter's pale, slender hand in his own.

"He who came last evening? No, I've not seen Neelie to speak to her, since he was here. What is he to be taught?"

"Wants to be a minister," replied the professor, rubbing his beard. "Shall do what I can for him, because he's the son of a former friend, now dead. I'm afraid he won't do, though. Needs a good deal besides Hebrew and history."

"But you can give him all he does need, papa," rejoined Sophie, with serene faith in the old gentleman's infallibility.

"I don't know," returned he, his eyes resting upon the Lord's Prayer. "I don't know," he repeated, turning them to his daughter's transparent face, which seemed almost an incarnation of the divine words. "I think, my dear, that you could put some ideas into his head that would do him more good than any thing I can give him;" and he smiled gravely upon her.

"All right, papa," said Sophie, gayly, with a tender kindling of her soft, gray eyes. "Nothing could make me happier than to do good to somebody. As soon as I get well enough, I'll take him under my charge."

Her manner was playful, but there was a vibration in her tone which caught the professor's ear, and conveyed to him the idea that there was an unseen depth of yearning and passionate desire to be something more than an invalid, selfish and helpless, during her earthly life; an inheritance, perhaps, of the apostolic spirit which had played a not inconsiderable part in the history of his own life. And surely, he may have thought, there never was human being better qualified than she to inspire to high and pure simplicity of life and thought, were it merely by the example of her own. And would it not be a strange and beautiful thing, if this beloved daughter of his should be the means of turning to worthier and truer ambitions a man whom, of all others, he had reason to wish honored and respected among mankind! It was a very alluring thought, and the professor quite lost himself for a few moments in the contemplation of it. He did not reflect, and Sophie could not know, that there might be danger in the prosecution of such a scheme; for, all the knowledge which a young girl like her can have or impart, must find its ultimate origin in the heart. But then, again, the matter had taken no definite or practical shape in his mind as yet, and things which in the abstract may wear an appearance of being highly desirable often put on quite a different look when presented in concrete form. This would be especially the case with a man like Professor Valeyon, who was half a dreamer, and half a practical, common-sensible individual. With Sophie, however, whose whole life was necessarily a tissue of delicate and high-wrought theories, there was no safeguard of the kind to be relied upon.

No more conversation was had upon the subject at that time. The professor went down to his breakfast, and, having disposed of it with good appetite, and smoked his morning-pipe with quiet satisfaction, Michael brought Dolly and the wagon round to the front door, the old gentleman clambered in, and off they rattled to Abbie's boarding-house.

This "Abbie," as she was called in the village—indeed, not more than one in a

hundred knew her other name—had long been an institution among the townspeople. When she first became a resident was uncertain: some said more, some less than twenty years ago. Certain it was, at all events, that she had grown, during her sojourn there, from a young and comely, though sober-faced woman, to considerably more than middle age; though time had perhaps used her less kindly than most women in her situation in life, which is saying a good deal. No one could tell where she came from, or what her previous life had been. She had first made her appearance as purchaser of the house in which she had ever since lived, and kept boarders. She was uncommunicative, without seeming offensively reserved; quietly tenacious of her rights, though far from grasping or aggressive, and was endowed with decided executive ability. She had made a most unexceptionable landlady; one or two of her boarders had been with her almost since the inception of her enterprise; while all the better class of transient visitors to the village, which had a moderate popularity as a summer resort, made their first application for rooms to her.

Some ten or twelve years after her establishment, Professor Valeyon and his family had moved into town. They had not taken up their quarters at Abbie's, though she could easily have accommodated them, as far as room went; a circumstance which caused all the more surprise in some quarters, because there seemed to have been some previous acquaintance between herself and the professor. But Abbie was even less talkative upon this than upon other subjects; and no one ventured to catechise the grave and forcible-looking man who was the only other source of possible information. After a time, he settled in the house which subsequently became the parsonage; and, since no particular relations were kept up between his family and the boarding-house keeper, curiosity and comment died a natural death, and it even came to be doubted whether they ever had met each other before, after all.

Abbie, at the present time, was a taciturn personage, neither tall nor short, stout nor thin. Her eyebrows were straight and strongly marked, and much darker than her hair, which, indeed, had begun to turn gray several years before. There was nothing especially noticeable in her other features, except that the lips were habitually compressed, and the chin so square-cut and firm as to be almost masculine. A good many little wrinkles could be traced around the mouth, and at the corners of the eyes, especially when she was much depressed; and sometimes her expression was very hard and stern. Her manners were quite undemonstrative; they seemed to be neither fastidious nor the reverse, and it would have been hard to predicate from them in what station of life she had been

brought up. She certainly adapted herself well to whatever society she happened to be with; neither patricians nor plebeians found any thing to criticise; but, whether this were the result of tact, or owing merely to the adoption of a negative standard, no one could say. In language she was uniformly correct, without seeming at all scholastic; she occasionally used the idioms and dialectic peculiarities of those around her, though never with the air of being heedlessly betrayed into them.

On the whole, therefore, the boarding-house keeper remained a problem or a commonplace, according to the fancy of the observer. In any case, she had grown to be a necessity, if not a popular element, in the village society. It was in her large, rambling rooms that all the grand parties and social celebrations took place. Was a picnic or other pleasure-expedition in prospect, Abbie's experience and managing ability were depended on for its success. She it was who arranged the details of weddings; and her assistance was almost as necessary a condition of a legitimate funeral, as that of Death himself!

Professor Valeyon drove up to the door in his wagon, got down with all the care that the successful support of his burden of years demanded, and chained Dolly to the much-gnawed post which was fixed for the purpose on the edge of the sidewalk. He ascended the steps, and was met by Abbie on the threshold. He removed his hat with old-fashioned courtesy, and gave her cold hand a quiet, warm grasp.

"Good-morning, Abbie," said he, gruffly, but cheerfully, and with a very kind look out of his deep-set old eyes. "Is all well with you this morning?"

"Yes," replied she, with a faint smile, that seemed to show more of weariness than merriment. "Come into the boudoir, Professor Valeyon. You're a stranger."

"But that's going to be remedied—that's going to be remedied!" rejoined the old gentleman, seating himself, and allowing his hand to wander to the top of his head, to make sure the hair-swathe was safely in position. "Bond of union been established between us, you know."

Abbie laid her finger upon her under lip—a common act of hers when interested or absorbed—and looked at her caller inquiringly.

"That young fellow that came last night, sent his trunk up before coming himself. Saw him, didn't you?"

Abbie shook her head. "I saw his trunk, but not him. Mr. Bressant, I think. You know him?"

"He's going to study divinity with me. I take some interest in him, though he's in an unsatisfactory condition just now; intellectual savagery, I should call it. I take it, his training has been at fault. Seems to have no social nor affectionate instincts. It would be a good thing to make him feel their value, to begin with."

"I'll make it as home-like for him as I can, Professor Valeyon."

"Well, well! I meant to ask you to do it. It'll be a new experience for him. He's never known a mother since he was a baby, and his father was—well!"—the old man checked himself—"his father is just dead." He seemed about to add something more in regard to the deceased gentleman, but forbore, glancing narrowly at Abbie, who looked only grave and thoughtful.

"How old is he? A boy?" she asked, presently.

"Boyish in some ways, but must be twenty-five or six, and looks older. A tall fellow, well made."

"He might still be a son of mine," said Abbie, with another dim smile, and a sigh. "Perhaps it would do me no harm to consider him as such. Would that satisfy you?"

"Just what I want!" exclaimed the professor heartily, and with heightened color. "Something can be made of him, I think," he added; "but a great deal depends on the sort of treatment he eats and sleeps under. Well, you be motherly to him, Abbie. That's all I have to ask. You will find good in it for yourself, too, as you say: more than you think, very likely."

She sighed again, playing absently with her fingers upon her dark-colored dress, and gazing out of the window. Professor Valeyon said no more on the subject of Bressant, but spoke of Cornelia's proposed trip, and the Fourth-of-July party, and Sophie's convalescence; and finally took his straw-hat from the table upon which he had placed it, and moved toward the door.

"Good-by, Abbie. Remember"—the old gentleman paused, with her hand in his, and glowing upon her from beneath his bushy eyebrows; "remember you have friends about you who don't need to be sought after. And another thing, Abbie; if you should ever find that Time has the power to liberate as well as to imprison you, don't forget that some wants may exist a long while without finding

expression, but that they do exist, for all that!"

Perhaps it was the consciousness that he was using rather grandiloquent language in the wording of this enigmatical little speech, that caused the good professor to look so red and embarrassed. Abbie drew her hand away, and laid her finger on her lip.

"Can you still say that?" asked she, with a sad kind of gleam in her eyes and voice.

"More than ever—more than ever!" declared he, with emphatic incoherence. And without more words he hurried down the steps, and in another minute was rattling rapidly homeward, astonishing Dolly herself by the speed which he encouraged her to put forth.

"It'll all work round," soliloquized he; "very good beginning this. If I could have spoken more explicitly—but she'll be prepared, and that's a great step toward clearing things up. Gee up! Dolly."

CHAPTER VIII.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS.

"Sophie," said Cornelia, several days afterward, "do you know, I believe I'll stay for that party at Abbie's, after all."

The two sisters were engaged in planning out an evening dress, and Sophie's bed was so covered with the confusion thereof, that her quiet little face, appearing above, looked odd by contrast.

"I'm glad," replied she, with the simplicity and lack of ornamentation that made her words forcible; "and I'm sure Abbie will be glad, too."

"There's no reason why I shouldn't, you know," resumed the elder sister, falling into that pleasing vein of argument wherein we consciously express the views of our interlocutor; "a few days won't make any difference to Aunt Margaret, and I wouldn't like to have poor old Abbie think that I slighted her, just because I am going to enter New York society! Besides, I think this dress will look very nice when it's finished—don't you?"

"Yes, dear," said Sophie, smiling to herself. "Is Mr. Bressant going to the party?"

"Oh, I don't know. No, I should suppose not. He's a great student, you know, and is going to be a minister and every thing. That isn't the sort of people that takes interest in parties. Besides, he couldn't hear the music, so, of course, he couldn't dance."

"Some deaf people can hear music, and even compose it."

"Can they? But then just imagine having to talk to a deaf person in a ballroom! it would be awfully embarrassing, don't you think so?"

Sophie, who knew her sister well, and was very shrewd besides, began to suspect that it would not be displeasing to Cornelia to be opposed, and even out-argued upon the question of Mr. Bressant's probable attendance at the party, and qualifications to make himself agreeable when there. She enjoyed the amusement, in Her demure way, and was besides interested to hear something about her father's pupil.

"I should think," said she, in a modestly suggestive manner, keeping her eyes busy with her work, "that it would be less embarrassing at a party than anywhere. You know everybody expects to say and hear nothing but nonsense, and there isn't a great deal said even of that. And you're obliged to talk loud, at any rate, on account of the music and noise."

"Well, you may be right," admitted Cornelia, who certainly did take her sister's opposition with admirable good-nature. "And I was thinking, Sophie, perhaps if they are not very deaf indeed, you know they might get so used to the sound of one's voice as to hear it even when it wasn't so much raised."

"Why, certainly!" assented Sophie; "to some kinds of voices, at any rate; probably to a woman's more easily than to a man's. Is Mr. Bressant very deaf, Neelie?"

Cornelia glanced quickly at her sister, but was reassured by the grave composure of her aspect. Nevertheless, she was deeply engrossed in her new dress as she made reply.

"Oh! no. Well, not so very; I can hardly tell, though, I've spoken to him so little. He's rather quick at catching your meaning, sometimes, I think."

"Do you think he's a man who would get married?"

"Oh! I don't believe he'll ever be married," said Cornelia, and blushed, she scarce knew why. "No woman would marry him."

"Is he so disagreeable?"

Cornelia moved her shoulders in a little shudder. "Oh, not that exactly; but he's so cold and bright and hard. And he isn't always that way, either. There are times when he's so strange—so different! I don't believe he understands himself then. There seems to be a wild fire in him, that once in a while blazes up, and scorches and frightens him as well as other people."

Sophie was perhaps more interested in this extravaganza of Cornelia's than if she had known the incident upon which it was mainly founded; but, on the other hand, it is possible that less exaggerated language would not have given her so correct an idea of Bressant's character. Cornelia—there being nothing else to especially occupy her thoughts—had allowed them to run a good deal upon Bressant, and upon what happened by the fountain in the garden: perhaps she had mingled the real things and events with the fantasies of her dreams, and thus

built up an impression and theory in regard to the young man considerably more picturesque than was warranted by the premises at her command. All this would have been done involuntarily; and possibly Sophie's question elicited the first conscious perception and statement of what Cornelia's opinion had grown to be. But unconscious judgments are often more accurate than deliberate ones because there is more of intuition about them.

Be that as it may, from the moment Sophie imbibed the idea that there was something strange, fierce, and ungovernable in Bressant's nature, she felt her sympathy and interest moved and aroused. It was the instinctive attraction of one strong spirit toward another, the more, because that other was so differently embodied, endowed, and circumstanced. She was a bed-ridden invalid, but she thrilled, like Achilles, at the first gleam and clangor of arms. The only thing that Sophie feared, and from which she shrank, was Sin. All else attracted her in proportion as it was powerful, stirring, or awe-inspiring. Delicate, sensitive, and apparently meek and timid as was her nature, her heart was firm as a Roman general's, and her soul as large and sympathetic as an Apostle's. Did the occasion offer, this pale minister's daughter was capable of great and immortal deeds.

"Which way do you like him best, Neelie?" demanded she at length, removing the dilated gaze of her gray eyes from the round knot on the top of the bed-post; "when he's cold and bright, or when he's wild and fiery."

"Oh! I don't like him at all!" exclaimed Cornelia, shuddering again.

Lest she should be suspected of a wilful misstatement, it may be as well to show how it might happen that she should deceive herself in the matter. Such likes and dislikes as she had heretofore felt could one and all have been paraphrased as a more or less agreeable state of mind, induced by the sight or thought of such and such an individual. She had never conceived the possibility that a vital affection could take its origin in aversion and fear, and grow strong through turmoil, passion, and suffering. As a matter of course, she estimated her feeling toward Bressant by the only gauge she had, and with no reference to the fact that it was a wholly inadequate one.

The majority of the impressions she had received of him could not certainly be called pleasant; and that he was continually in her thoughts; that every thing she heard or saw connected itself, in one way or another, with him; that he bore a possible part in many of her imaginations of the future—these were factors she did not take into account, because ignorant of their significance. The conclusion

that she did not like him was therefore a legitimate one, according to the light she had.

Whatever Sophie may have thought of Cornelia's answer, she said no more, but lay in reverie, opening and shutting her scissors in an objectless manner, until Cornelia's voice flowed forth again.

"Isn't it a pity he wasn't a nice, jolly, society fellow? it would have been such fun this winter! As it is, I don't suppose we shall be able to do so much even as if we were alone."

"From something papa said the other day, I think he'd like to try and make Mr. Bressant more of a society fellow; perhaps it would wear away that coldness and hardness you speak of."

"What I teach him the arts and pleasures of fashionable life?" exclaimed Cornelia, laughing. "Dear me! I'd no more think of trying to teach that great big thing any thing than—any thing!"

"But you can make him go to Abbie's party, if you are to be there yourself, and then, if you don't want to instruct him, you can give him to some one who isn't afraid of him, and—have Bill Reynolds all to yourself."

Cornelia laughed and pouted, and told Sophie she was mean; but probably felt it a relief to have poor Bill's name introduced, he being so palpably *hors de combat*.

"It would be pretty good fun, after all—walking round on the arm of that great, tall, broad-shouldered creature, and telling him how to behave! I believe I *will* try it!" and she straightened herself up with a very valiant air.

"It will be your last chance, remember!" said Sophie, looking up with a deep smile in her eyes. "I promised papa that when I was well I'd take charge of Mr. Bressant myself!"

Sophie's life, as has been said, was preeminently an ideal one. Materialism disturbed and perplexed her, and she ignored it as much as possible. She was inspired and excited by the ideal she had conceived of Bressant, and of her sphere of action with regard to him. But, had the physical personality of the man been thrust upon her in the first place, she would have very likely recoiled, her finer intuitions would have been jarred, and their precision paralyzed. Standing aloof, however, living and acting only in the realm of her pure maiden creeds,

every thing seemed clear and simple enough. Right should be done, and wrong be righted; there would be no material conditions or hinderances; results were attained immediately.

But life is not what the pure-hearted girl painted it in her ideal dreams. The unconsidered obstacles rise into frowning and insurmountable barriers. Those we would make our beneficiaries often fail to appreciate their position, and turn our good into a worse evil than their own. We may theorize about the human soul, but, to put our theories to the test, is to assume an awful responsibility.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DAGUERROTYPE.

Bressant occupied two adjoining rooms at Abbie's boarding-house; one contained his bed and the other was fitted up as his study. They were on the second floor of the house, and attainable through two turns in the lower entry, a winding flight of narrow stairs, and an uncertain, darkly erratic route above.

The study was some twelve feet by eight; the floor ornamented by a carpet which, to judge from the size of the pattern, must have been designed to grace some fifty-foot drawing-room. The furniture consisted of a deal table with a folding leaf, a chair, a stove—which, perhaps because it was so small, had been permitted to remain all summer—and a broad-seated lounge with squeaky springs, but quite roomy and comfortable, which monopolized a large portion of the room. The walls were papered with a bewildering diamond pattern, in blue and white. Upon the outside window-sill stood a pot of geraniums, and another of heliotrope.

A good many books were stowed away in various parts of the study; piled one upon another in the corner by the stove, ranged side by side beneath the lounge, carefully disposed upon the inner window-sill, and occupying as much space as could be spared to them on the table. There were few ornaments to be seen; no landscapes or hunting-scenes—no pictures of pretty women—no fancy pieces for the mantel—no wine either, nor cigars, for Bressant neither smoked nor drank. A beautifully-finished and colored drawing of a patent derrick, in plan and side elevation, was pinned to the wall opposite the window. Above the mantel-piece hung an ingeniously-contrived card almanac, by which the day of week and month could be told for a hundred years to come. Two small globes, terrestrial and astronomical, stood upon the table; on the mantel-piece was an ordinary kerosene-lamp, with a conical shade of enamelled green paper, arabesqued in black, and ornamented with three transparencies, representing (when the lamp was lighted) bloody and fiery scenes in the late war; but in the daytime appearing to be nothing more terrible than plain pieces of white tissue-paper.

For two weeks Bressant had done his studying and thinking in this room. He had

enormous powers of application, naturally and by acquisition, and the first fortnight had seen them exerted to their full extent. This diligence, however, was practised not so much because the course of study marked out necessitated it, as by way of voluntary self-discipline. His first evening's experience in the Parsonage garden had given the young man a serious shock; a disturbing influence had obtained possession of him, of which he could understand no more than that it appeared to have some connection with Cornelia. It interfered, at unexpected moments, with his processes of thought; it distracted his schemes of argument; it wrote itself unintelligibly upon the page he was reading. It even followed him in his rough tramps up the hills and through the woods, and sometimes shook the hand which held the pen during his compositions.

Bressant knew not how best to combat his novel difficulty. Although called into existence by an extraneous circumstance, it seemed to have struck root in every faculty of his mind, and, what was more, into the inmost core of every faculty. He was possessed, not by seven devils, but by one devil in seven different forms. He felt that the only thing to be done, if he did not intend to make an entire surrender of himself, was to take stern and rigorous measures for deliverance. The best course that suggested itself was to study his sevenfold devil down; taking every precaution, of course, to keep out of the way of all additional contamination; and this course he adopted, and had conscientiously adhered to. It was with very pardonable satisfaction that he felt his malady gradually and surely give way before his unsparing regimen, until by the first of July he considered himself entirely whole and in working order, and beyond danger of relapse.

He sometimes wondered why the professor persisted in inviting him to take dinner, or stay to tea, or sit on the balcony in the evening, or go on a picnic into the woods. Why couldn't the old gentleman divine the cause of his invariable and unhesitating refusals? Leaving other considerations out of the question, would such things be likely to increase his knowledge of theology, or further the lofty schemes of his ambition? He would be glad when that daughter left the house! What was it about her that had so disturbed and beclouded the heretofore untroubled stream? Were other women like her, or was she alone in her dangerous capacity? If the first, with what assurance could he look forward to the intellectual mastery of the world! If the last, what a refinement of misfortune to have been so thrown with her! What if he should give up Professor Valeyon altogether? No, no! if he could not conquer his destiny here, he could not be sure of doing it anywhere. Let him only be self-controlled and prudent—keep

carefully and systematically out of the woman's way. Or perhaps—for it was not gratifying or dignified thus to live in terror of a minister's daughter—perhaps he might ultimately learn to associate and hold intercourse with her, unharmed. That would be a triumph worth striving for! Indeed, how could he feel secure until it had been won? Again, did there at present exist any such risk as he had brought himself to imagine? Was not this first ordeal, and its effects, all that was to be apprehended? What if all his anxiety, and self-control, and prudence, had been wasting themselves upon nothing? Would it not be worth while to try the experiment? to prove whether he was still liable to this strange witchery and enchantment? even if so it should turn out, it was still well that the point should be settled once for all. Decided, then, that he should take the first opportunity to put himself to the test.

Thus did the young man argue around his instinct, ignorant that the poison was at that moment circulating in his blood, and prompting the very sophistries that his brain produced. He who is cured begets a wholesome aversion toward what has harmed him; he feels no curiosity to prove whether or no he be yet open to mischief from it. Bressant's poison was in fact an elixir, whose delicious intoxication he had experienced once, and which his whole nature secretly but urgently craved to taste again.

A result somewhat similar to this was doubtless what Professor Valeyon aimed at in his plan of developing the emotional and affectional elements of his pupil, albeit he was far from imagining what might be the cost and risk to every thing which he himself held most dear. Like many other men, of otherwise liberal mind and clear insight into character, he had certain convictions and principles, derived from contemplating the facts and results of his own life, which he believed must produce upon other people's mental and moral constitutions as good an effect as upon his own. And possibly, could we divest our regimen of life of all personal flavor and conformation, it might, other things being favorable, suit our friends very tolerably well. But, until we are able to throw off the fetters of our own individuality, the measure of our garments can never accurately fit anybody else.

On the morning of the 1st of July, Bressant sat at his table, with his books and papers about him. He was in an excellent humor, for he had just arrived at the conclusion that he might, and would, safely encounter his bugbear Cornelia. If the professor invited him to tea, and to spend the evening, he was resolved to accept; and, at that moment, he felt a hand laid upon his shoulder, and, turning quickly round, recognized the sombre figure of the boarding-house keeper.

Although he had lived with her two weeks, he had not as yet had other than the briefest communication with her. He probably thought ho had in hand many matters of more importance than the cultivation of his landlady's acquaintance; and she, whatever may have been her desire to carry out the promise she had made to the professor, had not found it possible to be other than indirectly observant of his welfare.

"I knocked, Mr. Bressant, but I couldn't make you hear. I came to ask you to do me a little favor, sir."

Bressant had risen to his feet, and stood leaning against the back of his chair. He nodded and smiled good-naturedly, his hand busy with his beard, and his eyes taking in, with mild curiosity, the plain and plainly-dressed woman before him. What favor could she expect him to do for her? He'd just as lief agree to any thing that wouldn't interfere in any way with his arrangements. Of course, she wouldn't ask any thing more. As long as he paid his board-bill, and created no disturbance, what obligations did he owe her?

"You see, sir," proceeded Abbie, gently rattling the bunch of keys that hung at her belt, "we've been in the habit of giving a party here, three or four times a year, for the young folks to come and dance and enjoy themselves. There will be one next Thursday, the 4th of July. Will you come down, and join in?"

Bressant threw back his head, with one of his brief laughs. "Come to a dance? But I don't know how to dance! I never go into society. What should I do? Thank you for asking me!"

"I thought you might be interested to look on at one of our country hops," said Abbie, whose eyes observed the young man's manner, as he spoke, with a closeness that would have embarrassed most men. "There's a good deal to amuse yourself with besides dancing. The school-master will be there, and the minister that is now, and Professor Valeyon."

"Professor Valeyon?" repeated Bressant, leaning forward, with his hand to his ear, and the vivid, questioning expression on his face, which was peculiar to himself.

The movement appeared to produce a disproportionate effect upon Abbie. Her finger tremblingly sought her under lip; a quiver, as if from a sudden pain, passed across her forehead; there was a momentary unsteadiness in her eyes, and then they fastened, almost rigidly, upon the young man's face. So habitual was

the woman's self-control, however, that these symptoms, whatever they betokened, were repressed and annulled, till none, save a particularly sharp-sighted person, would have noticed them. Bressant was thinking only of Professor Valeyon, and would scarcely have troubled himself, in any case, about the neuralgic spasms of his landlady.

"The professor and Miss Valeyon will both come," said Abbie, as soon as the neuralgia, if that it were, would allow her to speak. "Excuse me, sir—may I sit down a moment?" These words were uttered hurriedly, and, at the same moment, the woman made a sudden step to the lounge, and dropped down upon it so abruptly that the venerable springs creaked again.

"Beg your pardon, ma'am," said Bressant, rather awkwardly. "Must be an infirm old person," he added to himself. "She looks older, even, than when she came in!"

"Well, sir," said she, with rather a constrained air, rising, from the sofa in a way that confirmed the young man's opinion about her infirmity; "well, sir, shall I expect you on Thursday evening?"

"Yes; I'll come," said he, with an elastic inclination of his shoulders, and a smile. He thought himself fortunate in so good an opportunity to put his invulnerability to the proof.

Abbie bowed without speaking, and moved toward the door. Having opened it, she turned round, with her hands upon the latch: "Professor Valeyon tells me you're an orphan, sir?"

"My father died last month; I never knew my mother," returned Bressant, pushing his brown beard between his teeth, and biting it impatiently. He wished people would get through asking him about his deceased relatives.

"Never knew your mother! it must have been—have you never felt the need of her?"

"Oh, no! I was better without one," said he, quite provoked at his landlady's pertinacity. He turned about, and threw himself into his chair. The woman shrank back beyond the threshold.

"Good-day, sir, and thank you," she said. But Bressant could not be expected to hear the low, timid tone in which she spoke. Seeing that he made no response, she softly closed the door.

She went along the dark entry to her own room. On a little table in one corner stood an old-fashioned desk. She opened it, and, unlocking an inner drawer, took therefrom a small morocco case, lined with red velvet, and containing a daguerreotype much faded by age. She studied it long and earnestly, but seemingly without any very satisfactory result.

"But how can I expect it?" murmured she. "So long ago as this was taken! so sickly and unformed as he was then! But, oh! did they think I could be blind to that face, and form, and expression! and there is none other but he, now; the father is dead. Dead! Well, may God forgive him all the evil of his life! I'm sure I do. But what will this turn out to be, I wonder—a curse or a blessing? I must wait—it isn't for me to speak; I must wait, and the end may be happy, after all."

CHAPTER X.

ONLY FOR TO-NIGHT!

On the evening of the 4th of July, Professor Valeyon and Cornelia got into the wagon, and drove off, behind Dolly, to the boarding-house. It was a warm, breathless night, and the stars looked brighter and more numerous than usual.

The boarding-house was one of the largest buildings in town—an accidental sort of structure, painted white, green-blinded, and protected, from the two roads at whose intersection it stood, by a white-washed board-fence, deficient in several places. The house expanded into no less than four large bay-windows, affording an outlook to three small rooms upon the ground-floor. The four or five other larger apartments were forced to pass a gloomy existence behind a loop-hole or two apiece, which could not have measured over three feet in any direction.

The two largest rooms lay corner to corner, at right angles to one another, and communicating by a passage-way through their point of contact. Who the original genius was who discovered the admirable facilities this else preposterous arrangement afforded for dances will remain forever unknown; but the experiment once tried became an institution as permanent as Abbie herself.

The small triangle of space between the two rooms, which to utilize had theretofore been an unsolved problem, served admirably as a station for the band; they could be heard in either apartment equally well. The small boudoirs, nooks, and corners, which were scattered here and there with lavish hand, did excellent duty as flirtation-boxes for those of the dancers who needed that refreshment; the only drawback being that one was never quite sure of privacy, on account of the complicated system of doors and entries that prevailed.

But, in spite of all objections, a dance at Abbie's was the rallying-cry of the community. All the respectable people in town put on their newest clothes—and if they were new it did not so much matter what the style might be—and thronged, on foot or in wagon, to the boarding-house door. They came to have a good time, and they always succeeded in their object. What pigeon-wings were performed! what polkas perpetrated! what waltzes wrecked! How the long lines of the Virginia Reel, or "On the Road to Boston," extended through the hall from

end to end, and how the couples twisted, whirled, and scooted between them! How the call-man, with his violin under his chin, stopped playing to vociferate his orders, or anathematize some bewildered pair! How the old folks, sitting on chairs and benches along the walls, nodded and smiled and mumbled to one another as the ruddy faces of their descendants passed and repassed before them, and spoke to one another of like scenes thirty, or forty, or fifty years ago! How happy everybody was, and what a jolly noise they made!

As Cornelia and her papa approached the house, every window was alight, above and below. The door was thrown hospitably open, and the lamplight streamed forth and ran down the steps, and lay in a long rectangular pool upon the road. Abbie stood near the entrance, directing the ladies one way and the gentlemen another. Punctuality at an affair of this kind being among the village virtues, the whole company was present within a surprisingly short time of the appointed hour.

"Good-evening, Professor Valeyon; good-evening, my dear; how well-you look! Step up-stairs—the first room on the right."

"My pupil is to be here to-night, isn't he?" inquired the professor, as his daughter vanished.

"Yes, he said he'd be down. He doesn't seem to be used to society. Miss Cornelia told me she thought it would do him good to begin, so I went up the other day and asked him."

"Oh! humph!" said the old gentleman, who had vainly endeavored to catch Abbie's eye while she was speaking. He stood silent a few moments, and then moved off to the gentlemen's dressing-room, taking a pair of white-kid gloves from his pocket as he went.

Cornelia, having removed her hood, put on her slippers, shaken out her skirt, touched her hair with the tips of her gloved fingers, and settled the ribbon at her throat, descended to the reception-room—as that part of the entrance-hall where Abbie stood was styled—and found her papa awaiting her. She was about to take his arm, when the hostess touched her on the shoulder.

"Wait a moment," said she, with a peculiar grave smile; "I'll bring you your *protégé*."

Bressant was standing in the door-way of an inner room, leaning with the elbow

of one arm in the hand of the other, as he pulled at his mustache and twisted the beard on his chin. He looked ill at ease, and as if he rather regretted his intrepidity in coming down. Had he been what is called a student of human nature, he might have been interested in the quaint people and customs which an occasion like this would bring to light. But he believed that all the traits and elements of mankind at large were comprised, in a superior form, within himself, and that, knowing himself, he would virtually know the world. This somewhat exclusive creed had, doubtless, been aided and abetted by his deafness, which, even had he been otherwise inclined by nature, must have thrown him back, in great measure, upon himself; or, possibly, the dogma may have been but an outgrowth of the physical defect: he fights hard and well, in this world, who counteracts the bias given by bodily infirmity. In any case, however, since such was the position of his mind, he could scarcely be expected to derive much entertainment from a social occasion like the present. It is even uncertain whether he would not actually have repented and taken to flight, had not Abbie come up at the critical moment, and carried him off to Cornelia.

"I wanted to have the pleasure of presenting Mr. Bressant to you myself," said she, with the same peculiar smile; and so left them together.

The young man stood confronting the young woman, who, besides being dressed with great taste, looked, owing to the whimsical circumstances in which she was placed, every bit of beauty she had. Bressant stared at her in astonishment.

One woman's beauty cannot be contrasted with another's; as well compare a summer valley with the white clouds sailing over it; each is to be enjoyed in its own way. But Cornelia's loveliness carried with it a peculiar quality, which not only gratified the eye, but went further, and seemed to touch a vital chord in the beholder, jarring throughout his being with a sweet distribution of effect, and causing heart and voice to vibrate. It made Bressant conscious in every fibre that he was man and she woman. Whence came the influence he could not tell, and meanwhile it gained ever stronger and deeper hold upon him. Was it from the eyes, a-sparkle with the essence of youth and health? or from the mouth, with its red warmth of full yet delicate curves? the gates of what sweetness of breath! or from the crisp, dark, lustreless luxuriance of the hair? or from the curved shadows melting on the cheeks, and nestling beneath the chin? He could trace it to no single one of these various elements—yet how lovely all were! Whence, then, was it? In a bottle of wine there are many drops, alike in color, shape, flavor, and sparkle; in which one, of all, lurks the intoxication? The only way to make sure of the drop is to drink the bottle; and, even then, though there will be

no doubt about the intoxication, its precise origin may still be disputed.

As Bressant bowed to Cornelia, who courtesied grandly in return, the band struck up a waltz, which seemed to be at once reflected in her face and manner. She was particularly sensitive to musical impressions, and instinctively looked up to Bressant's face for sympathy, forgetting at the moment that his infirmity would probably debar him from sharing her enjoyment. However that might be, he was certainly not indifferent to the silent music of her beauty; he was gazing down upon her with an intensity which caused her to droop her eyes, and draw an uneven breath or two. There was in him all a man's fire, strangely mingled with the freshness of a boy.

"Take my arm," said he, offering it to her. After an instant's hesitation, more mental, however, than physical, she laid her graceful hand within it, and they moved toward the dancing-room.

But at the instant of contact an electric pulsation seemed to pass through Cornelia's blood, imbuing it with a powerful ichor, alien to herself, yet whose potency was delicious to her. She fancied, also, that she herself went out in the same way to her companion, establishing a magnetic interchange of personalities, so that each felt and shared the other's thoughts and emotions.

They now stood in the principal dancing-hall, where several couples, who had already taken the floor, were revolving with various degrees of awkwardness. The music had flowed into Cornelia's ears until she was full of the rhythmical harmony. She glanced up once more at her partner, this time with a lustrous look of confidence. Was it possible that he had become inspired through her? Certainly it seemed as if the feeling of the tune were discernible in his face as well as hers; it was even betokened by the lightsome pose of his figure, and a scarcely subdued buoyancy in his step. Moment by moment did the occult sympathy between one another and the cadence of the music grow more assured and complete; and at length—though precisely how it came about neither Cornelia nor Bressant could have told—they were conscious of floating through the room, mutually supporting and leading on each other, mind and motion pulsating with the beat of the tune, amid a bright, half-seen chaos of lights, faces, and forms, dancing a waltz!

Neither felt any surprise at what, but a few moments before, both would have deemed an impossibility. The easy, whirling sweep of the motion, not ending nor beginning, seemed, to Bressant as well as to Cornelia, the most natural thing in

the world. Beautifully as she danced, he was no whit her inferior. They moved in complete accord. Years of practice could not have made the harmony more perfect.

The charm of dancing, although nothing is easier than to experience it, is something that eludes statement. It is the language of the body, graceful and significant. It has that in it which will make it live and be loved so long as men and women exist as such. The fascination of the motion, the magic of the music, the hour, the lights; the nearness, the touch of hands, the leaning, the support, the starting off in fresh bewilderments; the trilling down the gamut of the hall; the pauses and recommencements; even the little incidents of collision and escape; the trips, slips, and quick recoveries; the breathless words whispered in the ear, and the laughter; the dropped handkerchief, the crushed fan, the faithless hair-pin —these, and a thousand more such small elements, make dancing imperishable.

Presently—and it might have been after a minute or an hour, for all they could have told—Bressant and Cornelia awoke to a sense of four bare walls, papered with a pattern of abominable regularity, a floor of rough and unwaxed boards, a panting crowd of country girls and bumpkins. The music had ceased, and nothing remained in its place save a fiddle, a harp, and an inferior piano.

"Come out to the door!" said Bressant, "the air here is not fit for us to breathe."

They went, Cornelia leaning on his arm, silent; their minds inactive, conscious only of a pleasant, dreamy feeling of magnetic communion. Both felt impelled to keep together—to be in contact; the mere thought of separation would have made them shudder.

The door stood open, and they emerged through it on to the wooden steps. At first their eyes, dazzled by the noisy glare of the house, could distinguish nothing in the silent darkness without. But, by-and-by, a singular gentle radiance began to diffuse itself through the soft night air, as if a new moon had all at once arisen. They looked first at each other, and then upward at the sky. Cornelia pressed her companion's arm, and caught her breath.

From the north had uprisen a column of light, of about the apparent breadth of the Milky Way, but far more brilliant, and defined clearly at the edges. Higher and higher it rose, until it reached the zenith. Pausing a moment there, it then began to slide and lengthen down the southern slope of the sky, lower and lower, till its extreme limit seemed to mingle with the haze on the horizon. Having thus completed its stupendous sweep, it remained, brightening and paling by turns,

for several minutes. Finally, it slowly and imperceptibly faded away, vanishing first at the loftiest point of all, and lingering downward on either side, till all was gone.

"What a glorious arch!" exclaimed Cornelia.

"It was put there for us, was it not?" rejoined Bressant.

Some of the other guests had come out in time to see the latter part of this spectacle, as it trembled athwart the heavens. They "Oh'd" and "Ah'd" in vast astonishment and admiration; and one of them humorously asserted that it had been engaged, at a huge expense, to celebrate the anniversary of American Independence. So the celestial arch vanished in the echo of a horse-laugh. But Bressant and Cornelia, as they stood silently arm-in-arm, felt as if it were rather the presage of an emancipation of their own selves. From, or to what, they did not ask; nor did the old superstition, that such signs foretell ruin and disaster, recur to their minds until long afterward.

Dancing was now recommenced, but, by an unuttered agreement, the two refrained from participating again. The enjoyment had been too entire to risk a repetition. They sat down in one of the small boudoirs, which, through a demoralized corridor, commanded a view of the extremity of one of the dancing-rooms.

From this vantage-ground they could see the distinctive features of the assembly pass before their eyes. Girls who danced well striving to look graceful in the arms of men who danced ill, or floundering women bringing disgrace and misery upon embracing men. Dancers of the old school, whose forte lay in quadrilles and contra-dances, cutting strange capers, with faces of earnest gravity. People smiling whenever spoken to, and without hearing what was said; and on-lookers smiling, by a sort of photographic process, at fun in which they had no concern. Introductions, where the lady was self-possessed and bewitching, the gentleman monosyllabic and poker-like; others, where he was off-hand, ogling, and facetious; she, timid, credulous, and blushing. All kinds of costumes, from the solitary dress-coat, and low-necked ball-dress, worn respectively by Mr. and Mrs. Van Brueck from Albany, to the mixed tweed sack and trousers, and the checked gingham, adorning the Browne boy and girl.

"How foolish it all seems when you're not doing it yourself!" remarked Cornelia at last, laughing softly.

"But very wise when you are."

"How beautifully you danced! I didn't know you could."

"I never did before—I couldn't, with any one but you. As soon as we touched each other, I felt every thing through you."

"It was very strange, wasn't it? and yet I don't wonder at it, somehow."

"It would have been stranger not to have been so."

"Why, how have you been hearing what I said?" suddenly exclaimed Cornelia, looking at him in surprise; "I've been almost whispering all this time!"

"Have you? It sounded loud enough to me. But I could hear you think to-night, I believe. Will it be so to-morrow, do you suppose?"

"To-morrow!" repeated Cornelia. "Dear me! to-morrow is my last day here."

"The last day!" echoed Bressant, in a tone of dismay. "Shall we find one another the same as to-night when you come back?"

"Why not?" responded she, with a resumption of cheerfulness. "I sha'n't be gone but three months."

So the conversation lingered along, until gradually the greater part of it was supported by Bressant, while Cornelia sat quiet and listened—a thing she had never done before. But the young man's way of expressing himself was picturesque and piquant, keeping the attention thoroughly awake. His ideas and topics were original. He plunged into the midst of a subject and talked backward and forward at the same time, yet conveyed a marvelously clear idea of his meaning. Sometimes the last word was the key-note that rendered the whole intelligible. And he had the bearing of a man all unaccustomed to deal with women—ignorant of the traditional arts of entertainment which society practises upon itself. He talked to Cornelia as he might have done to a man, and yet his manner showed a subtle difference—a lack of assurance—a treading in a pleasant garden with fear of trespassing—the recognition of the woman. To Cornelia it had the effect of the most soothing and delicious flattery; had he been as worldly-wise as other men, he could not have been so delicate.

He, for his part, gave himself wholly up to be fascinated and absorbed by the lovely woman at his side. Did a thought of danger intrude, the whisper, "Only for

to-night, only for to-night!" sufficed to banish it. Yet another day, and he would return to the old life once more.

CHAPTER XI.

EVERY LITTLE COUNTS.

Mr. William Reynolds arrived late, perhaps because he delayed too long over the niceties of his toilet. He was a country young man, fashioned upon a well-worn last. His occupation for several years past had been to attend to the furnishing and driving of a milk-cart, and, very likely, it was this which had hindered the proper development of his figure. At all events, he was stoutest where it is generally thought advisable to be lean, and narrow where popular prejudice demands breadth. His knees were more conspicuous than his legs, and his elbows than his arms. His face was striking, chiefly because an accident in early life had prostrated his nose; the expression, though lacking force, was in the main good-natured, the eyes were modestly veiled behind a pair of eye-glasses, which stayed on, as it were, by accident.

Mr. Reynolds was an admirer of Cornelia's; a fact which was the occasion of much pleasant remark and easy witticism. More serious consequences were not likely to ensue, for such men as he seldom attain to be other than indirectly useful or mildly obnoxious to their fellow-creatures. But the strongest instincts he had were social; and it was touching to observe the earnestness with which they urged him to lumber the path of fashion and gay life. He nearly broke his own heart, and unseated his instructor's reason, in his efforts to learn dancing; and, to secure elegant apparel for Sundays and parties, he would forswear the butcher's wagon for months at a time. Once in a while he would smoke an Havana cigar from the assortment to be found at the grocery-store on the corner, and sometimes, when a national holiday or the gloom of unrequited love rendered strong measures a necessity, he would become recklessly convivial over muddy whisky-and-water amid the spittoons and colored prints of the hotel bar-room.

On the present evening he arrived late, and came upon Cornelia and Bressant just as the latter was proposing to obtain the professor's consent to accompanying her home on foot.

Mr. Reynolds advanced, smiling; a polka was being played at the moment, and he playfully contorted his figure and balanced his head from side to side in time

with the tune, while with his right forefinger he beckoned winningly to Miss Valeyon to join him in the dance. Bressant gave an involuntary shudder of disgust; it seemed to him a grisly caricature of the inspiration he himself had felt at the beginning of the evening. But Cornelia was equal to the emergency.

"If you'll go and ask papa now," said she, "I'll take care of this person meantime. He's known me so long, I don't want to be impolite to him."

A good deal of harm may be done in this world by what is called a reluctance to be uncivil. There is generally more selfishness than consideration about it. All sincere admiration, no matter from how low a source, is grateful to us. Cornelia knew that Bill Reynolds worshipped her with his whole small capacity, and she was unwilling to deny herself the miserable little incense, and give him plainly to understand that, though it was not distasteful to her, he was. And who could blame her for not wanting to hurt his feelings?

Bressant had no such delicate scruples, and would gladly have assisted poor Bill through the open bow-window. He departed on his errand, however, with nothing more than a look of intense dissatisfaction, which was entirely lost upon the infatuated Reynolds.

"How lovely you do look to-night, Miss Valeyon! I almost think sometimes it ain't fair anybody should look as lovely as you do. Elegant music they've got to-night, ain't it? Come, now—just one turn. What?"

Cornelia actually had danced with this young gentleman on one or two memorable occasions in the past, but was scarcely in the mood to do so this evening. As she looked at him, now, she wondered how she ever had. What a difference there is in men I and even more in the way we regard them at different times. Bressant, simply by being himself, had annihilated all such small claims to social life as Bill Reynolds ever possessed.

"I'm not dancing to-night, thank you," said Cornelia; but she smiled so as wellnigh to heal the wound her words inflicted. "What makes you so late?"

Now, the fact was that Mr. Reynolds had been weak enough to allow himself to be drawn into conversation with some friends near the entrance of the hotel possessing the bar-room with the spittoons and colored prints already alluded to; and, being the Fourth of July, which, like many other days, comes but once a year, and a "dry night," as his friends assured him, he had further given evidence of lack of stamina by accepting an invitation to "take a damp," When he had

finally succeeded in making his escape, he was conscious that it was in a tolerably damp condition; and it had occurred to him, as a brilliant idea, to put his head beneath the pump by way of freshening up his wits. The effect had been, for the moment, undoubtedly clarifying, and he made his entrance into Abbie's with a great deal of confidence; more, perhaps, than was entirely warrantable; for the muddy whisky was still circulating in his blood, and the light, the close, hot air, and the excitement within-doors, were rapidly undoing the good work which the pump had accomplished. It was probably a dim suspicion that such was the case, which made him hesitate, and stick his hands in his pockets, and screw his boot-heel into the floor, when Cornelia asked him why he was so late. But the question had been asked in pure idleness, and not with any interest or purpose to elicit a reply. The next minute she relieved him from his embarrassment by speaking again.

"Would you mind doing me a favor, Bill?"

It seemed to Bill that, for the sake of hearing his Christian name from her lips, he would be willing to forswear all else that made life most dear—Havana cigars and muddy whisky included; and he was proceeding with impressive gravity to make a statement to that effect, when Cornelia once more interrupted him.

"Thank you; I was sure you would. You're always so kind! You see I'm obliged to go home now, but papa will want to stay to supper, probably, or to play backgammon, and, of course, I shall leave him the wagon. Now, I want you to promise to see that Dolly is properly harnessed before he starts—will you? You know that man they have here isn't always quite sober, especially when it's Fourth of July, or any thing of that sort; and papa is getting old."

"Yes, Miss Valeyon. I'll attend to it. I'll fix the old gentleman up, like he was my own father. And you're just right about that fellow that's around here; *I* wouldn't trust him. Why—" Bill was on the point of mentioning that he had made one of the convivial party that evening, but checked himself in time, and looked particularly profound.

Cornelia had probably had more than one motive in making her request of Bill Reynolds. She wanted to avoid being urged to dance, by keeping his mind otherwise employed; she enjoyed the amusement of making him imagine that he was of some consequence and importance to her; and, lastly, she was very willing that all this should concur with some possible benefit to her father. Of Bill's irresponsible condition she had of course no suspicion; indeed, he might

have been far worse, with impunity, as far as she was concerned. It takes considerable practice to detect the effects of liquor, except when very excessive; and Cornelia had no such training.

"And," added she, as she saw Bressant making his way toward her, with unmistakable signs on his face of having been successful in his errand, "and suppose you go now, and find out when papa leaves, so as to be sure to be on hand."

It was very neatly managed, on the whole; and Cornelia, as she put on her shoes, and drew the hood around her face, congratulated herself on her tact and readiness. Yet she felt a little uneasiness, assignable to no particular cause, and upon no definite subject; it may have been nothing more than some slight qualms of conscience at having so deluded her unfortunate admirer. As she came down from the ladies' dressing-room, she felt a strong impulse to go and kiss her papa good-by; but reflecting that Bill would probably be with him, and that she would see him at any rate before she went to bed, she thought better of it; and, taking Bressant's arm—he was waiting her at the foot of the stairs—she signified her readiness to start.

"When did papa say he was coming?" asked she, as they moved through the passage-way to the door.

"He was playing backgammon; he said he should be through in ten minutes; he would probably overtake us before we got to the Parsonage," replied the young man.

"I hope he'll be all safe!" said Cornelia, half to herself, the vague feeling of uneasiness still working within her.

At the door they were met by Abbie, who bade them good-night, with the same expression upon her lips and in her eyes that she had worn when presenting them to one another early in the evening.

"Take good care of each other, my children," said she, as they passed out; but her tone was so low as to be audible to Cornelia alone.

CHAPTER XII.

DOLLY ACTS AN IMPORTANT PART.

The faintest of breezes wafted in the young people's faces as they descended the wooden steps of the boarding-house and passed along the dark, deserted sidewalk of the village street. The noisy dance was soon left at a distance; how extravagant and unnatural it seemed in comparison with the deep, sweet night in which they were losing themselves!

The brightness of the stars, and the wavering peaks and jagged edges of the northern lights, brought out the shadows of the uneven hills, and revealed the winding length of downy mist which kept the stream in the valley warm. Such was the stillness, and the subdued tone of the landscape, that it seemed unreal—the phantom of a world which had lost its sunshine, and was mourning for it in gentle melancholy.

The sense of the solitude around them brought the young man and woman closer to one another. For enjoyment to be, mortally speaking, perfect, it needs that a soft and dreamy element of sadness should be added to it; and this was given by the gracious influence of the night. The darkness, too, encouraged the germs of that mutual reliance, hopefulness, and trust, which combine to build up the more vital and profound relations of life. There is a magic mystery and power in it, which we can laugh at in the sunshine, but whose reality, at times, forces itself upon us mightily.

As Bressant trod onward, with the warm and lovely woman living and moving at his side, and clinging to his arm with a dainty pressure, just perceptible enough to make him wish it were a little closer—it entered his mind to marvel at the tender change that seemed to have come over familiar things.

"I've walked often in the night, before," observed he, looking around him, and then at Cornelia; "on the same road, too; but it never made me feel as now. It is beautiful." He used the word with a doubtful intonation, as if unaccustomed to it, and not quite sure whether he were applying it correctly.

"You speak as if you didn't know what you were talking about!" said Cornelia, with a round, melodious laugh. "Did you never see or care for any thing

beautiful before this evening?"

"You remember that night in the garden?" asked Bressant, abruptly. "I've learned a great deal since then. I couldn't understand it at the moment; I wasn't prepared for it—understand? but I know now—it was beauty—I saw it and felt it—and it drove me out of myself."

Cornelia was thrilled, half with fear and half with delight. Bressant spoke with an almost fierce sincerity and earnestness of conviction, that quite overbore the shield of playful incredulity which woman instinctively raises on such occasions; they seemed to have crossed, at one step, the pale of conventionalities; and, sweet and alluring as the outer wilderness may be, it is wilderness still, and full of sudden precipices. Besides, the very energy and impetuosity which the young man showed, suggested the apprehension that the power of his newly-awakened emotions was greater than his ability to control and manage them.

But beauty, as he understood it, was something of deeper and wider significance than that generally accepted. It was all, in mankind and nature, that appeals to and gratifies the senses and sensuous emotions. Cornelia had been the door through which he had passed into a consciousness of its existence; the fragrant pass leading to the mighty valley. Unfortunately neither he nor she was in a position to comprehend this fact: she was no metaphysical casuist, and never imagined but that he would find the end, as well as the beginning of his newly-opened world in her; and he, dizzied by the tumult and novelty of the vision, was naturally disposed to attribute most value and importance to the only element in it of which he had as yet taken any real and definite cognizance.

"What a strange, one-sided life you must have had!" Cornelia remarked, after they had walked a little way in silence. "Don't you think you'll be happier for having found the other side out?"

Bressant started, and did not immediately reply. Thus far he had looked upon this unexpected enlargement of feeling as merely a temporary episode, after all; not any thing permanently to affect the predetermined course and conduct of his life. The idea that it was to round out and perfect his existence—that he was to find his highest happiness in it—had never for a moment occurred to him. He did not believe it possible that it could coexist with lofty aims and strenuous effort; it was a weakness—a delicious one—but still a weakness, and ultimately to be trampled under foot.

But Cornelia had taken the ground that it was the half of life—not only that, but

the better and more desirable half. For the first time it dawned upon the young man, that he might be obliged to decide between following out the high and ascetic ambition which had guided his life thus far, and abandoning, or at least lowering it, to take in that other part of which Cornelia was the incarnation. The prospect drove the blood to his heart and left him pale. He would not entertain it yet. Had he not promised himself to let this one night go by?

"It would be a very sweet happiness, if I were sure of finding it," said he; and Cornelia, turning this answer over in her foolish heart, made a great deal out of it, and was thankful for the darkness that veiled her face. But Bressant was hardly far advanced enough in the art of affection to make a graceful use of double meanings; and most likely Cornelia might have spared herself the blush.

Nevertheless, the young man was more deeply involved than he suspected. That magnetic sympathy could not otherwise have existed between him and his companion. The music could not have sounded through her sense to his, nor her whisper have penetrated the barrier of his infirmity, unless something akin to love had been the interpreter and guide; and not a one-sided something, either.

On they walked, with the feeling of intimacy and mutual contentment growing stronger at every moment. The ground was full of ruts and inequalities, and ever and anon a misstep or an overbalance would cause them involuntarily to tighten their hold upon each other; involuntarily, but with a secret sensation of pleasure that made them hope there were more rough places farther on. They did their best to keep up a desultory conversation, perhaps, because they wished to spare each other the embarrassment which silence would have caused, in leaving the pleasant condition of affairs without a veil. When this kind of thing first begins to be realized between young people, the enjoyment takes on a more delicate flavor from a pretended ignoring of it.

It is beautiful to imagine them thus placed in a situation to which both were strangers, knowing not what new delight the next moment might bring forth. There was an element of childlikeness and innocence about it, the more pleasing to behold in proportion as they were elevated in mind or organization above the average of mankind.

A woman who loves thinks first of the man who has her heart; while he, as a general rule, is primarily concerned with himself. If Bressant wished Cornelia to be happy and loving, it was in order that he himself might thereby be incited to greater love and happiness; but, had her pleasure been, independent of his own,

he would not have troubled himself about it. To her, on the other hand, Bressant's well-being would have been paramount to her own, and to be preserved, if need were, at its sacrifice.

Even a perception, on her part, of this selfishness in him, would not have alienated her. Selfishness in him she loves does not chill, but augments, a woman's affection. Cornelia, already inclined to allow her companion every thing, would have seen nothing unbecoming in his being of the same mind himself. He could scarcely value himself so high as she.

Meanwhile Professor Valeyon, having won his game of backgammon, hunted up his hat, made his adieux, and went to the shed for his wagon. He perceived a figure apparently busy in buckling Dolly between the shafts, and, supposing it to be the ostler, called to him to know whether every thing was ready.

"All serene, Profess'r Valeyon," responded the voice of Mr. Reynolds, as he led Dolly—who seemed rather restive—out into the yard. "Here you are, all fixed! I done it for you, in style. Jump in, and I'll give you the reins."

"Is this the reason you were asking me what time I should start, Bill?" inquired the old gentleman, as he mounted to his seat. "Very kind of you: sure she's all right?"

"Well, I ought to know something about harnessing a mare by this time, I guess!" responded Bill, with a good deal of dignity, as he handed up the reins. "Well, well I no doubt—no doubt! I'm accustomed to oversee it myself, that's all.—Steady, Dolly! Good-night."

"Good-night, Profess'r Valeyon," said Bill, who, in harnessing the mare had managed, with intoxicated ingenuity, so to twist one of the buckles of the head-gear, that every time the reins were tightened, the sharp tongue was driven in under her jaw-bone. The wagon rattled off at an unusual speed; there was no need for a whip, and the professor congratulated himself upon the fine condition of his steed.

"Hasn't shown such speed for years," muttered he, admiringly. "If I'd only been a horse-jockey, now, I could have made a fortune out of her! Points all superb—only wants a little training."

They had now descended the hill on which stood the village, and were flying along the level stretch between the willow-trees. The wheels crunched swiftly

and smoothly along the ruts, or, striking sharply against a stone, made the old wagon bounce and creak. Dolly was putting her best foot foremost, and her ears were laid back close to her head: though that, by reason of the darkness, Professor Valeyon could not see. He and Dolly had travelled this road in company so often, however, and every turn and dip was so well known to him, that it never would have occurred to him to feel any anxiety. Beyond keeping a firm hold of the reins, he let the mare have her own way.

In a few minutes the willow stretch was passed, and they began to stretch with vigorous swing up the slope. Dolly's haunches were visible, working below in the darkness, and occasionally a spark of fire was struck from the rock by her hoof. Really she was doing well to-night. As they topped the brow of the slope, the professor tightened the reins a little. It wouldn't do to let the old mare overwork herself. But, instead of slackening her pace, she sprang forward more swiftly than ever.

"That's odd!" murmured the old gentleman. "Can any thing be the matter, I wonder?" and he gave another steady pull on the reins. The wagon was jerked forward with such a wrench as almost to throw him backward. There was no doubt that something was the matter, now.

By this time they were within a quarter of a mile of the Parsonage, and rapidly approaching the sharp bend around the rocky spur of the hill. Dolly's skimming hind-legs spurned the road faster and faster, and the fences flickered by in a terrible hurry. They whisked around the curve with a sharp, grating sound of the wheels on the rock, and the Parsonage lay but a short distance ahead. Suddenly a white object seemed to rise out of the road not more than a hundred yards in advance. Dolly, with the bit caught vigorously between her teeth, stretched her neck and head out and ran. Professor Valeyon, bracing himself with his feet against the dash-board, leaned back with his whole weight and sawed the reins right and left. When within a few yards of the white object—which seemed to have fluttered back to one side of the road—his right rein broke: he lost his balance and fell over backward into the bottom of the waggon, while Dolly, quite unrestrained, dashed on madly.

The professor had just made up his mind that he stood very little chance of seeing Abbie or his daughters again, when he felt the onward rush suddenly modified. There were a pawing and snorting, an irregular jerk or two, and then a dead stop. The old gentleman picked himself up and descended to the ground uninjured beyond a few slight bruises.

Cornelia and Bressant had been pacing the latter part of their way slowly, there being a disinclination on both their parts to come to the end of it. But they had passed the bend, and were within a few rods of the Parsonage, before Cornelia pressed her companion's arm, paused, listened, and said:

"I think I hear him coming: yes! that's Dolly—but how fast she's going!"

As they stood, arm-in-arm, Bressant was between Cornelia and the approaching vehicle: but, when it swung around the corner, she stepped forward, thus bringing her white dress suddenly into view. At the same moment the velocity of the wagon was much increased, and, as it came upon them, both saw the figure on the seat, easily recognizable as the professor, fall over backward. Bressant, who had been busy freeing the guard of his watch, handed it to Cornelia, at the same time pressing her back to one side. He then stepped forward in silence, half facing up the road.

Cornelia remained motionless, her hands drawn up beneath her chin: and while she drew a single trembling breath, and the busy watch ticked away five seconds, the whole act passed before her eyes. She saw Bressant standing, lightly erect, near the centre of the road, could discern his darkly-clad, well-knit figure, seemingly gigantic in the gloom: his head turned toward the on-rushing mare, one foot a little advanced, his arms partly raised, and bent: remarked what a marvelous mingling of grace and power was in his form and bearing: as the watch ticked again, she saw him spring forward and upward, grasping and dragging down both reins in his hands: another tick—he was dashed against Dolly's shoulder, and his body swung around along the shaft, but without loosening his hold upon the reins: tick, tick, tick, the mare's headway was slackened; the dragging at the bit of that great weight was more than she could carry; tick, tick, tick, she staggered on a few paces, trailing Bressant along the road; tick, tick, she came to a panting, trembling stand-still; Bressant let go the reins, but, instead of rising to his feet, he dropped loosely to the earth and lay there; tick—the five seconds were up, and Cornelia drew her second breath.

By the time the professor had scrambled out of the wagon and got around to the scene of action, he found the mysterious white figure—his own daughter—kneeling in the road beside a prostrate something he knew must be Bressant.

"Father, is he dead?" she asked, in a broken, horror-stricken voice.

The old gentleman was too much concerned to reply. Had this been a narrower nature he might have been aggrieved at Cornelia's ignoring his own late deadly

peril in her anxiety for the young man. But he would have done her wrong; her heart had stood still for him till she had seen his safety assured; then it had gone out in gratitude, admiration, and tender solicitude, for the man who had shown unfaltering and desperate determination in saving him.

Having backed Dolly—who was standing, quite subdued, with hanging head and heaving sides—away from the body, Professor Valeyon stooped down to make an examination. He had begun life as a surgeon, and was well skilled in the science. He cautiously unbuttoned the closely-fitting coat.

"Stop! let me alone! let me alone!—will you?" growled Bressant, speaking thickly and disjointedly, like one just recovering from a fainting-fit, but with unmistakable signs of ill-temper.

"Thank God! you're alive, my boy," said the professor, too much relieved to notice the tone. "Cornelia, my dear, run to the house, and get Michael and the wheelbarrow.—Any bones broken, do you think?" he continued, carefully pursuing his investigations the while.

"No, nothing! can't you let me lie here alone?" was the sulky reply. But, as the other's hand happened to press lightly in the vicinity of the chest, Bressant drew a quick, gasping breath, and could not control a spasm of pain.

"Don't touch there—it's where the shaft struck me," said he, in a voice that was no more than a whisper, but as sullen as if he had been the victim of some unpardonable wrong. There was a trace of mortification in it, too, such as might have been caused by detection in a disgraceful act.

"Never saw any thing like this in him, before," said the professor to himself. "Badly injured, too, I'm afraid: collar-bone broken, at any rate. Ah! there's the wheelbarrow, and Neelie with some cushions. Now, Michael, take hold of him carefully, and help me lift him in." But Bressant, as he felt the first touch, opened wide his half-closed eyes, and looked around savagely.

"Keep your hands off me," whispered he, in a menacing tone; "if I must go into the house, I'll walk in myself."

"Nonsense! you're crazy! 'walk in?'" cried the professor.

Bressant said no more, but, with an effort that forced a groan, he rolled over on his face, and thence raised himself to a kneeling posture. He paused so a moment, and then, by another spasmodic movement, succeeded in gaining his

feet. He had been twice kicked in his right leg, and the pain was wellnigh insupportable. He stood balancing himself unsteadily.

"Let me help you," said Cornelia, coming to his side. But he took no notice of her, not even turning his eyes upon her. He staggered blindly along the road to the gate; it gave way before him with a reluctant rattle, and closed with an ill-tempered clap as he passed through. Swaying from side to side of the marble walk, he at last reached the porch. In trying to ascend the steps, he stumbled, and pitched forward in a heavy fall.

"There!—confound his obstinacy! he's fainted," muttered the professor, with an awful frown, while the tears ran down his cheeks. "Here, Michael, help me carry him in before he comes to."

CHAPTER XIII.

A KEEPSAKE.

Bressant's collar-bone was broken; there were two severe bruises on his leg, though it had escaped fracture; his body in several places was marked with dark contusions, and there was a cut in the back of his head, where he had fallen against a stone. The professor set the collar-bone—a harrowing piece of work, there being no anesthetics at hand—and attended to the other hurts, the patient all the while preserving a dogged and moody silence, and avoiding the eyes of whoever looked at him.

"Can't understand it," said the old gentleman to himself; "the fellow acts like a wild-beast as regards his appreciation of human sympathy, in spite of his refined intellect and cultivation. A wounded animal has the same instinct to crawl away, and suffer in private."

When brought into the house, Bressant had been laid in the spare room adjoining the professor's study. After he had done all he could for his comfort, the warm-hearted old gentleman, being overcome with fatigue, retired to rest; the patient lay sullenly quiet, wishing it were day, and, again, wishing day would never come: at length the composing draught which had been given him took effect, and he sank heavily into sleep.

It was broad daylight when he awoke, and stared feverishly around him. The room was a pleasant one, facing the north and east, and the morning sun came cheerfully in through the open windows, slanting down the walls, and brightening on the carpet. It was a great improvement upon his rather gloomy room at the boarding-house, and he could not but feel it so. A small ormolu clock ticked rapidly upon the mantel-piece, the swing of the gilded pendulum being visible beneath. Bressant watched it with idle interest. He felt so weak, in mind and body, that the clock seemed company just fitted for his comprehension.

The door opened by-and-by, and Cornelia's smiling face peeped in, looking the sweeter for an expression of tender anxiety. Seeing that he was awake, her eyes took on an extra sparkle, and she advanced a step into the room, still clinging with one hand to the door-knob, however, as if afraid to lose its support.

"You feel a little better, don't you? Is that mattress comfortable? I'm going to bring you your breakfast in a few minutes."

Bressant only grew red and bit his mustache for answer. He would gladly have covered himself up out of sight, but he could not move hand or foot.

Cornelia had in her mind a little speech she meant to deliver to Bressant, on the subject of the previous night's event, but, at the critical moment, she felt her courage forsaking her. The topic was so weighty—and then she shrank from speaking out what was in her head, perhaps because her auditor was there as well as her sentiments. Still, she felt she ought to try.

"Mr. Bressant," began she, with a kindling look, "Mr. Bressant, I—" here her voice faltered; "oh! you don't know—I can never tell you—I can never forget what you did last night!" This was the end of the great speech.

Bressant became still more red and uncomfortable. "I made a fool of myself last night," said he, dejectedly. "I wish you hadn't been there; if I'd known what a piece of work—"

"But you saved my papa's life!" interrupted Cornelia, in a blaze.

The young man looked as if struck with a new idea. It seemed as if he had not before thought of looking upon the professor as an independent quantity in the affair. The whole episode had presented itself to him as a difficult problem which he was to solve. The accident to himself had been an imperfection in the solution, of which he was deeply ashamed. But he was somewhat consoled by the reflection that the old gentleman had really needed preservation on his own account.

"That does make it better," said he, half to himself, with the first approach to good-humor he had shown since his misfortune.

Cornelia still remained glowing in the door-way, turning the latch backward and forward, not knowing what more to say, and yet unwilling to say nothing more. She did not at all comprehend Bressant's attitude, and therefore admired him all the more. What she could not understand in him was, of course, beyond her scope.

"You may think nothing of it, but I know I—I know we do—I can't say what I want to, and I'm not going to try any more; but I'm sure you know—or, at least, you'll find out some time—in some other way, you know."

Bressant could not hear all this, nor would he have known what it meant, if he had; but he could see that Cornelia was kindly disposed toward him, and was conscious of great pleasure in looking at her, and thought, if she were to touch him, he would get well. He said nothing, however, and presently his bodily pain caused him to sigh and close his eyes wearily. Cornelia immediately kissed her soft fingers to him twice, and then vanished from the room, looking more like a blush than a tea rose. Before long she returned with the sick man's breakfast on a tray.

"Do you like to be nursed?" asked she, as she put the tray on a table, and moved it up to the bedside.

"No!" said Bressant, emphatically, and with an intonation of great surprise.

"Oh! why not?" faltered Cornelia, quite taken aback.

"I hate disabled people; they're monstrosities, and had better not be at all. I wouldn't nurse them."

"You think there's no pleasure in doing things for people who cannot help themselves?" demanded Cornelia, indignantly.

"There can be no pleasure in nursing," reiterated he. "It might be very pleasant to be nursed—by any one who is beautiful—if one did not need the nursing!"

Cornelia was becoming so accustomed to Bressant's undisguised manners that she forgot to be disturbed by this guileless compliment. Many hours afterward, when she was alone in her chamber, the words recurred to her, devoid of the version his manner had given them, and then they brought the blood gently to her cheeks.

"You're very foolish," said she, as she poured out some tea, and cut up a mutton-chop into mouthfuls. "Now, you have to drink this tea, though you wouldn't the last time I poured you out a cup; and I'll give you your chop. Open your mouth."

So the athlete of the day before was obliged to submit to having his tea-cup carried to his lips and tipped for him by a woman, and the chop administered bit by bit on a fork. It was very degrading; but once in a while Cornelia accidentally touched him, or her face, lit up by interest in her occupation, came so near his own that he felt warm and thrilled, and went near to admit it was worth all the broken bones in the world, and the sacrifice of pride accompanying them.

Ere breakfast was over, Professor Valeyon entered with his slippers, his pipe, and a remarkably benevolent expression for one of such impending eyebrows.

"Well, my boy," said he—ever since the accident he had addressed Bressant thus—"you look in a better humor with yourself this morning. You'll be well used to this room before you leave it," he continued, with kindly gravity, as he felt his patient's pulse. "You'll know all about the number and relative position of the bars and bunches of flowers on the wall-paper opposite, and how many feet and inches it is from the window-frame to the room-corner, and which pane of glass is the crookedest, and how much higher one post of your bedstead is than the other; and plenty more things of that kind. And, to tell you the truth, my boy, I don't believe a course of such studies, by way of variety, will do you any harm. Now, let's look at this collar-bone of yours.—O Cornelia! you'd better be finishing your packing, hadn't you?" he added, to his daughter, who was leaning on the back of his chair, sympathizing with the sick man to her heart's content. She walked obediently to the door, but, before she disappeared, turned and sent back a smile charged with all the warmth of her ardent, womanly nature. Bressant got the whole benefit of it; and it lingered with him most of the morning.

"How long must I be here?" inquired he, after Cornelia was gone.

"Three months at least," replied the surgeon; "more if you worry yourself about it."

"Three months!" repeated the young man, aghast. "What's to become of my studies? I can't hold a book; I can't write; I had to have my breakfast fed to me this morning," continued he, biting his mustache and looking away. The professor smiled thoughtfully.

"I have hopes," said he, "that you'll know more about Divinity when you come out of this room than you did before you went into it. We'll see when the time comes."

"I've found out already that my bones are like other men's," remarked Bressant, with a sigh.

"So much the better," returned the old man. "You never would have learned that out of your Hebrew Lexicon. The best way to reach this young fellow's soul is through his body," declared he, silently, to the bandage he was preparing for the broken head. "This is nothing but a blessing in disguise." But he had too much

tact to carry the conversation further, and presently left his patient alone to digest his breakfast and the lesson it had inculcated.

This was Cornelia's last day at home; she was to take the eight-o'clock train next morning to the city. The young lady's mood was unequal: sometimes she drooped; anon would break forth into much talk and merriment, which would evaporate almost as quickly as the froth of champagne. This was her first departure from home, and the ease, freedom, and beloved old ways of home-life, assumed more of their true value in her eyes. She had acquired a sentiment of awe for Aunt Margaret's grandeur. She would be obliged to sleep in corsets and high-heeled shoes; everybody would be going through the figures of a stately minuet all day long.

Then she began to feel in advance the wrench of separating from those with whom her life had been spent, and from one other in whose company she had lived more—so it seemed to her—than in all the years since she ceased to be a child. Bressant was very prominent in her thoughts; nor could she be blamed for this, for the short acquaintance bad been emphasized by a disproportional number of memorable events: First, there was the thunder-storm evening by the fountain; afterward, the dance at Abbie's; and, following in quick succession, the celestial arch, the walk homeward, and the catastrophe in which he had borne the chief part. Besides, he was so different from common men.

"So perfectly natural and unaffected," she argued to herself. "He means all he says; of course I shouldn't let him say such things to me as he does if it weren't so; but it would be affectation in me to object to it as it is!"—a most plausible deduction, by-the-way, but dangerous to act upon. To persuade herself that, because he was an exceptional sort of person, his plain way of talking to her was justifiable, was to establish a secret understanding between him and herself, which placed her at a disadvantage to begin with; and unreservedly to accept compliments, even ingenuous ones, was to indulge in a luxury that must ultimately render callous her moral sensitiveness and refinement.

On the other hand, her toleration would be almost certain to have a bad effect upon Bressant, no matter how sincere and well-meaning he might be at the outset. A man is apt to know when he has power over a woman; and, although he may have no expectation of it, nor wish to use it, yet, as time goes on and accustoms him to the idea, he must have strong principles or cold blood who does not finally yield to temptation. Plain speaking, where pleasant things are said, is smelling poisonous flowers for both parties.

A steady fall of rain set in during the night, and made the morning of departure gray. Blurred clouds rested helplessly on the backs of the hills, and wept themselves into the wet valley without seeming to grow less lugubrious for the indulgence. There was no wind; trees and plants stood up and were soaked in passive resignation. The weather-beaten boards of the barn were drenched black, except a small place right under the eaves, which looked as if it had been painted a light gray. When the covered wagon was brought around to the gate, it speedily acquired a brilliant coat of varnish; Dolly's bay suit was streaked and discolored, and the reins, thrown over her back, got all wet and uncomfortable.

Michael now came for Cornelia's trunk—a ponderous structure packed within an inch of its existence. Cornelia stood at the head of the stairs and saw it go thump! thump! thump! down to the bottom, and then scrape unwillingly over the oil-cloth to the door. Such a heavy-hearted old trunk as it was! Then she walked to the hall-window, and watched its further journey along the glistening marble causeway, which dimly reflected its square ponderosity, and the tugging Michael behind it.

Now the gate had to be pulled open; the rasp of its rattle and sharpness of its flap were somewhat impaired by the wet, but it managed to give the trunk a parting kick as it went out, as much as to say the house was well rid of it.

"Cornelia!" called the Professor from down-stairs, "you've just five minutes to say good-by in. Get through and come along!"

She passed through Sophie's open door; her sister held out her arms, her eyes overflowing with tears, but smiling with the strange perversity that possesses some people on these occasions. Cornelia was troubled with no such misplaced self-dental; she threw herself impatiently down by Sophie, and sobbed with all her might. Possibly it was more than one regret that found utterance then.

"You'll be all well and walking about when I come back, won't you dear?" said she, at last, in a shaking voice.

"I shall get well thinking what a splendid time you're having, darling."

"Sophie—will you be quite the same to me when I come back?"

"Why, Neelie, dear, what a question! I shall always be the same to you."

"But I feel as if there were going to be something—that something was going to come between us;" and Cornelia began to droop like a flower under an icy wind.

"You never could hate me, could you, Sophie?"

"Hate you! Neelie! What makes you speak so, dear? I have no misgivings."

"Oh! I don't know—I don't know! it must be because I'm wicked!"

"*You* wicked, my darling sister! Come," said Sophie, with an earnest smile, "think only of how much we love each other; let the misgivings go."

"Yes, we do love each other now, don't we? Whatever happens we'll always remember that. Good-by, Sophie!" said Cornelia, with a strong hug and a long kiss.

"Good-by, dear Neelie!"

Cornelia ran down-stairs; her papa had just gone out to the wagon; she went into Bressant's room, and walked quickly up to the bedside.

"Here's your watch," said she. "I've kept it all safe, and wound it up and every thing." She had also slept with it under her pillow, and worn it all day in her bosom, but that she did not mention. She laid it down on the table as she spoke.

"Have you a watch?" asked Bressant.

"I had one, but it did not go very long. It was very small and pretty though;" this is the short and pathetic history of most ladies' watches.

"I'd like you to take something of mine with you that you can see and hear and touch: will you keep this watch?" asked he, fixing his eyes upon her. There was no time to deliberate; there was nothing she would like so much; she snatched it up without a word and stuck it into her belt.

"Good-by!" said she, holding out her hand. Bressant took it, not without difficulty.

"I wish you were going to stay," said he, gloomily, "I should be more happy to have you here, than ashamed to need your help."

Cornelia's eyes fell, and there was a tremulousness on her lips that might mean either smiles or tears. "You'll be glad to see me when I come back, then, and you are well?"

"You'll be like a beautiful morning when you come," returned he, with a touch of that picturesqueness that sounded so quaintly coming from him. All this time he had retained her hand, and now, looking her in the eyes, he drew it with painful effort toward his lips. Cornelia's heart beat so she could scarcely stand, and her mind was in a confusion, but she did not withdraw her hand. Perhaps because he was so pale and helpless; perhaps the old argument—"it's his way—he don't know it isn't customary;" perhaps—for this also must have a place—perhaps from a fear lest he should make no attempt to regain it. She felt his bearded lips press against it. At the touch, a sudden weakness, a self-pitying sensation, came over her, and the tears started to her eyes.

"No one ever did that before to me," she said, almost plaintively, for he had

spoken no justifying words, and she was balancing between a remorseful timidity and a timid exultation.

"It's the first kiss I ever gave," said he, and his own voice vibrated. "Are you angry? it shall be the last if you are."

"Oh, I'm not angry," faltered poor Cornelia; and then she felt, or seemed to feel, a force drawing her down—scarcely perceptible, yet strong as death. She bent her lovely glowing face, with its tearful eyes and fragrant breath, close down to Bressant's.

At that very moment, or even an incalculable instant before, the professor's voice was heard calling loudly from without:

"Come—come! be quick! you'll be too late!"

She rose and fled from the room; but it was too late, indeed.

CHAPTER XIV.

NURSING.

After seeing Cornelia off, Professor Valeyon bethought himself of Abbie; she must be wondering what had become of her late boarder, and he resolved to stop at the house, and give her an account of the accident. He had got some distance beyond the boarding-house when the idea occurred to him. Just as he was about to head Dolly round in the opposite direction, he discerned a figure beyond, beneath an umbrella, which looked very much like the person he was seeking. He drove on, and in a few minutes overtook her.

"Going up to the Parsonage?" cried the old gentleman, getting gallantly down into the mud. "Here, jump up into-the wagon; I want to tell you about your—boarder."

"He—there's nothing the matter with him, of course?" said Abbie, with a short laugh. She was looking very pale, and as if she had not slept much of late. "No, don't drive mo to the Parsonage; take me home, if you please, Professor Valeyon. Well, about Mr. Bressant?"

"Doing very well now; he was pretty seriously hurt." And he went on to give a short account of what had happened, which Abbie did not interrupt by word or gesture; she sat with her head bent, and her lips working against each other.

"It's quite certain he'll recover?" she asked, when all was told.

"As certain," quoth the professor, non-committally, "as any thing in surgery can be."

"It wouldn't be safe to move him, of course?"

"Not till he's a good deal better; you see, the collar-bone—"

"Yes, I'll take your word for it," said Abbie, very pale. "Well, I'm glad he's in such good hands. If I had him he wouldn't be comfortable; I should be sure to do him more harm than good; it's better as it is; much better."

She spoke in an inward tone, looking vacantly out into the rain, and fumbling

with the handle of her umbrella.

"But you'll come up and see him once in a while, at the Parsonage?"

Abbie shook her head. "No, no, Professor Valeyon; why should I? Do you suppose he wants to see me? do you suppose he's thought of me once since he went away? It would be a strange thing for an educated, intellectual, wealthy young man like him to do, wouldn't it?" asked Abbie, with a smile.

The professor's eyes met hers for a moment, and then she looked away. Presently she spoke again:

"I'd a great deal rather leave this world as I've lived in it, for the last twenty years and more, than run any risk of making a blunder. I don't want things to change, Professor Valeyon; but if they do, it musn't be through any act of mine, or yours either."

By this time they had arrived at the boarding-house; and the old gentleman, having seen Abbie safely in to the door, drove homeward, frowning all the way, and at intervals shaking his head slowly. When he got home, he shut himself into his study, and there paced restlessly backward and forward, and stared out of the window across the valley. That open spot on the hill-top seemed to afford little or no enlightenment or satisfaction; and when he sat down to his solitary dinner, the frown had not yet cleared away.

The next day the rain was over, and a cart was sent up to the parsonage, containing Bressant's books, and such other of his belongings as he would be likely to need during his illness; and, accompanying them, a note from Abbie, expressing her regret at his misfortune, and her hopes that he would return to his rooms at her house as soon as his health was sufficiently reestablished. The young man heard the note read, and congratulated himself, as he closed his eyes with a yawn, that he was not under his quondam landlady's ministrations.

But even the best circumstances could do little to lighten the insufferable tediousness of his confinement. Probably, however, such changes and modifications as may have been in progress in his nature, attained quicker and easier development by reason of his physical prostration. The alteration in his bodily habits and conditions paved the way for an analogous moral and mental process. The powers of a man are never annihilated; if dormant in one direction, they will be active in another; and thus Bressant's passions, naturally deep and violent, being denied legitimate outlet, had given vigor, endurance, and heat of

purpose, to the prosecution of his intellectual exercises. But, as soon as these elements of his nature found their proper channels, they rushed onward with far more dash and fervor than if they had never been dammed or deflected.

The combined effect upon the young man of the companionship of a beautiful woman and his own broken bones, had been to make him feel and ponder on the nature of her power over him. The name of love was of course familiar to him, but he could hardly as yet, perhaps, grasp the full significance of the sentiment. Like other forms of knowledge, it must be approached by natural gradations. Here, if nowhere else, Bressant's life of purely intellectual activity was a disadvantage. His stand-points and views were artificial, speculative, and material. Love cannot be reduced to a formula, and then relinquished; nor is it ever safe to use, as pattern for an untried work, the plan whereby something else was accomplished. Life has need of many methods.

Nearly a week of musing and speculation had passed over the young man's head, when one day, as he was feeling unusually disconsolate, and wishing for unattainable things—Cornelia among others—he became aware, through some subtle channel of sensation, that somebody was standing in the door-way. He was lying in such a position that he could not see the door, so, after waiting a few moments, he exclaimed, with an invalid's irritability:

"Come in—or shut the door!"

"I'll come in, if you please," answered an amused voice, which, though soft and low, possessed a penetrating quality which made it easily audible to the deaf man. He had never heard it before; but either because of this quality, or for some other more occult reason, he conceived a most decided liking for it.

It's owner now became visible. She was a delicate-looking girl, with a pale, conch-shell complexion, brown hair as fine as silk, and pleasant, serene, gray eyes. She was dressed very simply in white, with a blue band across her hair, and a blue scarf and sash around throat and waist. Her face, though showing signs of quiet strength, and of a self-confidence which was the flower of maidenly modesty and innocence, was not beautiful according to any recognized standard. Bressant, from his intuitive perception of form and proportion, was aware of this. The forehead was too high, the nose irregular, the mouth lacked the perfect curve, and the teeth, though white and even, were not small enough for beauty.

Nevertheless, Bressant was at once impressed with the young girl's presence. It was as if an ethereal cloud—such as that which, shone through by white

sunlight, was just floating past the window—had eddied unexpectedly into his chamber, cooling and quieting him with the freshness of its heavenly vapor. Her eyes met his with a simple directness which made his glance waver, though he was not given to humility. Something, whereof neither science nor philosophy can take cognizance, seemed to emanate from her, elevating while it humbled him.

"If I'd known who you were, I—I shouldn't have asked you to shut the door!" said he, in an apologetic tone quite new to him.

"And how do you know who I am?" inquired the vision, with a refreshing smile.

"I meant, what sort of a person you were; but you must be Miss Sophie: only I thought she was ill."

"I am Miss Sophie, but I'm not to be thought ill any more. One invalid in the house is enough. I'm going to nurse you, and, since I'm well, you may be twice as ill as ever, if you choose."

"Well!" said Bressant, quite resignedly. He was becoming a very respectable patient.

"In what way do you want to be taken care of?" resumed the nurse with a cheerful, business-like gravity which was at once becoming and piquant.

"Stay here and talk; I like to hear your voice: and you look so cool and pleasant."

Very few people could oppose this young man in any thing; he knew so well what he wanted, and demanded it so uncompromisingly. But Sophie's sense of fitness and propriety was as sound and impenetrable as adamant, and scarcely to be affected by any human will or consideration. She felt there was something not quite right in his manner and in the nature of his demand; and, being in the habit of making people conform to her ideas, rather than the reverse, she at once determined to correct him.

"If there's any thing you wish me to read to you, I'll do it. I didn't come to sit down and talk to you; but, if you like my voice, you can have more pleasure from it in that way."

"It would be no use for you to read: I couldn't understand—I couldn't attend to your voice and the book at the same time."

"We'd better wait, then," said Sophie, turning her clear, gray eyes upon him with an expression of demure satire. "By-and-by, perhaps, it won't have such a distracting effect upon you—when you come to know me better. If not, I must keep away altogether."

Bressant's forehead grew red with sudden temper. He felt reproved, but was not prepared to acknowledge that he had merited it.

"You're very generous of your voice!" exclaimed he, resentfully. "It's your fault, not mine, that it's agreeable. You're not so kind as your tone is."

"I don't mean to be unkind," said she, more gently, looking down. "You don't seem to see the difference between unkindness and—what I said."

"What is the difference?" demanded he, taking her up.

Sophie paused a few moments, compassionating this great, willful boy, and wondering what she could do for him. He had saved her father's life, thereby imperilling his own, and disabling himself, and she could not but admire and thank him for it. But his manner puzzled and annoyed her, and was an obstacle in the way of her would-be helpfulness.

"You wouldn't ask that question, I think, if you'd had sisters, or a mother," she said, at last. "I suppose you've lived only with men. But you must learn how to treat young women from your own sense of what is delicate and true."

Bressant stared and was silent: and Sophie herself was surprised at the authoritative tone she was assuming toward a bearded man whom she had never met before. But it was impossible to associate with Bressant without either yielding to him, or, at least, behaving differently from at other times, in one way or another. He was a magnet that drew from people things unsuspected by themselves.

The pause was finally broken by the young man's accepting the situation with a grace, and even docility, which was nearly too much for Sophie's gravity.

"If you'll read, I will listen and understand it: you'd better try the Bible. I have a great deal of work to do upon that, still: you'll find one on the table by the window."

She got the book, with whose contents she was considerably better acquainted than was the divinity student, and sat down to read, marveling at the oddness of

the situation; while he lay apparently absorbed in the cracks on the ceiling. By degrees—for having carried her point she could not help being more gracious—she began to allow a little embroidery of conversation to weave itself about the sacred text She spoke to Bressant about such simple and ordinary matters as went to make up her life—the books she had read, the people she knew, the country round about, a few of her more inward thoughts. He listened, and said no more than enough to show he was attentive; sometimes making her laugh by the shrewdness of his questions, and the quaintness of his remarks.

But he said nothing more to bring a grave look into the eyes of his young nurse; and she, finding him so gentle and boyish, and withal manly and profound, chatted on with more confidence and freedom; and, being gifted with fineness and accuracy of observation, and a clear flow and order of language and ideas, made talking a delight and a profit.

There was nothing formal or didactic about Sophie, and her talk rippled forth as naturally and spontaneously as a brook trickles over its brown stones, or the over-hanging willows whisper in the wind. There was in it the unwearied and unweariable freshness of nature. And Sophie's vein of humor was as fine and pungent as the aroma of a lemon: it touched her words now and then, and made their flavor all the more acceptable.

So Bressant gained his end at last, though he had yielded it; and this fact was not lost upon the trained keenness of his observation. After his nurse was gone, he lay with closed eyes, and a general sensation of comfort, until he fell asleep. Quiet dreams came to him, such as children have sometimes, but grown-up people seldom. Everywhere he seemed to follow a cool, white cloud. But where was Cornelia?

CHAPTER XV.

AN UNTIMELY REMINISCENCE.

In spite of nursing and a very strong constitution, Bressant's recovery was slow. The fact was, his mind was restless and disturbed, and produced a fever in his blood. Large and powerful as he was, his physical was largely dependent on his mental well-being, as must always be the case with persons well organized throughout. He would never have been so muscular and healthy had his life not been an undisturbed and self-complacent one. These questions of the heart and emotions were not salutary to his body, however beneficial otherwise.

At the same time, no one is quite himself who is ill, and doubtless Bressant would have escaped many of his difficulties, and solved others with comparatively little trouble, if his faculties had not been untuned by illness. While he was more open to the influx of all these novel ideas and problems, he was less able to deal with and dispose of them. So the professor, while encouraged by the observation of his apparent progress in the direction of human feeling and emotional warmth, was concerned to find him falling off in recuperative power.

Sophie was largely to blame for it. Bressant was getting to depend too much upon her society. He brightened when she came in, and was gloomy when she went out. He liked to talk and argue with her; to dash waves of logic, impetuous but subtle, against the rock of her pure intuitions and steady consistency. He was careful not to go too far; though, indeed, she usually had the best of the encounter. Of course his knowledge and trained faculties far surpassed Sophie's simple acquirements and modest learning; but she had a marvelous penetration in seeing a fallacy, even when she knew not how to expose it; and she mercilessly pricked many of the conceited bubbles of his understanding.

Doubtless she would have noticed the too prominent position which she had come to occupy in the invalid's horizon, had not her eyes, so clear to see every thing else, been blinded by the fact that he, also, was grown to be of altogether too much importance to her. She never for a moment imagined that any thing but an abstract and ideal scheme for benefiting Bressant was actuating her in her intercourse with him. She proposed to educate him in pure beliefs and true

aspirations; to show him that there was more in life than can be mathematically proved. But that she could derive other than an immaterial and impersonal enjoyment from it—oh, no!

This was quixotic and unpractical, if nothing worse. What other means of imparting spiritual knowledge could a young girl like Sophie have, than to exhibit to her pupil the structure and workings of her own soul? But this could not be done with impunity; neither was Bressant a cup, to be emptied and then refilled with a purer substance. Young men and women with exalted and ideal views about each other, cannot do better than to keep out of one another's way. Unless they are prepared to mingle a great deal of what is earthly with their dreams, they will be apt, sooner or later, to have a rude awakening.

The conceit of her ideal crusade against Bressant's shortcomings blinded Sophie to what she could not otherwise have helped seeing—that she enjoyed his companionship for its own immediate sake. She had, perhaps, more direct and simple strength of character than he; but he made up in other ways for the lack of it. Besides, he had not taken measures to obstruct the natural keenness of his vision, and therefore saw, with comparative clearness, how the land lay; an immense advantage over Sophie, of course. But when he came to analyzing and classifying what he saw, he found his intelligence at fault. That little episode with Cornelia was the only bit of experience he had to fall back upon; and that was more of a puzzle than an assistance to him.

Matters went on thus for about six weeks, at which time Bressant was still confined to his room, although decidedly convalescent. It had seemed to him for some time past that a crisis would soon be reached in his relations with Sophie, but what the upshot of it would be he could not conjecture. He only felt that at present something was concealed—that there were explanations and confessions to be made, which would have the effect of putting his young nurse and himself upon more open and intimate terms. He looked forward to this culmination with impatience, and yet with anxiety. One morning, when they had been reading Spenser's "Faerie Queene," Cornelia's weekly letter was brought in, and subsequently the conversation turned upon her.

"I used to think she was much more beautiful than you," remarked Bressant, thoughtfully, twisting and turning the palm-leaf fan he held in his hands. "I don't think, now, that I knew what beauty was," he added, concentrating his straight eyebrows upon Sophie, in a scrutinizing look.

"No one could be more beautiful than Neelie," said Sophie, with gentle emphasis. "What has made you change your opinion?" As she spoke, she closed the book on her lap, and leaned her cheek upon her hand. Some of the sunshine fell upon her white dress, but left her face in shadow. It struck Bressant, however, that the clear morning light which filled the room emanated from her eyes rather than from the sunshine.

"I don't know that I have changed my opinion," said he, looking down again at the fan; "I learn new things every day, that's all. Do you ever think about yourself?"

"I suppose I do, sometimes; nobody can help being conscious of themselves once in a while."

"About what you are, compared with other people, I mean."

"There's nothing peculiar about me; still, I may be different, in some ways, from other people," answered Sophie, with simplicity.

"I can judge better about that than you; there was some use in deafness, and being alone, and thinking only of fame, and such things."

"What use?" asked Sophie, leaning forward, with interest, for he had never spoken about his former life before.

"The same way that a man who never drinks has a more delicate sense of taste than a drunkard," returned Bressant, apparently pleased with his simile. "I've seen so little of women, that I can taste you more correctly than if I had seen a great many. Understand?"

Sophie did not answer, being somewhat thrown out by this new way of looking at the matter. There seemed to be some reason in it, too.

"If I'd associated with other people, I shouldn't have been sensitive enough to recognize you when we met; no one except me can know you or feel you," continued he, following out his idea.

Sophie began to feel a vague misgiving. What did this mean? What was going to be the end of it? Ought she to allow it to go on? And yet—most likely it meant nothing; it was only one of his queer fancies that he was elaborating. There did not seem to be any thing suspicious in his manner.

"It wasn't easy even for me," he resumed, throwing another glance at her; she sat with her eyes cast down, so that he could observe her with impunity. "It would have been impossible unless you had helped me to it. You have taught me yourself, even more than I have studied you."

Sophie started, and a look of terror, bewilderment, and passionate repudiation, lightened in her eyes. How dared he—how could he, say that? how so falsely misrepresent her actions, and misinterpret her purposes? Her mind went staggering back over the past, seeking for means of self-justification and defense. She had only meant to benefit him—to amplify and soften his character—to inspire him with more ideal views and aims; and to do this she had—what? Sophie paused, and shuddered. Could it, after all, be true? Had she, forgetful of maidenly modesty and reserve, opened to this man's eyes her secret soul? invited him into the privacy of her heart, to criticise and handle it?—invited him!—brought forward, and pressed upon his notice, the thoughts and impulses which she should scarcely have whispered even to herself? Had she done this?

"You have taught me that there is no one like you in the world," said Bressant. His voice sounded strangely to her, coming across such an abyss of shame, remorse, and dismay. Did he know the bitter satire his words conveyed? Sophie's face was hidden in her hands. She dared not think what might come next.

"Is it nothing to you to know that you are more to me than any thing else?" demanded he, and his tone was becoming husky and unsteady. The passion that had been smouldering within him so long, unsuspected in its intensity even by himself, was now beginning to be-stir itself, and shoot forth jets of flame. "Why have you let yourself be with me—why have you made yourself necessary to me—if I was nothing to you?"

Sophie, in the extreme depths of her degradation and abasement, became all at once quiet and composed. She lifted her face, pale, and smitten with suffering, from her hands, and, folding them in her lap, looked at Bressant calmly, because she understood herself at last, and felt that the time for hiding her head in shame had gone by.

"You have *not* been nothing to me," said she, "though I didn't know it before, or, rather, I *would* not. I had an idea that I was leading you up to higher things, as an angel might, and all the time I was making use of God's truth and recommendation, as it were, to gratify and shield my own selfishness and—" here her voice sank, and her lips quivered, and grew dry, but she waited, and

struggled, and finally went on—"and immodesty. I don't know why I should tell you this—except that I've told you every thing else, and this may save you from some of the wrong the rest has done you. But the most of it must remain irreparable." A long sigh quivered up from Sophie's heart, and quivered down again, like a pebble sinking through the water. Such a sigh, in a woman, is the sign of what can scarcely come twice in a lifetime.

"I don't understand any thing about that; I don't want to!" exclaimed Bressant, with an impetuous gesture. "What you've done seems to have been better than what you meant to do, at any rate. You've made yourself every thing to me. Say that I am as much to you, and what more do we need? Say it! say it!" and, in the vehemence of his appeal, the sick man half raised himself from his bed.

"I cannot! I cannot!" said Sophie, in a low, penetrating voice of suffering. "If you were the lowest of all men, I could not. I came to you in the guise of an angel, and what I have done, what woman is there that would not blush at it? It may not be too late to save you—"

"Stop!" cried Bressant, with an accent of hoarse, masculine command, such as she could not gainsay. "It is too late!—I will not be saved! Look in my eyes, Sophie Valeyon, and tell me the name of what you see there!"

Her sad, gray eyes, stern to herself, but tender and soft to him, as a cloud ready to melt in rain-drops, met his, which were alight with all the fire that an aroused and passionate spirit could kindle in them. She saw what she had never beheld before indeed, but the meaning of which no woman ever yet mistook. It was her work—the assurance of her disgrace—the offspring of her self-seeking and unwomanly behavior; and yet, as she looked, the blood rose gradually to her pale cheeks, and stained them with a deeper and yet deeper spot of red; her glance caught a spark from his, and her fragile and drooping figure seemed to dilate and grow stately, as if inspired by some burst of glorious music. Bressant, in the mid-whirl and heat of his emotion, fell back upon the pillow, whence he had partly raised himself, trembling from head to foot.

"Is it love?" he said, in a smothered tone that was scarcely more than a whisper. He was beaten down and overawed by the might and grandeur of the passion which, growing in his own breast, had become a giant that swayed and swept all things before it.

"Yes—love!" said Sophie, in a voice like the soft ring of a silver trumpet. Her heart was steadied and strengthened by what mastered him. "Love—it is above

every thing else. It has brought me down so low—perhaps, through God's mercy, it is the path by which I may rise again. You will guide me, dear?"

And, with a gesture of divine humility, she put her hand in his, and looked down, with the smile brightening mistily in her eyes.

At that moment—recalled, perhaps, by a chance similarity in position, gesture, or expression—came over him, like a sudden chill and darkness, the memory of his last interview with Cornelia.

CHAPTER XVI.

PARTING AN ANCHOR.

Cornelia, upon her arrival in New York, had been met at the station by an emissary of Aunt Margaret, and conducted to a country-seat some distance up the river. Four or five young ladies were already assembled there, and as many young gentlemen came up on afternoon trains, and availed themselves of Aunt Margaret's hospitality, until business called them to the city again the nest morning, except that on Saturdays they brought an extra change or two of raiment, to tide them over the blessed rest of Sunday.

"I've been so *ill*, my love—how sweet and fresh you *do* look! Give your auntie a kiss—there. *Oh*! you naughty girl, how jealous all the girls will be of those *eyes* of yours!—so ill—*such* dreadful sick-headaches—oh, yes! I'm a *great* sufferer, dear, a great *sufferer*—but no one, hardly, knows it. I tell *you*, you know, dear, because you are my own darling little Cornelia. Oh! those sweet *eyes*! So ill—so *unable*, you know, to be *up* and *doing*—to be as I should wish to be—as I once *was*—as you are now, you—splendid—creature—you! Now you *must* let me speak my heart out to you, dear; it's my nature to do it, and I *can't* restrain, it—foolish I know, but I always *was* so foolish! oh dear! well—Ah! there's the first bell already. Let me show you your room, darling. As I was going to say, I've been so indisposed that I've been obliged to pet myself up a little here, before starting on our *tour*, you know, but in a week I mean to be well again—I *will* be. Oh! I have immense *resolution*, dear Neelie—*immense* fortitude, where those I love are concerned. There, this is your little nest—now *one* more kiss. Oh! those sweet *lips*! Remember you sit by me at dinner."

"What a funny old woman Aunt Margaret is!" said Cornelia to herself, after she had closed the door of her chamber. "Such a queer voice—goes away up high, and then away down low, all in the same sentence. And what a small head for such a tall woman! and she's so thin! I do hope she won't go on kissing me so much with her big mouth! how fast she does twist it about! and then her front teeth stick out so! and she keeps shoving that great black ear-trumpet at me, whenever she thinks I want to speak; and her eyes are as pale and watery as they can be, and they look all around you and never at you. Well, it's very mean of me

to criticise the old thing so; she's as kind as she can be. I wonder whether she knows Mr. Bressant; her manner reminds me sometimes of him; in a horrid way, of course, but—poor fellow! what is he doing now, I'd like to know!" Here Cornelia's meditations became very profound and private indeed; she, meanwhile, in her material capacity, making such alterations and improvements in her personal appearance as were necessary to prepare herself for the table.

Every few minutes—oftener than any circumstances could have warranted—she pulled a handsome gold watch out of her belt and consulted it. She did not, to be sure, seem solely anxious to know the hour; she bent down and examined the enameled face minutely; watched the second-hand make its tiny circuit; pressed the smooth crystal against her cheek; listened to the ceaseless beating of its little golden heart. That golden heart, it seemed to her, was a connecting link between Bressant's and her own. He had set it going, and it should be her care that it never stopped; for at the hour in which it ran down—such was Cornelia's superstitious idea—some lamentable misfortune would surely come to pass.

The dinner-bell sounded; she put her watch back into her belt, bestowing a loving little pat upon it, by way of temporary adieu. Then, feeling pretty hungry, she ran down the broad, soft-carpeted stairs, with their wide mahogany banisters —she would have sat upon the latter and slid down if she had dared—and entering the dining-room, which was furnished throughout with yellow oak, even to the polished floor, she took her place by her hostess's side. She had already been presented to the fashionable guests who sat around the ample table, and a good deal of the awe which she had felt in anticipation, had begun to ooze away. Although much was said that was unintelligible to her, she could see that this was not the result of intellectual deficiency on her part, but merely of an ignorance of the ground on which the conversation was founded. As Cornelia stole glances at the faces, pretty or pretentious, of the young ladies, or at the mustaches, whiskers, or carefully-parted hair of the young gentlemen, it did not seem to her that she could call herself essentially the inferior of any one of them. As to what they thought of her, she could only conjecture; but the gentlemen were extravagantly polite—according to her primitive ideas of that much-abused virtue—and the ladies were smiling, full of pretty attitudes, small questions, and accentuated comments. No one of them, nor of the young men either, seemed to be very hungry; but Cornelia had her usual unexceptionable appetite, and ate stoutly to satisfy it; she even tasted a glass of Italian wine at dessert, upon the assurance of Aunt Margaret that "she must—*really* must—it would never do to come to New York without learning how to drink wine, you know;" and upon the

word of the young gentleman who sat next to her that it wouldn't hurt her a bit—all wines were medicinal—Italian wines especially so; and so, indeed, it proved, for Cornelia thought she had never felt so genial a glow of sparkling life in her veins. She was good-natured enough to laugh at any thing, and brilliant enough to make anybody else laugh; and the evening passed away most pleasantly.

But Cornelia was no fool, to be made a butt of; and her personality was too vigorous, her individuality too strong, not to make an impression and way of its own wherever she was. The young ladies tried in vain to patronize her: they had not the requisite capital in themselves; and the young gentlemen soon gave up the attempt to make fun of her; her vitality was too much for them, and they were, moreover, disconcerted by her beauty. Miss Valeyon, however, was new to the world, and her curiosity and vanity had large, unsatisfied appetites. To have been patronized and made fun of would have done her little or no harm; but in gratifying these appetites she might do a good deal of harm to herself.

When the young gentlemen were in town, or in the smoking-room, the young ladies were of course thrown upon their own resources, and generally drifted together in little groups, to talk in low tones or in loud, to laugh or to whisper. Cornelia, who soon got upon terms of companionship with one or two members of these conclaves, could hardly do otherwise than occasionally join the meetings. At first she found little or nothing of interest to herself in what they talked about.

The discussion of dress, to be sure, was something, and she found she had much to learn even there. Then there was a great deal to be said about sociables, and theatres, and sets, and fellows; and there was also more or less conversation, carried on in a low tone that occasionally descended to a whisper, which, beyond that it seemed to have reference to marriage and kindred matters, was for the most part Greek to Cornelia. A kind of metaphor was used which the country-bred minister's daughter could not elucidate, nor could she comprehend how young ladies, unmarried as she herself was, could know so much about things which marriage alone is supposed to reveal.

Once or twice she had requested an explanation of some of these obscure points, but her request had been met, first by a dead silence, then by a laugh, and an inquiry whether she had no young married friends, and also whether she had ever read the works of Paul Féval, Dumas, and Balzac—all of which gave her little enlightenment, but taught her to keep her mouth shut, and open her eyes and ears wider.

One day when "Aunt Margaret" had invited her to a *tête-à-tête* in the boudoir, it occurred to Cornelia, in the wisdom of her heart, to take advantage of the opportunity to introduce the subject. She was a widow: was very good-natured; would be sure not to laugh at her, and could hardly help knowing as much as the young ladies knew.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Vanderplanck, as Cornelia entered, "such a relief—such a *refreshment* to look at that sweet face of yours! There! I must have my *kiss*, you know. Yes, I was just thinking of you, my love—so longing to have a quiet *chat* with you—your dear father!—such a *grand* man he is! *such genius*! Oh! *I* was his devoted. Tell me all about him, and that sweet *home* of yours, and *dear* little Sophie, too. Oh! I was so shocked, so terrified, to hear of her illness; and—let me see!—oh, yes, and that new pupil your papa has—Mr. Bressant—*how* is he? *does* he behave well? *is* he pleasant? *do* you see much of him? *does* he keep himself quiet?—such a—"

"Why! how did you know about him?" interrupted Cornelia, into Mrs. Vanderplanck's ever-ready ear-trumpet. "Is he a relation of yours, or any thing?"

Aunt Margaret stopped short, and pressed her thin, wide lips together. She had never imagined but that Professor Valeyon had told his daughters through whose immediate instrumentality it was that Bressant made his appearance at the Parsonage; but finding, from Cornelia's questions, that this was not so, she bethought herself that it might be well for her young guest to remain in ignorance, at least for the present. It was not too late, and, after a scarcely-perceptible pause, she made answer:

"It was in your dear papa's *answer* to my invitation, my love. Oh! so shocked I was dear little Sophie couldn't come—lay awake *all* that night with a headache—yes, *indeed*!—when he *wrote* to me, you know—such a dear, noble letter it *was*, too! Oh! I read it over a dozen—*twenty* times at least!—he mentioned this new pupil of his—seemed interested in him—of course I *can't* help being interested in whatever interests any of you dear ones, you know—he mentioned his strange name and all—it *is* a strange name, isn't it, love?"

"It isn't his real name," interposed Cornelia; "nobody except papa knows who he is. It's just like one of those ancient names, you know—the Christian name and the surname in one."

"Oh, yes, I see—so odd, isn't it?—such a *mystery*, and all that—yes—so that's how I came to speak of him, I suppose. One gets *ideas* of a person that way

sometimes, don't you know, though they may never have actually *seen* them at all? Oh! when I was a *young* thing, I was just full of those—*ideals, I* used to call them—oh, you know all about it, I *dare* say!"

"He met with a very serious accident just before I came away," said Cornelia to the ear-trumpet; "he stopped Dolly—our horse—she was running away with papa in the wagon. He saved papa beautifully, but he was dreadfully hurt—his collar-bone was broken, and he was kicked, and almost killed. He's at our house now, and papa's taking care of him."

At this information Aunt Margaret became very white, or rather bloodless, in the face. She allowed the ear-trumpet to hang by its silver chain from her neck, and, reaching out her hand to a recess in the writing-table at which she sat, she drew forth a small ebony box, set in silver, and carved all over with little figures in bass-relief. Opening it, she took out a few grains of some dark substance which the box contained, and slipped them eagerly into her large mouth, Cornelia watched her out of the corner of her eyes, and, being a physician's daughter, she drew her own conclusions.

"Ho, ho! that's where your sick-headaches, and yellow complexion, and nervousness, and weak eyes, come from, is it? You'd better look out! that's morphine, or opium, or some such thing, I know; and papa says that old ladies like you, who use such drugs, are liable to get insane after a while, and I shouldn't be a bit surprised if you were to become insane, Aunt Margaret!"

This agreeable prophecy, being confined solely to Cornelia's thoughts, was naturally inaudible to Mrs. Vanderplanck. She murmured something about her doctor having prescribed medicine to be taken at that hour, and then, the medicine appearing to have an immediate and salutary effect, she found her color and her voice again, and took up the conversation.

"Shocking! oh, shocking! *so* sad for the poor young man—no father—no—no mother there to care for him. He *it* an orphan, is he not?—no relatives, I suppose —no one who *belongs* to him, poor boy! Dear, dear!—but he's *not* fatally injured, is he?—not fatally?"

"Oh, no," replied Cornelia, whose opinion of Aunt Margaret's character was much improved by this evidently sincere sympathy in the suffering of some one she had never seen—"oh, no; papa says he'll be all well in three months."

"And he's staying at your house, and under your dear father's care?"

"Yes, he is now. Before his accident he was boarding at Abbie's, down in the village. She would have been very kind to him, of course, but I suppose he'd rather be at our house, because papa can always be at hand."

While Cornelia was delivering this into the black ear-trumpet, she turned her eyes away from Aunt Margaret's face, being in truth somewhat embarrassed at talking so much about the man who had her heart. Consequently she did not observe the expression which crossed her companion's face at her mention of the modest name of the boarding-house keeper. Her features seemed to contract and sharpen, and there was positively a glitter in her watery eyes, seemingly mingled of consternation, astonishment, and hatred. In another moment the expression had passed away, or was softened into one of nervous alarm and anxiety; and even this, when she spoke, was wellnigh effaced.

"Certainly—yes, *certainly*! your dear father—*what* a wise man he is! he *has* such a profound knowledge of medicine and surgery—all those things—so prudent, so careful! Still, a woman is a treasure, you know—a good, sensible, efficient woman is a *host*—oh, yes, in a sick-room. This boarding-house keeper, now—she's just such a person, I *dare* say—elderly, sober, experienced—a married woman, probably, with a large family, no doubt? Abbie, Abbie! what *did* you say her last name was, my love?"

Cornelia was so much amused at the idea of Abbie's being a married woman with a large family that she did not observe how Aunt Margaret, awaiting her answer, was all in a tremble. If she had not been laughing, she could scarcely have helped seeing how the ear-trumpet shook as it was presented to her.

"Oh, no," said she, "she's not married, Aunt Margaret—at least not now, though I believe she's a widow, or something of that kind, you know—and she hasn't any children at all! As to her other name, I don't know it, and I believe hardly any one does. You see, she's one of that queer sort of people; she's very quiet, and always grave, and nobody knows much about her, except that she's very good, and has lived in the village for twenty years and more. I believe, though, papa has met her before, or knows something about her in some way; but he never says any thing to us on the subject."

This was all that could be got out of Cornelia upon the topic of Abbie, and Mrs. Vanderplauck was obliged to swallow whatever uneasiness, curiosity, or misgiving she may have felt. In the midst of an exhortation to her young guest to repeat her visit daily to the boudoir, and regale her auntie with anecdotes of the

dear old, interesting people in the village, Abbie and all, some one of the young ladies knocked at the door, and hurried Miss Valeyon off, without her having asked, as she had intended, for an explanation of the puzzling, metaphorical allusions.

Mrs. Vanderplanck, left to herself, rocked backward and forward in her chair, with her hands clasped over her forehead, much in the way that an insane person might have done.

"Who'd have thought it! who'd have thought it! In the very village—in the very house—of all places in the world!—in the very house!—and he laid up—can't be moved—can't be taken away. Why didn't I know?—why didn't I find out?—careless—stupid—thoughtless! Curse the woman! couldn't I have imagined that she'd never be far away from her dear professor—and we sent him there—we hid him away—we disguised his name—college was too public for him—let him finish his education in the country—and then we could escape away—to Germany—France—anywhere—and carry all the money with us—all the money!—half for me, and half for him!—and what'll become of it now? Curse the woman! I knew she couldn't be dead. But she sha'n't have the money—no! she sha'n't, she sha'n't!

"Is it possible, now?—could it be that that girl was deceiving me? Did she know the woman's name, after all?—no, no! she hasn't the face for it—no hypocrite in her yet—not yet, not yet! Well, but what if it's all a mistake?—Why not a mistake? why not?—tell me that! Plenty of women called Abbie, aren't there? Why shouldn't this be one of them—one of the others? No, but the professor had known her before—oh, yes!—known her before! and there's only one Abbie that the professor knew before! Curse her—curse her!

"Well, what if she is there? how will she know *him*? The professor won't tell her—he can't—he dare not tell her!—for I made him promise he wouldn't, and I've got his promise, written down—written down!—Ah! that was smart—that was smart! Yes, but the boy looks like his father!—that'll betray him!—she'll know him by that—know him? well, just as bad—yes, and worse too, in the end—worse! Oh! curse her!

"Never mind. I know how to manage. If the worst comes to the worst, I know what to do! And I must write to him—not now—as soon as he's well—he must come away. Even if it should turn out all a mistake, he must come away!—I'll write to him, as soon as he's well, that he must come away. And I'll question

Cornelia again—ah! she's a handsome girl!—it's well I got her up here, out of the way!—I'll find out more from her. It may be a mistake, after all—it may, it may!"

While Aunt Margaret, sitting in her boudoir, thus took doubtful and disconnected counsel with herself, Cornelia was left to manage her little difficulties as best she might. Being tolerably quick in observing, and putting things together, and unwilling to trust to intuitive judgments of what was safe or unsafe in the moral atmosphere, she set to work with all her wits, and not without some measure of success, to fathom the secrets of the tantalizing freemasonry which piqued her curiosity. By listening to all that was said, laughing when others laughed, keeping silent when she was puzzled, comparing results and drawing deductions, she presently began to understand a good deal more than she had bargained for, was considerably shocked and disgusted, and perhaps felt desirous to unlearn what she had learned.

But this was not so easy. Things she would willingly have forgotten seemed, for that very reason, to stick in her memory—nay, in some moods of mind, to appear less entirely objectionable than in others. She had little opportunity for solitude—to bethink herself where she stood, and how she came there. During the daytime, there were the young ladies, here, there, and everywhere; there could be no seclusion. In the afternoons and evenings some admiring, soft-voiced young gentleman was always at her side, offering her his arm on the faintest pretext, or attempting to put it round her waist on no pretext at all; who always found it more convenient to murmur in her ear, than to speak out from a reasonable distance; whose hands were always getting into proximity with hers, and often attempting to clasp them; whose eyes were forever expressing something earnest or arch, pleading or romantic—though precisely what, his lingering utterance scarcely tried to define; who never could "see the harm" of these and many other peculiarities of behavior; and, indeed it was not very easy to argue about them, although the young gentlemen never shrank from the dispute, and never failed to have on hand an inexhaustible assortment of syllogisms to combat any remonstrance that might be advanced withal; while at the worst they could always be surprised and hurt if their conduct were called into question. Well, they appeared to be refined and high-bred. Compare them with Bill Reynolds! And the flattery of their attention, and the preference they gave her over the other girls, were not entirely lost upon Cornelia.

In the absence of both gentlemen and ladies, there, on an easily-accessible shelf in the library, were those works of Dumas, Féval, and the rest, to which

Cornelia's attention had been indirectly invited. She had a sound knowledge of the French language, and an ardent love of fiction, and beyond question the books were of absorbing interest.

At first, indeed, Cornelia, as she read, would ever and anon blush, and look around apprehensively, for fear there should be an observer somewhere; and this, too, at passages which a week before she would have passed over without noticing, because not understanding them. If any one appeared, she hid the book away in the folds of her dress, or under the sofa-cushion, and put on the air of having just awakened from a nap. By-and-by, however, when she had become a little used to the tone of the works, and had asked herself, what were the books put there for, unless to be read, she plucked up courage, as her young friends would have said—albeit angels might have wept at it—and overcame her notions so far as to be able to take down from its shelf and become deeply interested in one of the Frenchiest of the set, while three or four people were sitting in the library!

A triumph that! Howbeit, when she went to bed that night there was a persistent pain of dry unhappiness in her heart, and a self-contemptuous feeling, which she tried to get the better of by calling it *ennui*. But in time a kind of hardness, at once flexible and impenetrable, began to encase her, rendering her course more easy, less liable to embarrassment, more self-confident than before.

At length a crisis was brought on by the attempt of the boldest of her admirers to kiss her. She repelled him passionately, facing him with gleaming eyes, and lips white with anger and disgust. He was surprised, at first—then angry; but she spoke to him in a way that cowed, and finally almost made him ashamed of himself. He even went so far, afterward, as to try to knock a fellow down for speaking disrespectfully of "Neelie." For her own part, she locked herself into her room, and cried tempestuously for half an hour; then she spent a still longer time in lying with her heated face upon the pillow, reviewing the incidents of her life since Bressant had entered into it. He was the superior of any man she had met before or since: she was sure of it now; it could no longer be called the infatuation of inexperience. She took herself well to task for the recent laxity and imprudence of her conduct; did not spare to cut where the flesh was tender; and resolved never again to lay herself open to blame.

This was very well, but the mood was too strained and exalted to be depended upon. Cornelia got up from the disordered bed, put it to rights again, washed her stained face carefully, rearranged her hair, and went down-stairs. All that

afternoon she was cold, grave, and reserved; inquiries after her health met with a chilling answer, and her friends wisely concluded to leave her malady, whatever it were, to the cure of time. As dinner progressed, Cornelia began to thaw: when Mr. Grumblow, the member of Congress, requested her, with solemn and oppressive courtesy, to do him the honor of taking a glass of wine with him, she responded graciously; and as the toasts circulated, she first looked upon her ideal resolves with good-humored tolerance, and then they escaped her memory altogether. She became once more lively and sparkling, and carried on what she imagined was a very brilliant conversation with two or three people at once. By the time she was ready to retire, she had practised anew the whole list of her lately-abrogated accomplishments; and she wound up by picking the French novel out of the corner into which she had disdainfully thrown it twelve hours before, reading it in bed until she fell asleep, and dreaming that she was its heroine. And yet she had not forgotten to wind up Bressant's watch, and put it in its usual place under her pillow.

It might seem strange that his memory should not have kept her beyond the reach of deleterious influences. But a young girl's love is any thing but a preservative, if it shall yield her, in any aspect, other than such pure and delicate thoughts as she would not scruple to whisper in her mother's ear, or to ask God's blessing on at night. Should there be any circumstance or incident, however seemingly trifling and unimportant, in her reminiscences, which nevertheless keeps recurring to the mind with a slight twinge of regret—a feeling that it would have been just as well had it never happened—then is love a dangerous companion. Gradually does the trifling spot grow upon her; in trying to justify it, she succeeds only in lowering the whole idea of love to its level; and this once accomplished, in all future intercourse with her lover she must be undefended by the shield of her maidenly integrity. And not all men are great enough not to presume on woman's weakness, even though it be that woman, to assert whose honor and purity they would risk their lives against the world.

Some such quality of earthiness Cornelia may have felt in the course of her acquaintance with Bressant, preventing her love from ennobling and elevating her. Alas! if it were so. If she cannot draw a high inspiration from the affection which must be her loftiest sentiment, what shall be her safeguard, and who her champion?

In the course of ten days or a fortnight, Aunt Margaret announced that the condition of her head would admit of traveling, and the long-expected tour began. But the more important consequences of Cornelia's fashionable

experiences had already taken place.

CHAPTER XVII.

SOPHIE'S CONFESSION.

Sophie did not stay long in the invalid's room after the awakening they had undergone with respect to one another. She went instinctively to her father's study, and, entering the open door, kissed the old man ere he was well aware of her presence. He took her affectionately upon his knee, and hugged her up to him with homely tenderness.

"My precious little daughter!" quoth he; "what would your old father do without you?"

"Am I so much to you, papa?" asked she, with her cheek resting upon his shoulder.

"Very much—very much, Sophie: too much, perhaps; for I don't see how I could bear to lose you."

"Do you mean to have me die, papa?"

"How is your sick boy getting along?" returned the professor, clearing his throat, and not seeming to hear his daughter's words.

Sophie caught a breath, and paled a little at the thought of the news she had to tell about the sick boy. Her father had just told her she was precious to him, and she felt that to be married might involve a separation virtually as complete as that of death, and perhaps harder to bear. But, again, she needed his sympathy and approval: and, sooner or later, he must hear the truth. She was not, perhaps, aware that etiquette should have closed her lips upon the subject until after Bressant had spoken to the professor; at all events, she had no intention of delegating or postponing her confidence.

"He seemed quite well when I left him. I have been having a—talk with him, papa."

"He begins to show the effects of being talked to by you, my dear. You're a wise little woman in some ways, that's certain! and have done him good in more ways than one," said papa, with parental complacency.

Sophie shrank at this, remembering how lately she had fed herself with the same idea. She had learned a great deal about herself since discovering how little of herself she knew.

"He is a—man!" said she, trying to throw into the word an expression of its best and loftiest meaning. "I can do very little to help him."

"Hope to see him a man some day, my dear," returned the professor, gathering his eyebrows. "Has a great many faults at present. Why, in some respects, he's as ignorant and inexperienced as a child. Very one-sided affair still, I fear, that soul of his!"

"One-sided, papa?"

"Yes: don't believe it would carry him very far toward heaven, as it is now," said the old gentleman, whose severity of judgment was cultivated in this instance as a preservative against possible disappointment. "He needs melting in a crucible."

"What does that mean?"

"If you weren't a wise little woman, as I said, I shouldn't be talking about my pupil's character and management with you, my dear. But I can trust you as well as if you were forty;" and here he gave her another little hug, which made Sophie feel like a receiver of stolen goods. "Well, now, theorizing won't do a young fellow like that much good. He needs something real—that he can take hold of, and that'll take hold of him. You and I can't give it him—not more than an impetus in the right direction, at any rate. But the only thing that can make his future tolerably secure—make it safe to count upon him (or upon any other man, for that matter), is for him to fall heartily and soundly in love, in the old-fashioned way, and with a strong-hearted, worthy woman."

"O papa! do you really think marriage will help him to be greater and better?"

"It's the only thing for him, my dear," said Professor Valeyon; and, although he was looking his guilty little daughter straight in the face, and at such short range, too, this would-be sharp-sighted old man of wisdom never thought to ask himself why she blushed so. "As soon as he gets well again, I must see to getting him somewhere where he can have a chance to profit by what we have done for him."

"Papa," said Sophie, sitting up, and stroking the old gentleman's white beard, "you don't know how happy it makes me to hear you think that to love and to be

loved will be good for him."

"So anxious to get rid of him, eh?"

"No; oh! papa, don't you see? it's because—because I *never* want to get rid of him!" and Sophie, catching her father suddenly around the neck, hid her face in his linen coat-collar.

The professor, his features discharged of all expression, sat stone-still, looking straight before him. Had Death been embracing him, instead of his daughter, he could hardly have been struck more motionless. Existence, spiritual as well as physical, seemed for a space to have come to a stand-still.

By-and-by, startled at his silence, Sophie raised her head and looked at him with alarmed eyes. With an effort, he turned his face toward her, and smiled as naturally as though his mouth had been frozen.

"I'm an old man, you see, my dear: a surprise like this makes me feel it," he made shift to say, in an uncertain voice. "So—you're engaged to each other?"

"We're waiting for you to say we may be, papa."

"It is right—it is just!" said the professor, solemnly, though still with a sluggish utterance. "I sought to glorify God to the end of mine own glorification, and lo! He hath taken from me my own heart's blood!" Swept off his feet by the profundity of his emotion, the ministerial form of speech, so long disused, rose naturally to the old man's lips.

But presently, the paralyzing effect of the shock beginning to wear off, he drew a few long breaths, and found himself growing very hot. He took out his handkerchief and wiped away the perspiration that had gathered on his forehead. Then he took his little daughter strongly yet tremblingly to his heart, and kissed her more than once.

"God bless you! my darling—my Sophie—you're my Sophie still, if you are in love with that—great overgrown rascal. I'm a fool—an old fool! Well—and how long has this been going on between you, my darling?"

Sophie's heart, which, in the passionate tumult of her recent interview with her lover, had remained so steady and unfaltering, began now to beat with such violence as to impede her utterance and visibly to shake her. She was resolved to show herself to her father even as she was.

"I hardly can say how long, papa—I think—I think it must have been a—a long time—at least, on my side. Oh! I have been so false—so false to myself, and so unwomanly! I have courted him, papa—*I*, papa—think of it! I've thrown myself in his way, and—and made him interested in me; and talked to him about things that—no one but his mother, or you, should have done. Poor fellow!—I've forced myself upon him, papa. I took advantage of his illness and helplessness, and pretended all the time I was thinking only of his spiritual welfare, and—and not of—of any thing else. That was the wickedest part. And yet, somehow, I deceived myself too—or, rather, I wouldn't see the truth: and I didn't know—papa, I really believe I didn't know that I—loved him, till he—till he began to speak of it; then it seemed suddenly to fill all my heart, as if it had always lived there. For I succeeded, papa: I've won his love, and, oh! he loves me so! he loves me so! and so I've found my punishment in my happiness. God is so just and good. The happier his love makes me, you see, the more I shall be humbled to think how it became mine. It is well for me, for I was proud and reserved and full of self-conceit. And you really think it will not hurt him to love me, and to have me love him, papa?"

"Stuff and nonsense!" growled the old gentleman, testily; "hurt him!"

But the professor was really a very wise man, in spite of his occasional blindness; and he refrained from showing Sophie the exaggeration and distortion which marked the view she took of her conduct. He saw it would involve lowering the high integrity of her ideal conceptions respecting delicacy and honor—hardly worth while, merely for the sake of explaining the distinction between a trifling piece of self-deception and mistaken vanity, and the severe and unrelenting sentence which Sophie had passed upon herself. Meanwhile, every word she had uttered had been an indirect, but none the less telling blow upon a sore place in his own conscience. It was long since Professor Valeyon had stood so low in his own self-esteem.

They sat awhile in silence, Sophie nestling up to her father as if seeking protection from the very love that had come to her; and he sighed, and sighed again, and coughed, and pulled his nose and his beard, and finally blew his nose. Then, depositing Sophie upon her feet, he got slowly up, stretched himself, and went for his pipe.

"Run off, my dear. Go up in your room, or out in the garden, or somewhere. I must be alone a little while, you know; must think it all over, and see how things stand. Besides, I must step in and see this fellow who's going to rob me of my

daughter, and tell him what I think of him. Come, off with you!"

"You'll be happy about it—you'll forgive us, won't you, papa?" she said, turning at the door.

The old gentleman shuffled heavily up to her, and kissed her on the forehead.

"God bless you, and God's will be done, my darling!" said he; but at that moment he could say no more.

An hour afterward, however, when the professor knocked the ashes out of his second pipe, and laid his hand upon the latch of Bressant's door, the expression upon his strongly-cut features was neither gloomy nor severe. There was a look in his eyes of benignant sweetness, all the more impressive because it made one wonder how it could find a place beneath such stern eyebrows and so deeply lined a forehead. But, cutting off an offending right hand, although a bitter piece of work enough for the time being, may, in its after-effect, work as gracious a miracle in an older and more forbidding gentleman even than Professor Valeyon.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FLANK MOVEMENT.

Bressant was lying comfortably upon his bed with his eyes closed; no one would have imagined there had been any outburst or convulsion of passion in his mental or emotional organism. He breathed easily; there was a pale tint of red in his cheeks, above his close, brown beard; his forehead was slightly moist, and his pulse, on which the surgeon laid his finger with professional instinct, beat quietly and regularly. In entering upon the world of love, all marks of wounds received upon the journey seemed to have passed away.

He opened his eyes at the professor's touch, and fixed them upon the old gentleman in such a serene stare of untroubled complacency as one sometimes receives from a baby nine months old.

"Well, sir"—the professor, from some subtle delicacy of feeling respecting the prospective change in their relationship, adopted this form of address in preference to that more paternal one he had been in the habit of using since Bressant's accident—"well, sir, how do you find yourself now?"

"Much better; I shall soon be well now. I feel differently from ever before—very light and full here," said the young man, indicating the region of his heart.

"I've seen Sophie," observed Professor Valeyon, after a somewhat long silence, which Bressant, who had calmly closed his eyes again, showed no intention of breaking.

"Sophie and I love each other," responded he, meditatively, and rather to himself than to the father. The latter could not but feel some surprise at the untroubled confidence the young man's manner displayed. Before he could put his thought into fitting words, the other spoke again.

"I've been thinking, I should like to marry her."

"You'd like to marry her?" repeated the old gentleman, with a mixture of sternness and astonishment, his forehead reddening. "What else do you suppose I expected, sir?"

Bressant turned over on his side, and regarded him with some curiosity.

"Do all people who love each other, or because they love each other, marry?" demanded he.

For a moment, the professor seemed to suspect some latent satire in this question; but the young man's face convinced him to the contrary.

"In many marriages, there's little love—true love—on either side; that's certain," said he, passing his hand down his face, and looking grave. "But marriage was ordained for none but lovers."

"The reason I want to be married to Sophie is because I love her so much I couldn't live without her," resumed Bressant, as if stating some unusual circumstance.

"Humph!" ejaculated the professor, partly amused and partly puzzled.

Bressant rubbed his forehead, and fingered his beard awhile, and then continued:

"We've been reading poetry lately, and romances, and such things. I used to think they were nonsense—good for nothing; because they came out so beautifully, and represented love to be so great an element in the world. But now I see they were not good enough; they are much below the truth; I mean to write poetry and romances myself!"

This tickled Professor Valeyon so much, that he burst out in a most genuine laugh. The intellectual animal of two or three months before seemed to have laid aside all claims to what his brain had won for him, and to be beginning existence over again with a new object and new materials. And had Bressant indeed been a child, the succession of his ideas and impulses could hardly have been more primitive and natural.

"What's to become of our Hebrew and history, if you turn poet?" inquired the old gentleman, still chuckling.

Bressant turned his head away and closed his eyes wearily. "I don't want any thing more to do with that," said he. "Love is study enough, and work enough, for a lifetime. Mathematics, and logic, and philosophy—all those things have nothing to do with love, and couldn't help me in it. It's outside of every thing else: it has laws of its own: I'm just beginning to learn them."

"A professional lover! well, as long as you recognize the sufficiency of one object in your studies, you might do worse, that's certain. But you can't make a living out of it, my boy."

"I don't need money, I have enough; if I hadn't, money-making is for men without hearts; but mine is bigger than my head; I must give myself up to it."

"That won't do," returned the professor, shaking his head. "Lovers must earn their bread-and-butter as well as people with brains. Besides," here his face and tone became serious, "there's one thing we've both forgotten. This matter of your false name—you can't be married as Bressant, you know: and if the tenure of your property depends, as you said, on preserving the *incognito*, I have reason to believe that you stand an excellent chance of losing every cent of it, the moment the minister has pronounced your real name."

"No matter!" said the young man, with an impatient movement, as if to dismiss an unprofitable subject. "I shall have Sophie; my father's will can't deprive me of her. I don't want to be famous, nor to have a great reputation—except with her."

The old man was touched at this devotion, unreasonable and impracticable though it was. He laid his hand kindly on the invalid's big shoulder.

"I don't say but that a wife's a good exchange for the world, my boy; I'm glad you should feel it, too. But when you marry her, you promise to support her, as long as you have strength and health to do it. It's a natural and necessary consequence of your love for her"—and here the professor paused a moment to marvel at the position in which he found himself—stating the first axioms of life to such a man as this pupil of his; "and you should be unwilling to take her, as I certainly should be to give her, on any other terms. If your hands are empty, you must at any rate be able to show that they won't always continue so."

"Well, but I don't want to think about that just now; I can be a farmer, or a clerk; I can make a living with my body, if I can't with my mind; and I can write to Mrs. Vanderplanck, some time, and find out just how things are."

"Very well—very well! or perhaps I'd better write to her myself—well—and as long as you are on your back, there'll be no use in troubling you with business—that's certain! And perhaps things may turn out better than they look, in the end."

As Professor Valeyon pronounced this latter sentence, he smiled to himself pleasantly and mysteriously. He seemed to fancy he had stronger grounds for

believing in a happy issue, than, for some reason, he was at liberty to disclose. And the smile lingered about the corners of his mouth and eyes, as if the issue in question were to be of that peculiarly harmonious kind usually supposed to be reserved for the themes of poems, or the conclusions of novels.

"I never was interested to hear of the every-day lives of men who have loved, and wanted to make their way in the world; for I never expected I should be such a man. Now, I'm sorry; it would have been useful to me, wouldn't it?"

"Perhaps it might," responded the old gentleman, musing at the change in the attitude of the young man's mind—once so self-sufficient and assertive, now so dependent and inexperienced. "Very few lives are bare and empty enough not to teach one something worth knowing. I know the events of one man's life," he added, after a few moments of thoughtful consideration; "perhaps it might lead to some good, if I were to tell them to yon."

"Did he marry a woman he loved?" demanded Bressant.

"You can judge better of that when you hear what happened before his marriage," returned the professor, apparently a little put out by the abruptness of the question. "He made several mistakes in life; most of them because he didn't pay respect enough to circumstances; thought that to adhere to fixed principles was the whole duty of a man: nothing to be allowed to the accidents of life, or to the various and unaccountable natures of men, their uncertainty, fallibility, and so on. One of the first resolutions he made—and he's never broken it, for when he grew wise enough to do so, the opportunity had gone by forever—was never to leave his native country. He wanted to prove to himself, and to everybody else whom it might concern, that a man of fair abilities might become learned and wise, without ever helping himself to the good things that lay beyond the shadow of his native flag. 'The majority of people have to live where they are born,' was his argument; 'I'll be their representative.' Well, that would seem all well enough; but it stood in his way twice—each time lost him an opportunity that has never come again—the opportunity to be distinguished, and perhaps great; and the opportunity to have a happy home, and a luxurious one. It was better for him, no doubt, that his life was a hard and disappointed one, instead of—as it might have been; he's had blessings enough, that's certain; but he has much to regret, too; the more, because the ill effects of a man's folly and willfulness fall upon his friends quite as often, and sometimes more heavily, than upon himself.

"He was a poor man in college, and an orphan. The property of his family had

been lost in the War of 1812; from then till he was twenty-one, he had followed a dozen trades, and saved a couple of hundred dollars; and he'd picked up book-learning enough to enter the sophomore class. The first thing he did was to make a friend; he loved him with his whole heart; thought nothing was too good for him, and so on. He and his friend led the class for three years; and up to the time of the last examination, he was first and his friend second. In the examination they sat side by side; one question the friend couldn't answer; the other wrote it out for him; after the examination the two papers were found to be alike in the answer to that question, and the friend was summoned before the faculty, and asked if he had copied it. He denied it—said it had been copied from him; so he took the first rank in graduating, and the other was dropped several places."

"What became of their friendship after that?" inquired Bressant.

"He I'm telling you of never knew any thing of what his friend had done till long afterward. Well, the faculty and some of the wealthy patrons of the university determined to send the first scholar abroad, to finish his education: he accepted the offer eagerly, and sailed for Europe, without bidding his friend good-by. Afterward, the faculty made the same offer to him, on the consideration that he had stood so well, during his course, until the examination. But he declined it: it was contrary to his principle of never leaving his country."

"What sort of a man was the friend?" asked Bressant, who was paying close attention, with his hand at his ear.

"Clever, with a winning manner, and fine-looking; had a pleasant, easy voice; never lost his temper that I know of." The professor paused, perhaps to arrange his ideas, ere he went on. "The man I'm telling you of left the college-yard with as much of the world before him as lies between the fifteenth and twenty-fifth parallels of latitude, and the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. He'd made up his mind to be a physician; and in a year he was qualified to enter the hospital; worked there four years, and, by the time he was twenty-nine, he had an office of his own and a good practice.

"At last, he fell in love with a beautiful woman; she was the daughter of one of his patients—a Southerner with a little Spanish blood in him. The young doctor had—under Providence—saved the man's life; and, since he himself came of a good family—none better—and had a respectable income, there wasn't much difficulty in arranging the match. The only condition was, that the father should never be out of reach of his daughter, as long as he lived."

"Was this Southerner rich?"

"Very rich; and a dowry would go with the daughter enough to make them more than independent for the rest of their lives. Well, just about that time, the friend who had gone to Europe came back. He'd done well abroad, and-was qualified for a high position at home. He was engaged to marry a stylish, aristocratic girl, who was not, however, wealthy. But he seemed very glad to see the doctor, and the doctor certainly was to see him, and invited him to stay at his house a while, and he introduced him into the house of his intended wife."

Here the professor broke off from his story, and, getting up from his chair, he passed two or three times up and down the room; stopping at the window to pull a leaf from the extended branch of a cherry-tree growing outside, and again, by the empty fireplace, to roll the leaf up between his finger and thumb, and throw it upon the hearth. When he returned to the bedside, he dropped himself into his chair with the slow, inelastic heaviness of age.

"The fellow played him a scurvy trick," resumed he, presently. "Exactly what he said or did will never be known, but it was all he safely could to put his friend in a bad light. It was because he wanted the young lady for himself; he was ambitious, and needed her money to help him on. What he said made a good deal of impression on the father; but the daughter wouldn't believe it then—at any rate, she loved the doctor still, and would, as long as she knew he loved her."

"Why didn't the other manage to make her think he didn't?"

"Well, sir, he did manage it," returned the professor, compressing his white-bearded lips, and lowering his eyebrows. "He told the father some story of having met relations of his in Spain; told him the climate would cure him of all his ailments, without need of a physician, and persuaded him to make the journey at last. The doctor heard of it first by a note written by his intended father-in-law. It contained no request nor encouragement to accompany them—of course, the daughter was to go too; her father wouldn't separate from her. But the doctor's friend had not trusted only to that: he knew that the other's resolution never to leave his country was not likely to be broken, so he was quite secure."

"And the doctor knew nothing of how his friend was cheating him?"

"No, not then. Far from it; he showed him the letter, and asked him for advice. He never dreamed of doubting his constancy, either to himself or to the girl he was engaged to marry. His friend counseled him to write a letter to her he meant

to make his wife, explaining his position, and asking her not to leave him. He would carry it to her, and advocate it himself, he said, and do all in his power to influence the father. The young doctor didn't altogether relish this course, nevertheless he trusted in his friend, wrote the letter, and gave it into his hands.

"He never saw his friend after that day. The next morning came an answer from the young lady—a cruel and cold rejection of him—repudiation of his love, and a doubt of his honor. It bewildered him, and, for a time, crushed him. Long afterward, he found out that she had never seen the letter he wrote, but a very different one, of his friend's concoction.

"Very soon afterward, they were gone—all three! and, before a year was passed, he heard that his friend and the daughter were married, and the father died of a fever contracted in Spain.

"He tried to go on as usual for several months, but it was no use. At last, he left his practice, and all his connections, and wandered over the United States—through towns and wildernesses. He rode across the plains on a mustang; clambered through the gorges of the Rocky Mountains; saw the tide come in through the Golden Gate at San Francisco. He pushed north as far as Canada, and thence came down the Mississippi to New Orleans. From there he crossed to the Pacific coast again, and lived to find himself a second time in San Francisco. He didn't stay there long, but struck overland, slanting southward, and, in four or five months, appeared at Charleston, South Carolina. So he worked up the Atlantic coast to New York. By the time he got there, he was older and wiser, and strengthened, body and mind, by a rough experience. He resolved to travel no more; but, as yet, it was not in his power to feel happy.

"Much had happened in his absence. His friend, after living three or four years with his wife in Europe, was separated from her—not, however, by a regular divorce—and she had disappeared, and had not since been heard of. It was reported that she was dead. She had left with her husband a son, two or three years old, at that time a sickly little fellow, scarcely expected to live. It was supposed that the mother had discovered that it was her money, and not herself, that her husband cared for, and, perhaps, too, may have imagined him to be still thinking of his first love, who, indeed, was said to have in some way fomented the quarrel between them, though how, or to what end, was never known. She, by-the-way, after an absence of some years from New York, suddenly reappeared there, and married a wealthy old Knickerbocker, who died not long afterward, and left her his property. She became eminent in society, and was

intimate with all the most distinguished people. Her former lover returned from Europe, with his little son, and, I believe, settled somewhere in the neighborhood of New York. They met, and, I understand, came to be on very friendly terms with one another, but the conditions of their lives would have prevented the possibility of marriage, even had they desired it.

"Well, it was before the old Knickerbocker's death that he I am telling you of first arrived in the city. He gave up medicine, and devoted himself to other studies; and, in the course of a few years, he found himself occupying the chairs of History and of Science at the University of New York. He also paid some attention to politics, and became, for a while, a person of really considerable renown and distinction. He was respected by the most influential persons in the city. Among the rest, he became acquainted with the widow—as she was by this time—of the Knickerbocker—and she showed him every kindness and attention. But he did her the injustice of not believing her kindness genuine; he imagined that she cared for nothing but fashion and display, and was polite to him only because she thought he would add a little to her drawing-rooms. At length, a sudden weariness of his mode of life coming over him, he resigned his public positions, and his professorships, and took lodgings in the family of a poor clergyman in Boston. While there, he took up the study of divinity, and, before long, was fully qualified for ordination. But, at this time, he fell, all at once, dangerously ill, and lay at death's door.

"He owed his life to the care that the daughter of the clergyman took of him. She was a sweet, gentle girl, a good deal younger than he; but she grew to love him —perhaps because she had saved him from death. When he recovered, they were married, and found a great deal of happiness; there was no more passionate love, for him, of course; but he could feel gratitude, and tenderness, and a steady and deep affection. They had two children, and when they were five or six years old, the parents moved to the country, and took a house in an out-of-the-way village."

"Is that all?" demanded Bressant, eying the professor's face with great intentness.

"There's not much more. One of the first persons the minister—such he was now —met, on his entrance into the village, was the woman he had loved first—the wife of his false friend—she whom he had long believed dead. She had settled, several years before, in this place, whither he had unawares followed her. In an interview—the first for nearly half a lifetime—all the old errors and falsehoods were cleared up. She told him how her husband's heartlessness and insolent indifference had made her leave him; and how, for the sake of her son, and partly

also out of pride, she had made no attempt to repossess herself of the fortune with which she had endowed her husband at their marriage. The hardest of all had been to leave her son, whom she loved with her whole heart; but he was sickly, and she dared not expose him to the chances of privation and hardship, such as she expected to endure. With some three thousand dollars in her pocket, she had come to America, and since then had never heard a word of those she had left, nor had they of her.

"About three years after his arrival, the minister's wife died. He took his two children, and went with them to New York, where they staid nearly a year; and the widow of the old Knickerbocker found them out, and was as cordial as ever. But finally the minister decided to return to his country dwelling, and there he still remains."

As Professor Valeyon concluded, he looked toward his auditor, having been conscious, especially during the latter part of the narrative, of the peculiar magnetic sensation which the steady glance of the young man's eyes produced.

But at the same moment, Bressant turned his head away, and closed his eyes, as if wearied by the strain which had been imposed upon his attention. The old gentleman presently arose, and, after a moment's hesitation, he apparently decided not to disturb or rouse his patient any further. He could wait until another time for whatever discussion yet remained. So he betook himself quietly to the door.

He had nearly closed it when, thinking he heard a sudden call or exclamation from within, he hastily reopened it, and looked into the room. But the invalid showed no signs of having spoken. His position was slightly changed, indeed, but his eyes were still closed, and his face turned somewhat away from the door.

"I must have been mistaken," said Professor Valeyon, as he shut himself into the study. He walked to the table, and, resting one hand upon it, stood for several moments with his head bent forward, thinking. As he raised it, a sigh escaped him; nor was his countenance so serene as it had been half an hour before.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN INTERMISSION.

Bressant's recovery was now very rapid, as he had himself foretold. The wedding was finally fixed for New-Year's Day at noon. They were to be married at the Parsonage; afterward they might go South for two or three months, but it was understood that they would return to the village before settling permanently anywhere.

"If there isn't room for us here, we can board at Abbie's; it would be very pleasant, wouldn't it?" said Sophie; but Bressant made no rejoinder.

Professor Valeyon was getting on well beneath the weight of his prospective loss. He indulged in as many comforting reflections as he could. Cornelia would still be with him, and he loved her as much in one way as Sophie in another. He seemed to think, too, that the bride and groom would probably settle somewhere in the neighborhood. Again, he felt a greater natural affection for Bressant than for any other young man; what son-in-law, after all, would he have preferred to have? And there may have been additional considerations equally pleasant in the contemplation.

Sophie was in her element; the loveliness and richness of her character came out like a sweet, sustaining perfume. In love, all her faculties found their fullest exercise. There was no doubt nor darkness in her soul. Without looking upon her lover as an angel, she saw in him the grand possibilities which human nature still possesses, and felt that she might aid them somewhat to develop and flourish.

As for Bressant, originally the least inclined of any of the circle to be pensive and sombre, he now seemed occasionally to contend with shadows of some kind. He was far from being habitually gloomy, but his moods were not to be depended upon; sometimes a turn of the conversation would seem to alter him; sometimes a word which he himself might utter; sometimes a silence, which found him light-hearted, would leave him troubled and restless. Sophie, so strong and trustful was her happiness, never suspected that any thing more than the fretting of his sickness was responsible for this, and, indeed, thought little about it at all; for, after all, what was it compared to the full tide which swept

them both along in such an overmastering harmony?

Within a week from the day of the engagement, a letter came from Cornelia, speaking of her desire to be at home again, and further intimating that she meant to return in a month at farthest. She did not write with as much liveliness and light-heartedness as usual. Sophie read the letter aloud to Bressant and her father as they sat in the former's room on a cool August afternoon.

"How surprised she will be to hear what has been going on!" said Sophie, looking for Bressant to sympathize with her smile. "I'll write to her this evening and tell her all about it." She paused to imagine Cornelia's delight, astonishment, and playful dismay on learning that her younger sister, whom nobody ever suspected of such a thing, was going to be married, and to "that deaf creature," too, whom they had discussed so freely only two months or so before. "She must know before anybody," said Sophie; and the professor, as he rubbed his spectacles, grunted in approval.

But Bressant chewed his mustache, and said, hastily, the blood reddening his face: "No, no! wait—wait till she comes back. She can know it first, still; but you had better tell her with words. You can see, with your own eyes, then, how —how it pleases her."

"Yes, that is true," said Sophie, half reluctantly. "Well?"

Bressant lay silent, with a peering, concentrated look in his eyes, his brows slightly contracted. He must have had an intuitive foreboding that this matter of the two sisters would cause some difficulty, but he could hardly as yet have had a distinct understanding of what jealousy meant.

Howbeit, the lovers grew every day more intimate. In the earlier days of her intercourse with him Sophie had felt an involuntary shrinking from she knew not what, but this had been entirely overcome, partly by habit, partly from an unconscious resolve on her part not to yield to it. The quick, intelligent sympathy of her nature discerned and interpreted the germs of new ideas and impulses which were struggling into life in Bressant's mind; she translated to him his better part, and warmed it with a flood of celestial sunshine.

But the sun which makes flowers bloom brings forth weeds as well, and it would not be strange if this awakening of Bressant's dormant faculties should have also brought some evil to the surface which else might never have seen the light.

In the course of another week or so the invalid had so far improved as to be able to leave his room, and make short excursions about the house, and on to the balcony. The feverish and morbid symptoms faded away, and the indulgence of a Titanic appetite began to bring back the broad, firm muscles to arms, legs, and body. He felt the returning exhilaration of boundless vitality and restless vigor which had distinguished him before his accident.

The summer was now something overworn; the sultry dregs of August were ever and anon stirred by the cool finger of September. The leaves, losing the green strength of their blood, changed color and fluttered, wavering earthward from the boughs whereon they had spent so many sociable months. The surrounding hills seen from the parsonage-balcony took on subtle changes of tint; the patches of pine and evergreen showed out more and more distinctly; the over-ripe grass in the valley lay in lines of fragrant haycocks.

Every day, in the garden, a greater number of red and yellow leaves drifted about the paths, or scattered themselves over the flower-beds, or floated on the surface of the fountain-basin. Little brown birds hopped backward and forward among the twigs, with quick, jerking tails and sideway, speculative heads; or upon the ground, pecking at it here and there with their little bills, as if under the impression that it was summer's grave, and they might chance to dig her up again. But once in a while they got discouraged, and took a sudden, rustling flight to the roof-tree of the barn, seemingly half inclined to continue on indefinitely southward. Then, a reluctance to leave the old place coming over them, they would dip back again on their elastic little wings, to hop and peck anew.

Bressant and Sophie were sitting one afternoon—it was in the first days of September, and within less than a week of the time when they might begin to expect Cornelia—upon the little rustic bench beside the fountain. Their conversation had filtered softly into silence, and only the flop-flop of the weak-backed little spout continued to prattle to the stillness.

"I don't like it!" exclaimed Bressant, stirring his foot impatiently. "I'd rather put my whole life into one strong, resistless shooting upward, even if it lasted only a minute."

"The poor little fountain is happy enough," said well-balanced Sophie.

"To do any thing there must sometimes be a heat and fury in the blood; or a whirl and passion in the brain. Volcanoes reveal the earth's heart!" returned he,

sententiously.

"They're very objectionable things though," suggested Sophie, arching her eyebrows.

"They make beautiful mountains, whole islands, sometimes; in a man, they show what stuff is in him. It would be better to commit a deadly crime than to dribble out a life like that fountain's!"

"Even to speak of sin's bringing forth good, is a fearful and wicked thing," said Sophie; and, although tears rose to her eyes, her voice was almost stern. "But you don't know what you say: only think, and you will shudder at it."

But Bressant was perverse. "I think any thing is better than to be torpid. I'd rather know I could never hope for happiness hereafter, than not have blood enough really to hope or despair at all."

"Why do you speak so?" asked Sophie, with a look of pain in her grave little face. "Do you fear any such torpor in your own life? My love, this hasn't always been so."

"I feel too much in me to manage, sometimes," said he, leaning forward on his knees, and working in the sanded path with his foot. "I'm not accustomed to myself yet: it will come all right, later. My health and strength, too, so soon after my weakness—they intoxicate me, I think."

Sophie looked at his broad back and dark curly head, and brown, short beard, as he sat thus beside her, and she grew pale, and sighed, "It isn't right, dear," said she, shaking her head. "There is a quiet and deep strength—not demonstrative—that is better than any passion: it is less striking, I suppose, but it recognizes more a Power greater than any we have."

"It's true—what you say always is true!" responded Bressant, throwing himself back in the seat. "Sophie," he added, without turning his eyes upon her, "if I shouldn't turn out all you wish, you won't stop loving me?"

"I couldn't, I think, if I tried," replied she; and there was more of regret than of satisfaction in her tone as she said it. "Or, if I could, it would tear me all to pieces; and there would be nothing left but my love to God, which is His already. All of me, except that, is love for you."

"God and heaven seem unreal—unsubstantial, at any rate—compared with you,"

said Bressant, striking his hand heavily upon the arm of the rustic bench. "My love for you is greater than for them!"

"Oh, stop! hush!" cried Sophie, flinching back as if she had received a mortal thrust. The light of indignation and repulse in her gray eyes was awful to Bressant, and his own dropped beneath it. "Have you no respect for your soul?" she continued, presently. "How long would such love last? in what would it end? it would not be love—it would be the deadliest kind of hate."

Bressant rose to his feet, and made a gesture with his arms in the air, as if striving by a physical act to regain the mental force and equilibrium which Sophie had so unexpectedly overthrown. The mighty strength and untamed vehemence of the man's nature were exhibited in the movement. Sophie saw, in the vision of a moment, on how wild and stormy a sea she had embarked, and for a moment, perhaps, she quailed at the sight. But again her great love brought back the flush of dauntless courage, and her trembling ceased. She became aware, at that critical moment, that she was the stronger of the two; and Bressant probably felt it also. He had put forth all his power in a passionate and convulsive effort to prevail over the soul of this delicate girl, and he had been worsted in the brief, silent struggle. He did not need to look in her clear eyes to know it.

His love must have been strong, indeed; for it stood the test of the defeat. He sat down again, and after an almost imperceptible hesitation, he held out his hand toward her. She put her own in it, with its pressure, soft and delicately strong.

"I can't reason about these things—I can only feel," said he. "You can look into my heart if you will. Don't give me up: you can help me to see it all as you do. Isn't it your duty, Sophie, if you love me?"

"Oh! I will pray for you, my darling," she answered, almost sobbing in the tenderness of her great heart, and laying her head upon his broad shoulder. "I would not lose your love for all the world; but I feared you might be led to something—something that would prevent your loving either God or me. Promise me something, dear: if you are ever in trouble or danger, and I'm not with you, come to me! No harm can reach us when we're together. You need me, and I you."

"I promise," replied Bressant.

In the short silence that followed, Sophie heard, though Bressant could not, a

quick, excited, warbling voice calling her again and again by name. She released herself from her lover's hold, and sprang up with a cry of delight.

Bressant, surprised and defrauded, was about to remonstrate; but ere the words came, he saw Cornelia appear upon the balcony, and he sank back and held his peace.

CHAPTER XX.

BRESSANT CONFIDES A SECRET TO THE FOUNTAIN.

Sophie went flitting up the garden-path toward the house, and in a moment more the sisters were in one another's arms. Bressant, glad of the concealment afforded by the shrubbery, remained gazing moodily at the fountain, his head on his hand. The two girls entered the house, and sat down in the professor's study, where the old gentleman (who had been the first to meet Cornelia) sat enclouding himself with smoke, but betraying no other symptom of his huge delight.

"But how came you to get here so soon, you dear darling?" said Sophie, looking with lighted eyes at her sister. "We thought it would be a week at least."

"Oh, bless your heart, I couldn't wait, you know. So awfully tired I got of seeing new things and people. Dear me!"—and Cornelia threw herself back in her chair and uplifted her gloved hands in a little gesture of ineffability—"you would never imagine what a bore society is, after all."

The professor, from his cloud, cast, unobserved, a glance of quiet scrutiny at his daughter. A certain jaunty embroidery of tone and manner struck him at once—she wasn't quite the same simple little woman who had gone to New York two months ago. Well, well, they would wear off, perhaps, these little affectations; and then, too, it was not to be expected of her that she'd be a girl all her life. They all must needs pass through this stage to something better—or worse: all women of pith and passion like Cornelia.

"How did you leave Aunt Margaret?" inquired he.

"Oh, *désolée*, because I would go away," replied Cornelia, with a very pretty laugh. "She vowed she could have spared me much better six weeks earlier; for, you see, after I'd learned the ropes, and how to take care of myself, I became, as she expressed it, 'such a dear, sweet, *invaluable* little *attachée*.'"

Sophie laughed at the comical air with which her sister repeated the sentence; yet, when her laugh was gone, there remained a slight shadow of disappointment. She, too, was unwillingly aware of some alteration.

"Is she such a grand lady as you expected?" asked she.

"Oh, my dear, grandeur's a humbug, let me tell you. Gracious! by the time I'd been there a week, I could put it on as well as anybody. Aunt Margaret, she was no end of a swell, and all that; but, as for grandeur!—And she was such an odd old thing. Sometimes I seemed to like her, and sometimes she almost made me faint. Once in a while I thought she was trying to pump me about something; though, to be sure, there was nothing in me to be pumped. I told her about Abbie, for one thing, as much as I knew, and she seemed awfully interested—it was put on, I suppose, very likely; and yet she really did seem to mean it. I remember she couldn't get over my forgetting Abbie's last name: she even told me to mention it the first time I wrote to her. So queer of the old person."

"No necessity for you to write, my dear," observed the professor at this point. "I've been intending to do it myself for some time, and I'll thank her for her hospitality, and so forth."

Cornelia nodded, yawned, and then allowed her eyes to wander around the room.

"How nice and cozy and home-like every thing does look! And so small. Why, I should almost believe I was looking through the small end of the telescope, or something."

"New York houses are so big, I suppose?" said Sophie.

"Gracious, dear!" exclaimed Cornelia, laughing again. "Why, the very cupboards are bigger than this whole house. It'll take me ever so long to get over being afraid to knock my head against something when I stand up."

"You can sit out-doors until the weather gets too cold," observed the professor. "The sky is as high here as in New York, isn't it?"

Cornelia ignored this remark with admirable self-poise. "Aunt Margaret was asking a good deal about Mr. Bressant, too," said she. "She said she'd only heard about him from you, papa; but I thought, sometimes, she must be fibbing. Once in a while, you know, she acted just as if she had forgotten having said she didn't know him. However, that's absurd, of course. By-the-way, where is he? Here still?"

"Oh, yes. O Neelie dear, I have such news to tell you. But—yes, he's out there by the fountain, I believe. Go out and speak to him, and then come up to my room and hear the secret."

"All right, I'll be there directly;" and, springing from her chair with a sudden overflow of animal spirits, drowning out the small growth of affectation, the beautiful woman danced out upon the balcony, and down the steps. Sophie went to her chamber, and the professor remained in his study to indulge his own thoughts, which, by the way, appeared to be neither light nor agreeable.

As Cornelia neared the fountain, her steps grew more staid. The clustering shrubbery hid Bressant from sight until she was close upon him. She thought, perhaps, in the few moments that passed as she walked down the path, of that other time when she had picked her way, in his company, between the rain-besprinkled shrubs. Here was the same tea-rose bush, and hardly a flower left upon it. Yes, here was one, full-blown, to be sure, and ready to fall to pieces; but still, perhaps he would smile and remember when he saw it in her bosom; or perhaps—and Cornelia smiled secretly to herself at the thought—perhaps he needed no reminder. He was sitting by the fountain now. What more likely than that he was thinking over that first strange scene that had been enacted between them there? Dear fellow! how he would start and redden with pleasure when he saw her appear, in flesh and blood, in the midst of his reverie! Cornelia blushed; but some of the loose petals of the overblown rose in her bosom became detached, and floated earthward.

All at once her heart began to beat so as to incommode her: she was uncertain whether she was pale or red. It seemed to require all her courage to get over the last few steps of garden-path that brought her into view. What was it? A premonition? Now she saw him, as he sat with his legs crossed, his head resting on his hand, turned away from her, staring moodily before him.

He did not look up until Cornelia stood almost beside him; then, become aware of her presence, he leaped suddenly to his feet, and towered before her, one hand grasping the fantastically-curved limb which ornamented the back of the rustic seat.

In the space that intervened while Cornelia, startled at his abrupt movement, remained motionless in front of him, the piece of branch which his hand held parted with a sharp crack. It broke the pause, and Cornelia laughed.

"You seem to be recovering your strength pretty well, if you can break the limb of a tree short off just by laying your hand upon it! How do you do? Aren't you glad to see me?" and she held out her hand with a frankness not all real, for she felt a secret misgiving, and an undefined fear.

But the strain of Bressant's suspense was removed. He concluded that either Cornelia had as yet heard nothing of his bond with Sophie, or that, having heard it, it had not seriously affected her. Of the two suppositions he was inclined to the first (and correct) one; but he kept scanning her face with an uneasy curiosity. He took her hand, shook it, and dropped it.

"How do you do?" said he.

They took their places side by side upon the bench. Cornelia felt a great weight pressing heavily and more heavily upon her, crushing out life and vivacity. This was not what she had expected; what did it mean? was it indifference? was it aversion? could it—could it be an uncouth way of showing joy? Poor Cornelia held her clasped hands in her lap, and knew not what to say.

When the silence had lasted so long that in another moment she must have screamed, she chanced to remember the watch. It was ticking steadily in her belt. She dragged it out, her hands feeling stiff and numb, and then commanding herself by a not inconsiderable effort to speak naturally, she put it in his hand, which he opened mechanically to receive it.

"Here it is, all safe. You can't think how punctual I've learned to be since I've had it. I got to be quite superstitious about winding it up; but it did run down once—just about six weeks after I left. It was in the forenoon, about eleven. I—I happened to be looking at it at the time, and suddenly the second-hand began to go slower and slower, and at last it stopped. You can't think how frightened I was. I couldn't help thinking that something must have happened at home. I wrote to Sophie that I would come home the same afternoon. Of course you know"—here Cornelia interrupted the hurried and nervous flow of her words to force a laugh—"of course it wasn't any thing but that I'd been up late talking with Aunt Margaret, and had forgotten to wind it. It isn't out of order or any thing."

She was out of breath now, and had to pause. She would gladly have kept on indefinitely, for the sake of avoiding another of those dreadful silences.

Bressant was not in the habit of paying much attention to coincidences, but it happened to occur to him that the stoppage of the watch must have taken place pretty nearly, if not exactly, at the time of his engagement to Sophie, and the thought rendered his discomposure still more painful.

"Won't you keep the watch?" said he at length.

"Keep it?" repeated Cornelia, timidly, uncertain what might be coming nest. Her breath went and came unevenly. "How can I keep it?" faltered she. "They know—papa and Sophie know—that I haven't any such watch. I—I have no right to keep it."

She could hardly have spoken more plainly; indeed, she had been surprised into speaking much more plainly than she intended. The moment after her pride rebuked her, and made her cheeks burn with shame; and a feeling of anger at having so betrayed herself put a sparkle into her eyes. Bressant, looking at her, was stricken by the angry glow of her beauty. It began to dazzle his reason, and bind his will. Their eyes met fully for a moment; a world of fatal significance can sometimes be conveyed by a glance. The extremity of his danger perhaps aroused the young man to a realization of it. He stood up, and pressed one hand over his eyes.

"If you've no right to keep the watch, I've no right to give it you, I suppose," said he, sullenly.

"I owe you an apology, certainly, Mr. Bressant," exclaimed Cornelia, interrupting what more he might have been going to say. She was tingling to her fingertips with the intolerable anger of a woman who finds herself rejected and befooled. "Really, I am surprised at myself for persecuting you so relentlessly. Not satisfied with depriving you of your timepiece for two whole months, I actually am unable to surrender my—my ill-gotten booty without giving you an uncomfortable feeling that I want to task your beneficence further yet. Well, I've not a word to say for myself. I had no grudge to pay. I'm sure your conduct to me has always been—most unexceptionably polite! The most charitable explanation is, that I was crazy. I hope you'll consent to accept it; and I do assure you that I'm perfectly sane now, and mean to keep so. You needn't," she continued laughing, "you really needn't be afraid of my persecutions any longer. I'm going to be as circumspect as—as you are. Now, good-by for the present." She held out her hand with an air of formal courtesy. "I promised Sophie I'd be back directly. I'll see you at dinner, I suppose?"

As she came to the good-by, Cornelia had risen from her seat; by the action the remaining petals of the tea-rose had been shaken off, leaving the nucleus bare and unprotected. Bressant's eyes fastened idly upon it, but he said nothing, and did not move, Cornelia withdrew her unaccepted hand, smiled, and, turning about, walked up the path to the house with an easy and dignified grace, which was not so much natural as the inspired result of passion.

Bressant looked down at the watch in his hand, and saw it marking the hour at which a dark epoch in his life began. He knelt on one knee by the basin of the fountain—but not to pray. Grasping in one hand the guard-chain of his watch, he dashed the watch itself two or three times against the stone basin-rim. When it was completely shattered, he tossed it into the water, and then rose lightly to his feet.

CHAPTER XXI.

PUTTING ON THE ARMOR.

Sophie, in her room, was moving about hither and thither, ostensibly to put things in order, but really to make the time before her sister's appearance pass the easier. She was little given to the manifestation of impatience; but now, so much did she long to pour out her heart to her sister on the subject of her love; to speak with a freedom which she could use to no one else—not even to Bressant himself—and to receive the full and satisfying measure of sympathy which she felt that only Cornelia could give her—dear, loving, joyous Cornelia!—so much did all these things press upon her, that she found waiting a very tedious affair.

At last she heard Cornelia's step along the hall, and up the staircase. It sounded more slow and listless than a few minutes before, as if she were treading under the weight of a weary load. Now that she was out of Bressant's eyeshot, the support afforded by her anger had given way, and she felt very tired, very reckless, and rather grim. She entered Sophie's open door, crossed the room heavily, and, with scarcely a glance at her sister, threw herself plump into the chair by the window.

"Poor child," thought Sophie; "she's so tired with that long journey; but she'll be refreshed by what I have to tell her."

"I'm so glad you're here," she continued, aloud. "I've never wanted any one so much,-especially since the last two weeks. A great happiness has come to me, dear, but I haven't been able fully to enjoy it, because I couldn't tell you—they didn't want me to write. But I wouldn't tell any one before you, nor let any one tell you but me, because I wanted to enjoy your enjoyment all myself."

Sophie had sat down at Cornelia's feet, upon a little wooden cricket which stood in the window, and had taken one of her hands in both of hers. Cornelia glanced down at her somewhat indifferently; she had scarcely attended to what her sister had been saying. But the fathomless expression of happiness upon Sophie's uplifted face struck through her gloom and pain. She had never seen any thing like it before, and probably at no moment of her life had Sophie's earthly content been so complete.

"I am engaged to be married," said she, a rose-colored flush spreading over her cheeks. She delayed lovingly over the words—they were dear, because they expressed such a world of happiness.

Cornelia repeated the words stupidly. She felt as if she were rooted beneath a rock, which was about to fall and crush her. Yet, resolutely shutting her eyes to what she knew must come—to gain an instant's time to breathe and brace herself—she asked, with an air of vivacious interest, bending down, and studying Sophie's face the while—

"Engaged, did you say? To whom, dear?"

"Why, to Mr. Bressant. Who else could it be?"

Sophie spoke in a soft tone of gentle surprise, but the words rang in Cornelia's brain as if they had been fired from a cannon. She closed her eyes, and leaned back in her chair. The strings of her hat choked her—she tore them apart, and the hat fell from her nerveless hand to the floor. She strove to open her eyes and command herself, but her sight was blurred and darkened, and her head dizzy.

In a minute or two, however, she recovered herself sufficiently to be aware that Sophie was alarmed about her. The imperative necessity not to betray herself gave her a brief and superficial control. Her mind was in confusion, and it was, perhaps, for this reason—because she could not collect her faculties and analyze the situation—that she was enabled to feel a gush of the natural, tender love for her sister—a joy in her joy. Knowing that such a mood could not last long, she hastened to make it available: she bent down, and put her arms around Sophie's neck.

"I'm so glad, darling! so happy! How splendid! isn't it? What a perfect match! Ah, Sophie, I sympathize with you with all my heart. I couldn't have wished you any thing better."

This was doing very well. Her manner was a little exaggerated; her speech was hurried, and almost mechanical. She avoided looking Sophie in the face while the lies were coming out of her mouth (if they were real lies, and not a bastard kind of truth, good while spoken, and the next moment degenerating into falsehood). Notwithstanding these minor defects, it was a very successful effort—excitement, and even vehement emotion, were quite admissible in a warm-hearted girl who had her sister's welfare nearly at heart, and much might be allowed to surprise. Indeed, Sophie, though a good deal agitated, and even

anxious, was not in the least suspicious or dissatisfied. Such was the loyalty and humility of her own nature, that much stronger grounds would have failed to inspire misgivings.

"I thought you were going to be ill, at first," she remarked, with a loving smile. "Perhaps I told you too abruptly—did I? You see, I thought you half knew it already—at least, that you suspected it—and, then, to tell the truth, dear," added she, with a bright smile in her eyes, "I didn't think you'd care so much—be so *very* glad, I mean. There never was so sweet a sister as you."

Cornelia felt that this must not go on any longer. She could feel her cheeks getting hot, and her eyes bright—very little more, and there would be an outburst. She must leave the room at all hazards, and be by herself.

She got up, and stood unsteadily, with her cold hand to her hot forehead.

"I believe I *don't* feel very well, Sophie. I think I must have a little palpitation, or something. I've been awfully dissipated, and all that, you know, with Aunt Margaret. I feel a little run down. Oh! it's nothing serious. Don't tell papa! no—don't on any account. I'll just go to my room, and lie down for half an hour. I shall be all right before tea-time. You must tell me all the particulars afterward—not just this moment. Don't mention any thing about me, you know, and don't let any one come up. Good-by till supper, dear. *Au revoir*."

She got out of the room, not very gracefully, probably, but still she escaped. A few hurried and uneven steps down the entry brought her to her own door. She burst it open, entered, and locked it behind her in feverish haste. Then, with a miserable sense of luxury, she flung herself on the bed, and was alone.

Her first sensation, as soon as the tumult in her thoughts suffered her to have any intelligent sensation at all, was one of secret pleasure and relief. It was a surprise to herself—she even struggled against it, and tried to convince herself that she was only miserable, but still the sensation remained. Guilty or not, there it was, and she could not help it. The news of Bressant's engagement to Sophie was a relief and a pleasure to her.

The real pain—hard and bitter, and with no redeeming grain of consolation—had been the unexpected and unexplained change in his manner. She had met him, anticipating a tender and delicious renewal of the relations on which they had parted—the memory of which had never left her during her absence, and which had grown every day sweeter and more precious in the recollection. His silence

and coldness, unaccompanied by any show of reasons, had penetrated her soul like iron. It could only be that she had become distasteful to him, that what he had said and done before her departure had been in a spirit of deliberate trifling, or, at the best, that it had been a mistake, of which he had been convinced during their separation, and now wished to correct. The pride and resentment that were in her had risen up in defence, and, had the matter rested there, might ultimately have gained the victory.

But his engagement to Sophie—that was another story. In the first place, if he loved her sister, it did not therefore follow that he disliked her; quite the contrary. And, on the other hand, it readily explained the restraint and embarrassment of his manner. How otherwise could he have acted? Well—and was this all?

Ah! no—not all! There was a tawny light in Cornelia's eyes as she lay upon the bed, flushed and dishevelled. She was thinking of a moment—that one little moment—when their glances had met, and penetrated to a fatal depth. For a time, the ensuing events had swept it from her memory; but now it returned, charged with a deeper and darker meaning than Cornelia at present cared to recognize. She was satisfied that it gave her comfort. She hid her thought away, as a miser does his gold: it was enough that it had existence, and could be used when the fitting hour should come. She had not seen the little episode of the watch; but that was, perhaps, scarcely necessary.

The intensity of the beautiful woman's reflections at length exhausted her mind's power of maintaining them: she turned over on her side, and began to follow with her eye the arabesques worked upon the white counterpane. It was just the sort of occupation which suited her mood. The arabesques were pretty and graceful; the counterpane was of immaculate whiteness; there was just enough of effort in tracing out the intricacies of the interlacements to give a gentle sensation of pleasure; and there was the latent consciousness, behind this voluntary trifling, that it could be exchanged at any moment for the most terribly real and absorbing excitement.

At length it occurred to her that time was passing, and the hour for tea must be near at hand. She sat up on the bed, threw off her light sack, and unbuttoned her boots. Going to the glass, she saw that her hair was in disorder, and partly fallen down, and that one cheek was stamped with the creases of the pillow. She pulled off her gloves, and looked critically at her hands.

"It'll never do to go down this way!" determined she. "I must make myself decent."

In half an hour more she was finished, and took a parting peep at herself in the mirror. Cold water and a soft sponge had taken from her face all traces of travel and emotion. Her dark, crisp hair was arranged in marvelous convolutions, and from the white tip of each ear, peeping out beneath, hung an Etruscan gold ear-ring, given her by Aunt Margaret. Her cheeks were pale, but not colorless; her eyes glowed like a tiger's. She was dressed in a black demi-toilet, relieved with glimpses of yellow here and there; an oblong piece cut out in front revealed, through softened edges of lace, the clear, smooth flesh of the neck and bosom. The dream of a perfume hovered about her, and touched the air as she moved. Her wide sleeve fell open, as she raised her arm, disclosing the white curves, which were remarkably full and firm for one of her age.

She gave a little laugh as she stood there that made the ear-rings quiver, and parted her lips enough to show that her small white teeth were set edge to edge.

"It can't do any harm," was passing through her mind. "If I'm to be his sister, he ought to like me. It's no use making him detest me. If he loves Sophie so much, what harm can it do for him to be pleased with my beauty? Besides, haven't I a right to my own good looks?"

She kissed her fingers to her reflection, and made a deep courtesy. As she did so, she caught sight of the little petal-less rose-stalk which had fallen out of her traveling-dress on to the floor. She picked it up, and, after turning it idly in her fingers for a moment, she yielded to a sudden fancy, and fastened it into the bosom of her dress; so that this symbol of a body from which the soul had departed formed the central and crowning ornament of the voluptuous and lovely woman.

"There!" ejaculated she, with a smile which did not part her lips, but seemed to draw her dark eyebrows a little closer together.

"Strange I'm so quiet!" she mused, as she walked slowly to the door. "What an ordeal I have to go through! I must sit down with Sophie, and papa, and—him: listen to all the particulars, ask all the proper and necessary questions, smile and laugh; and it would be well, I suppose, to rally the lovers archly on the ardor of their affection, and the suddenness of the consummation. Better still, I can laughingly allude to my own prior claim—suggest that I feel hurt at being distanced and left out in the cold by that demure little younger sister of mine!

Oh, yes!" exclaimed Cornelia, clapping her hands together, "that will cap the climax; what fun!"

Here the tea-bell rang. Cornelia put her hand on the door-handle.

"Of course, nobody could help loving Sophie—such a dear, simple, good little thing! and why not he as well as any one else? and, of course, in that case, Sophie must think that she loved him back—thought it her duty, too, perhaps! Nobody was to blame."

"But he was mine first!" she whispered to her heart, again and again, and she found a disastrous solace in each repetition. She flung open the door, and ran down-stairs with a light step, a smiling face, and a fierce, tight heart.

CHAPTER XXII.

LOCKED UP.

Bressant's health was now sufficiently established to warrant his moving back to Abbie's. Not that he was particularly anxious to go, but he had no pretext for staying, and his engagement to Sophie was a reason in etiquette why he should not. Accordingly, about a week after Cornelia's arrival, such of his books and other property as had been sent to him from the boarding-house were packed in a box, which was hoisted in to the back of the wagon; he and Professor Valeyon mounted the seat, and, with Dolly between the shafts, they set out for the village.

"I suppose you remember a talk I had with you the first evening you came here?" said the old gentleman, as they turned the corner in the road. "Told you it would be work enough for a churchful of missionaries to make any thing out of you, in the way of a minister, and so on?"

"Very well; I remember the whole conversation," said Bressant, pushing up his beard into his mouth and biting it.

"Thanks to God—I can't take any credit to myself—you've been more changed than I ever expected to see you. You've found your heart and how to use it. That goes further toward fitting you for the ministry than all the divinity-books ever printed."

Bressant's hankering after the ministerial life was not so strong as it once had been; but he said nothing.

"You'll need means of support when you're married," resumed the professor. "A few months' hard study will qualify you to take charge of a parish. The next parish to this will be vacant before next spring. If I apply for it now, I may be able to give it you, with your wife, as a New-Year's gift."

"I thought of getting a place in New York. What could I do in a country parish?"

"Expensive, living in New York!" said the professor, with a glance of quiet scrutiny at his companion's profile. "Marriage won't be a good pecuniary investment for you, remember. Better begin safe. The village salary will be good

enough."

Bressant communed with himself in silence a few moments, before replying:

"As my father's will stands, Mrs. Vanderplanck—I believe he owed some obligation or other to her—receives half the fortune, and I the other half. Are you certain that my marriage, and the disclosure it would bring about, will forfeit the whole of it?"

Professor Valeyon touched Dolly with the whip, and turned inward his white-bearded lips.

"All I can tell you about it," said he, "is this: when your mother married your father, all her property was settled upon her; so that it was only the event of her death, intestate, that could have given your father the right to will it away at all."

At this information, Bressant folded his arms, and, looking steadfastly before him, said not a word. A silence followed between the two, which lasted over half a mile. Dolly seemed to be in a meditative humor, likewise; she whisked her tail with an absorbed air, and once in a while shook her ears, or wagged her head, as though accepting or rejecting some hypothesis or proposition. Most likely, her problems found their solution in the manger that afternoon; but those of the professor and his companion received neither so early nor so satisfactory a settlement.

When they had entered upon the willow-stretch, where the trees had already scattered upon the ground their first tribute of narrow golden leaves, the younger man came to the end of his meditations, straightened himself in his seat, and spoke:

"Let it be as you said about the country parish; if you can get it for me, I'll be ready for it."

Professor Valeyon's face, which had been somewhat overcast, cleared beautifully; he appealed to Dolly's sympathies with a flick of the whip, to which she responded with a knowing shake of the head, and a refreshing increase of speed.

"That's well, my dear boy," said he. "I respect you."

"I'm not the only one concerned," continued Bressant, who still sat in the same position, with folded arms; "it involves about as much for Mrs. Vanderplanck as

for me. I shall have to consider that point, and attend to it first of all."

"To tell you the truth," returned Professor Valeyon, with an emphatic deliberation of manner, "I don't think you can give her any information that she's not possessed of already. She knows as much as you do, that's certain. You'll do well to begin business nearer home than at Mrs. Vanderplanck's."

Bressant lifted one hand to his beard, which he twisted about unmercifully. "It's only since Cornelia came back that you have thought that," he said, at length, with sudden keenness.

The old gentleman nodded, and met steadily the rapid glance which the other gave him.

"At all events," the latter resumed presently, "she don't know that I know, and she don't know what I intend. It's not a pleasant business, altogether—understand? You know how I've been brought up. It isn't so easy for me to fall into the right sentiments as it might be for other men. And—I feel it to be a private matter; I ought to go about it alone, and in my own way. Now"—here he turned around, and changed his tone, watching the professor's countenance as he spoke, "are you willing to leave it entirely in my hands?—promise not to question me, nor to speak to me, nor to anybody else, until it's all settled?"

"More than willing, my dear boy! more than satisfied; you shall have a clear field, that's certain. I sha'n't do any thing—sha'n't say a word, meanwhile; shall wait with perfect confidence till you're ready to report, whenever and however you please."

"I should like to make you a present on my wedding-day, in return for the parish, you know. Will that be soon enough?" and the young man met the elder's eye with a sharp look of significance.

"No more fitting time, no more fitting time," replied Professor Valeyon. The old gentleman's heart was full; he shifted the reins to his right hand, and laid his left upon Bressant's, which he pressed with much feeling. Perhaps it was of bad omen thus to seal a bargain with the left hand, but no misgivings of the sort troubled the professor. He felt more at ease than at any time since his pupil first sprang up the steps of the Parsonage-porch.

But Bressant, if he were a child in the world of the affections, was, in other respects, a man of exceptional shrewdness and comprehensive ability. Although

he had never as yet turned his attention to business matters, he had every faculty and instinct required to make a successful business-man. When he found his own interests deeply at stake, he may have had more than one motive for wishing to secure to himself a clear field. But Professor Valeyon was still as simple-hearted a soul—as quick to trust wherever his sympathies dictated—as ever in his younger days.

Bressant did not intend to deceive him, but then he had no irrevocably settled plans. He was not one of those who follow blindfold the promptings of any principle, simply because it chances to be a lofty one. Although passionate, and hot of blood, he could believe that the greatest good might be made not inconsistent with the greatest comfort. He undoubtedly intended to do what honor, generosity, and his future father-in-law, urged him to do; but it was less from an abstract love of virtue, than from an overmastering unwillingness to give up Sophie (his affection for whom was the most deeply-seated necessity of his nature—a fact which must be borne in mind through all that follows), and also—this was likewise a consideration of the greatest weight; indeed, Sophie alone counted for more—also, from a very confident conviction that, after every thing had been accomplished, according to the highest dictates of truth, and justice, and all that—he would not, to all intents and purposes, lose his fortune after all; that, whatever might be the legal disposition of it, all the enjoyments and benefits that it could confer would still be his, with the additional grace of having acted in a most lofty and self-sacrificing spirit; that, in short, and to use a homely illustration, he would be able to give away his cake and eat it too.

After being safely landed at the boarding-house—Abbie was not at home at the moment—Bressant bade farewell to the professor, and, assisted by the fat Irish servant-girl, carried his box up to his room. It was neatly swept, dusted, and put in order; a bunch of fresh flowers upon the table; others, in pots, upon the window-sill. Their fragrance gave a delicate tone to the atmosphere of the room, and perhaps penetrated more nearly to Bressant's heart than an hour full of unanswerable arguments and exhortations. He turned to the fat servant, who stood smiling, and wiping her hands on her apron.

"Who brought these flowers? Who arranged them here?"

"Sure, and wasn't it Abbie herself!" replied the functionary, giving her mistress her Christian name, with true democratic freedom. "More than that; isn't it herself has swept out the room every week, let alone dusting of it every day of her life! which is not mentioning that the flowers has been exchanged every day

likewise, and fresh put in place of them, by reason that the old shouldn't fade; which is a fact unprecedented, and unbeknown in my experience, which have been in this house nine year come St. Patrick's day—God bless him!"

Having thus delivered herself of what had evidently been weighing on her mind for weeks past, the fat servant-girl stopped wiping her hands on her apron (without help of which praiseworthy act she could no more have talked, than a donkey with a heavy stone tied to his tail can bray), and turning herself about, waddled toward the door. Bressant hesitated a moment, passed his hand rapidly down over his face and beard, and then, catching open the door just as the fat servant-girl was closing it, he requested her to inform Abbie, when she came back, of his return, and tell her he would like to speak with her.

"I'll do it, sir; rest easy," was the encouraging reply. "Faith, and it's a handsome man he is, and a sweet, lovely look he has out of his eyes; leastways now, which is, maybe, more than could be said when first he came here, three months ago, and looked that cold and sharp at a body as might make one shiver like. It's likely his being going to marry Miss Sophie up to the Parsonage as has fetched a change in him; which, she's a dear good girl; and may they be happy—God bless the both of them!" Thus soliloquizing, the fat servant-girl, apron in hand, descended the narrow stairs, and betook herself to the kitchen.

Bressant paced restlessly up and down his small room, stopping every minute or so to bend over the flower-pots in the window, or take a sniff from the bouquet on the table. His cheeks and forehead were flushed, and his eyes very brilliant. His lips worked incessantly against one another, and he held his hands now clasped behind his back, now thrust into the pockets of his coat. But there was certainly a noble and a gentle light upon his features, different from their usual expression of dazzling intellectual efficiency, different from the passionate fire which Cornelia's presence had more than once caused to flicker over them, different even from the purer and deeper illumination which his love for Sophie sometimes kindled within him. A virtuous act stirs the soul by its own innate beauty, even when the motive is not all unselfish. It was probably the first time that precisely such a look had ever visited Bressant's face; and it was certainly a great pity that no one but a fat Irish servant-girl should have had the privilege of beholding it there.

Presently, as he stood facing the door, he saw the latch lifted. The moment had come. Involuntarily he caught hold of the back of the chair, and drew in his breath.

Pshaw! only the fat servant again. Bressant bit his lip, stamped his foot upon the floor, and frowned.

The fat girl met these demonstrations with a fat smile, and extended to the young man a long, narrow envelop, laid crossways over the dirty palm of her large, thick hand.

"A letter!" exclaimed she, resuming her apron as soon as her hand was at liberty. "A letter from New York I'm thinking it is; and sure the handwriting's a lady's, every bit of it; which I don't know what Miss Sophie would be after saying if she should hear of it—nay, don't fear me, sir, that I'd ever have the heart to be telling her of it! And it's Abbie as fetched it, and the same bid me tell you as how she'd be after coming up here directly; she'll be cleaning her face first, and removing her bonnet; which she's always a right neat body, and it's myself can testify, as has lived with her nine years, and never had cause to complain, God bless her!"

When Bressant was alone, he sat down in the chair, with the letter between his fingers. On such slight hinges do our destinies turn. If Abbie had neglected to call at the post-office, or if she had been satisfied to give the letter to the young man herself, instead of sending it to him five minutes beforehand, or if the writing of the letter had been delayed a few hours (how many *ifs* there always are in such cases!), Bressant would have had a far different fate, and this story would never have been written. But as it was, five fatal minutes intervened between the delivery of the letter and Abbie's appearance, during which time he had read it through twice—at first hurriedly, the second time slowly and carefully—had replaced it in the envelop, and put the envelop in his pocket. Then he sat quite quiet, leaning back in his chair, his head thrown forward, his under eyelids drawn up, and contracted around the piercing glance of his eves, his jaws and lips set tight, and a straight line up his forehead from between his eyebrows. A more unpleasant and forbidding expression one does not often meet; but, such as it was, it grew still more stern and unpromising when the door once more slowly opened, and Abbie appeared upon the threshold.

Nevertheless, he at once rose, and inclined forward his lofty shoulders in a remarkably courteous bow. Abbie, who showed some traces of discomposure, and held one finger nervously to her under lip, stepped into the room, and they shook hands.

"I'm glad to welcome you back," said she, apparently unable to remove her eyes from his face. "You'll not likely find this place as convenient as the Parsonage, though."

"It's very pleasant; these flowers are delightful. I wanted to thank you for them; it seems like home to be here."

"Like home!" repeated Abbie. Her body seemed to bend and sway toward him, and the outer extremity of the eyebrows drooped a little, giving a singularly soft and gentle expression to her elderly visage. But seeing that he only colored, turning his head aside, and fumbling with his beard, her expression changed into one of constraint, which appeared to stiffen on her features.

"I'm glad you like the flowers; I didn't know as you cared for such things. I thought if you were ill they might be pleasant to you. But you're looking very well, sir, for one who has had so severe an accident."

"Oh, yes; I'm as well as ever. I've had very good nursing."

"Yes—yes," she said, slowly; "it was better you should be there; you couldn't have been so well cared for here. I told Professor Valeyon so at the time. I knew you'd feel happier there—more at home. It's all for the best—all for the best, in the end." She rattled the keys in her girdle before proceeding, with a distraught, embarrassed manner: "By-the-way, you had something more than good nursing to help you to health, I heard. Is it Cornelia—or Sophie?"

Bressant hesitated and stammered—a weakness he seldom was guilty of, especially when there was so little reason for it as at present.

"It's—I'm—oh!—Sophie!" said he.

"I heard it was Sophie, but I thought likely as not it was a mistake of one for another. Sophie," repeated she, musingly, "that sweet, delicate little angel. Oh, I should fear, I should fear! Cornelia would have been better—not so sensitive—she can bear more—and who knows?—No; but I do him wrong; he loves her: she'll be happy; she can't help it!"

Here Abbie became aware that she had been thinking aloud; her hand sought her mouth, and she glanced apprehensively at Bressant. But he had evidently heard nothing of the latter part of her speech, which was spoken in a low tone. He had taken a flower from the bunch on the table, and was pulling it ruthlessly to pieces. He did not look up. Abbie, rattling her keys, retired toward the door.

"I'll bid you good-morning, sir. A house-keeper always must be busy, you know; and, of course, you can't afford to be disturbed. You need never fear any disturbance from me—never, I assure you. By-the-way, you received your letter? I gave it to the servant, instead of waiting to bring it myself, because I thought it might be important."

"Oh, yes, I have it; no—no importance at all. Good-morning."

Abbie walked hurriedly and unevenly to her room, shut herself in, and fastened the door. She sat down on a chair which stood by the old-fashioned desk in the corner, and it seemed to her she could not rise from it again. A faintness was upon her, which she thought might, perhaps, be death. There was a sensation within her as if a clock had run down in her head, and had dropped the heavy weight into her heart. She could feel the paleness of her face, and the drops of moisture on her forehead. Her breathing was wellnigh imperceptible. She sat quite, still, in a kind of awful expectation, as if listening for the echoless footfall of Death. But he passed by on the other side, and left her to face her life again.

She felt rather tired of it, as she sat up and looked dimly around her. Putting her hand in the pocket of her dark dress, she drew out the small square morocco case which contained the daguerreotype. It was rather mortifying, certainly: every one knows what it is to appear, dressed for a party, and find you have mistaken the night. In what pleasant little episode had Abbie flattered herself that this portrait, with its grave, dark, baby eyes, its soft, light curls, its slender, solemn little face, might be going to play a part? No matter: the hope was gone by; and every day the portrait faded more and more indistinguishably into the dark background. Abbie looked at it a moment or two only, then closed the case, and carefully fastened the two little hooks which kept it shut. Opening the old-fashioned desk, she put the daguerreotype in its little drawer, and locked it up. She held the key —a small brass key—between her finger and thumb, meditating. Presently she went to the window, opened it, and looked out. Beneath, a little to one side, stood a huge black water-butt, half buried in the earth, and partly full of rain-water, contributed by the tin spout whose mouth opened above it. Into this butt Abbie dropped the key. It struck the water with a faint pat, and disappeared, causing two or three circles to expand to the edges of the butt, against which they disappeared also.

She did not immediately draw back, but remained leaning with her arms upon the window-sill. It was a beautiful, cool, September morning, such as makes breathing and eyesight luxurious. The fat Irish girl sat on the back steps, peeling potatoes for dinner. On the step by her side was a large earthen bowl, into which she put the potatoes, while throwing the skins into the swill-pail on her right. She was obliged to give her whole mind to the operation, there being a danger lest, in rapid working, she should happen to throw the potato into the swill-pail, and put the skin into the earthen bowl. She was much too absorbed to notice the beautiful weather, even had she been inclined to do so; but it remained beautiful, nevertheless.

"I'd be a fool to find fault with him," said Abbie to herself. "How can I expect him to see any thing in me, more than I can see myself in the looking-glass? And then, he loves Sophie, and perhaps he thinks I'd rob her; the Lord knows I only coveted the luxury of giving away my own, and seeing them happy with it. Well, he may set his mind at rest; he shall never suffer the mortification of having to thank a boarding-house keeper for his fortune.

"O my boy—my dear, dear boy!"

Meanwhile Bressant, having been relieved, by the timely arrival of the letter,

from any present necessity of visiting his aunt, was devoting himself pretty diligently to the cultivation of that line in his forehead running perpendicularly up from between the eyebrows. It bade fair to become a permanent feature in his face.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ARMED NEUTRALITY.

One afternoon in the cool heart of October, Cornelia and Sophie found themselves on the hill which rose up in front of the house, above the road, bound on a hunt for autumn leaves. They were alone. Bressant's time for coming was still an hour distant. A few nights before there had been a frost, which had inspired a rainbow soul into the woods; and the glory of the golden and crimson leaves made it imperatively necessary that they should be gathered and allowed to illuminate the dusky interior of the Parsonage.

Since Cornelia's return home, the sisters had not been so much together as formerly. Sophie had observed it, and secretly blamed herself: she allowed Bressant to monopolize her—left Cornelia out in the cold—was selfish and thoughtless just because she was happy—and so forth: taking herself severely to task, and resolving to amend her behavior forthwith. But there seemed to be some difficulty in the way of consummating her best intentions.

Cornelia was no longer so easily to be come at; she did not volunteer herself now in the liberal, joyous way she used to do; did not, in fact, appear half so ready to do her share in the work of reconstruction. It began to force itself upon Sophie that the edifice of their former relations was not lightly to be rebuilt; and the growth of this conviction occasioned her to mar her ordinarily serene and justly harmonized existence with sundry little fits of crying and other mournful indulgences.

As for Cornelia, if she noticed the estrangement at all, she did not allow it to occasion her any anxiety. Jealousy and discontent are more self-absorbing passions than love, and they closed her eyes to whatever they did not involve. Yet the effect of the estrangement was more hurtful upon her than upon Sophie; for never had her pure-minded sister's influence been so needful to her as now, when the very nature of the malady forbade its being so relieved.

But this afternoon it had so happened that they found themselves together, on the hill. Each had filled a basket with the most brilliant, or harmonious, or vividly contrasted colors they could find. They had emerged from the wood into the

clear autumn sunshine which rested upon the hill-side, and sat down upon a gray knee of rock, encased with crisp gray and black lichens. Below lay the Parsonage, with its weather-blackened, shingled roof, and the garden, full of shrubbery, intersected by winding paths, the fountain in the centre. The stony road wound around the spur of the hill, and was visible here and there, in its slopes and turnings on the way to the village, light buff between the many-colored bordering of foliage. The winding valley looked like Nature's color-box; the tall hills beyond, sleeping beneath their Persian shawls, contrasted richly with the cool pearl-gray of the lower sky behind them. Away to the right, though seemingly nearer than from the road below, rose the white steeple of the meeting-house, and, peeping out around it, the roofs and gable-ends of the village houses.

"There could not be a more lovely place to be happy in!" said Sophie, sighing from excess of pleasure.

"Any place is as lovely as another when you're in love, I suppose," remarked her sister; "that is, if being in love is as nice as poets say it is."

Sophie looked around with a smile, implying that the best description a poet ever wrote could give but a faint impression of the reality.

"But," pursued Cornelia, "don't you find it very stupid when he's away? The happier you are with him, the unhappier you'd be without him, I should think."

"Oh, no, dear!" returned Sophie. "I'm happy mostly, because I know he cares for me more than for any one else in the world, and because I know he's one of the best and truest of men. I can feel that, you know, just as much when he's at Abbie's, as when he's here. The happiness of love isn't all in seeing and hearing, and—all that tangible part."

"Don't it make any difference, then, if you never Bee one another from the day you're engaged until you're married?"

Sophie began to blush, as she generally did when called upon to speak of her love. "Of course, it's delicious to be together," said she, "and it would be very sad if we could not meet. But it would be more sad to think that our love depended on meeting."

"Well, it may be so to you," returned Cornelia, picking lichens from the rock and crushing them between her rounded fingers; "but my idea is that the whole

object of being engaged and married is to be together all the time. I don't see what on earth we are made visible and tangible for, unless to be seen and touched by the persons we love."

Sophie looked distressed, and a little embarrassed.

"You can't think our bodies are the most important part of us, Neelie, dear? It's our souls that love and are loved, you know. How could we love in heaven if it were not so?"

"Oh, I don't know any thing about that. It's love in this world I'm speaking of. I believe it has as much to do with flesh and blood, as an instrument has with the music that it makes. What would become of the music if it wasn't for the instrument?"

"That's a beautiful illustration, my dear," observed Sophie, after a thoughtful pause, "but I think it can be used better the other way. The music of love, like other music, is an existence by itself, exclusive of the flesh-and-blood instruments, which weren't given us to create music, but to interpret it to our earthly senses. Our souls are the players; but in the next world we shall be able to perceive the harmony without need of any medium. We can remember music, too, and enjoy it, long after we have heard it—that is why we don't need to be always together. And yet it's always sweet to meet, to hear a new tune; and the number of tunes is infinite; so love needs all eternity to make itself complete."

When Sophie hit upon an idea which seemed to her spiritually beautiful and harmonious, she was apt to be carried away—sometimes, perhaps, into deep water. Yet thus, occasionally, did she catch glimpses of higher truths than a broader and safer wisdom could have attained. Cornelia took one of the glowing leaves out of her basket, and looked at it. Perhaps she saw, in the perfect earthly self-sufficiency of its splendor, something akin to herself.

"I suppose I don't half appreciate your theory, Sophie, though it's certainly pretty enough. But you're more soul than body, to begin with, I believe. For my part, I almost think, sometimes, I could get along without any soul at all, and never feel the least inconvenience. Perhaps everybody hasn't a soul—only a few favored ones."

"What is it gives you such thoughts, Neelie?" said her sister, in a tone which, had it not been charged with so ranch depth of feeling, would have been plaintive. Her gray, profound eyes, from a slight slanting upward of the brows above them,

took on an expression in harmony with her tone. "I never knew you to have such, until lately."

"I suppose, until lately, I didn't have any thoughts at all." There was a pause. Sophie looked away over the beautiful valley, but it could not drive the shadow of anxious and loving sorrow from her face. Cornelia busied herself selecting leaves from her basket, and arranging them in a bouquet. Like them, she was more vividly and variously beautiful since the frost.

"Do you think men's ideas of love, and such things, are as high as women's?" asked she presently.

"Why shouldn't they be?" answered Sophie, coming back from her reverie with a sigh. "I'm sure Bressant's are: if they weren't—"

She sank again into thought, and another long silence followed. This time Cornelia's hands were still, but she watched Sophie closely.

"Well—suppose they weren't—suppose he were to turn out not quite so high-minded, and all that, as you think him: you would stop loving him, wouldn't you?"

"Why do you suggest it!" cried Sophie, almost with a sob. She bent down, resting her face upon her arms, and against the rock. "That question has come to me once before. How can I know? If he were to degenerate now—now, after I have told him that I love him—it must be because he no longer loved me; and I should have no right to love him, then."

Cornelia looked down, for there was a certain light in her eyes which had no right to be there. When she thought it was subdued, she raised them again.

"Shouldn't you hate him always afterward? Shouldn't you want to kill him?" demanded she, in a low voice.

"I should want to kill only the memory of his unworthiness," replied Sophie, her voice rising and clearing, while she regarded her sister with a full, bright glance. "As to hating him—I cannot hate any one I have loved, Neelie." She raised herself up as she spoke, and sat erect.

"Well, you're a strange girl!" said Cornelia, who was a little confused. "I don't see how you can ever be either happy or unhappy. Nothing human seems to have any hold upon you."

"I'm very human," returned Sophie, shaking her head. "There are some things, I think, would soon drive me out of the world, if God wore to send them to me."

The idea of death, when brought home to Cornelia, never failed to affect her. If she had been planning the destruction of an enemy, she would have wept bitterly at the sight of that enemy's dead body; nay, even at a vivid account of his death. Sophie's words brought tears to her eyes at once, and a quaver into her voice.

"Don't—please don't talk that way, dear; it isn't so easy to die as you think, I'm sure. The idea of dying because anybody was wicked! It's only because you've been ill, and have got into the habit of expecting to die, that you have such ideas —isn't it? don't you think so? You'll stop feeling so as soon as you're well again —won't you?"

"Perhaps," said Sophie, with, it may be, a particle of satire in her smile.

They now got up from the rock and began to descend toward the Parsonage. Sophie stepped with a quick but careful precision, never slipping or missing her footing. Cornelia made short rushes, and daring jumps, often coining near to fall. Her mind was a Babel of new thoughts; or rather one idea spoke with many tongues, and made much disturbance.

The greatest crimes are often perpetrated by those who, in their own phrase, follow the lead of the moment, and let things take their course. Things never take their own course, in a certain sense; what we do, and say, and think, creates circumstances and shapes results. There seems always to be a choice of paths. We profess—and believe—that we are neutral; that we surrender ourselves to the chance of the current. But let an evil hope—a dangerous wish—once enter our minds: something we venture only half to hint to ourselves in the non-committal whispers of a craven, unacknowledged longing-working secretly within us, it will act upon our course as a rudder, which, hidden beneath the water, steers the vessel inevitably toward a certain goal. Perhaps, when the current has become too swift, and the rudder, clamped in one fatal position, cannot be turned, we may realize, and recoil; but now, indeed, we follow the lead of the moment; now, beyond a doubt, we let things take their course: we are hurried on irresistibly; that which we dared not openly to name, or fairly to face, now looms awfully above us—an irrevocable, accomplished fact.

Beyond doubt it would have been safer to have steadily and fearlessly kept the end in view from the outset: for the full horror of it would have been visible while yet there was time to change our minds. Few people have the nerve to

jump from a precipice, or stand in way of a railway-engine, without first shutting their eyes, and perhaps their ears also.

In Cornelia's mind there was no intention of ruining her sister's happiness by interfering between her and Bressant; but then she did not think it likely that to lose him would occasion Sophie any thing more than a temporary and comparatively trifling degree of suffering. If she could allow her love for him to depend upon the immaculateness of his moral character, she did not love him as much as Cornelia, to whose affection any considerations of that kind were immaterial. What, after all, was Sophie's love but an idealization, which had, to be sure, taken Bressant as its object, but which placed no vital dependence upon him? But Cornelia's love was to her a matter of life and death: she was quite convinced that to live without Bressant would be an impossibility.

The next question was, whether Bressant was really as good as Sophie believed him to be. Cornelia did not think he was. Perhaps a secret sense of his attitude toward her suggested her suspicions; perhaps they were the result of her New-York experience, which had taught her just enough about men to make her imagine there was more or less of dark and indefinite villainy in the composition of all of them; perhaps it was her wish that fathered her moral misgivings about him—for it must be confessed that Cornelia was very far from shrinking at the idea of seeing her suspicions verified.

Indeed, was it not, on all accounts, desirable that, whatever objectionable points and passages the young man's life-record contained, should be at once forthcoming? Cornelia could not restrain a feeling of satisfaction at the growing conviction that it would be doing Sophie a kind and friendly service to inform her, in time, what a reprobate she was about to marry—if he only could be proved a reprobate! This question of proof was the only one difficulty in Cornelia's way; all the rest was as clear and easy as is generally the case in such matters.

It would not do to lie about it: Cornelia had a natural if not a moral disinclination to falsehood, and was, moreover, acute enough to see how strong, in this case, would be the chances of detection. It was not likely that Sophie would accept upon hearsay any imputations or accusations against her lover: she would speak to Bressant at once; the lie would be revealed, and the result would be not only a failure to alienate Sophie from him, but a certainty of alienating him from Cornelia.

No; her reliance must be placed upon facts. Whatever she could hear to the young man's disadvantage that was true, beyond the possibility of his denial, that she must at once make known to Sophie: it was no less than her duty. Or, better still, why would it not be enough simply to inform Bressant of her dark discovery, and compel him, by the threat of revelation, to give up Sophie of his own accord! Cornelia, in congratulating herself upon this shrewd idea, did not perceive how entirely it transformed the whole aspect and spirit of her intention.

So much being arranged, the next thing was to put herself in the way of learning the objectionable truths which she had persuaded herself existed. This was rather an awkward point. How should she go to work? to whom apply? who would be most likely to know, or, knowing, to impart what Cornelia desired to hear? Aunt Margaret? But it was not certain that she knew any thing about him more than the little Cornelia had herself told her: if not useless, it would certainly be rash to make inquiries of her, especially since it would have to be done by letter. Aunt Margaret wouldn't do.

Her papa? No, no! that was quite out of the question. He might not approve—he was old-fashioned—he wouldn't understand the necessity—he might ask her disagreeable questions—and besides—no, he must be given up.

But besides Aunt Margaret, and Professor Valeyon, who was there? Cornelia was quite at a loss. To think of being obliged to give up the whole explosion, merely for want of a match to touch off the powder, that was unendurable! She would not give it up; she would let herself be guided by circumstances; something would be sure to turn up that would serve her purpose; she must be on the alert, that was all, and let things take their course. One thing troubled her—the day of the wedding was not much over two months distant! Every thing must be done before then. It was to be hoped that things would take their course with a reasonable degree of rapidity.

As regarded the favorable result to herself of Bressant's separation from Sophie, Cornelia seems never to have entertained a doubt. That he would fall into a state of despair, and of bitterness against all women, herself included, she was unable, consistently with her confidence in herself, to believe. Far more natural was it, that, finding Sophie no longer could care for him, he would seek to repose and refresh his heart elsewhere: and where so soon as with Cornelia? Indeed it was a mystery to her how he had ever come to care for Sophie at all; and the reason of the mystery was, that she had felt a movement of passion in him toward herself. There was certainly not much similarity between the sisters, and it was not

strange that Cornelia should be inclined to doubt the validity of her rival's claim to supremacy in Bressant's heart.

Her rival! The current of events had already carried Cornelia a considerable distance beyond her position on the evening of her return from New York, when she had excused her beautiful appearance, to herself, by suggesting that it would not do for the husband of her sister to detest her! That was sophistry, and it was sophistry that served her now; but the subjects upon which she exercised it were becoming hourly more and more ticklish. The woman of two weeks back would have started and turned pale before the woman of to-day.

It would be very funny—if it were not so deep a tragedy—the havoc bungling human fingers make in essaying the work of Providence. No one but God can know how delicate are the petals of his flowers, nor on what depend their bloom and fragrance. Hearts are sacred things; we should beware of meddling, not alone with others' but with our own.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A BIT OF INSPIRATION.

Bressant was in the habit of spending three hours every afternoon at the Parsonage. Part of this time was passed in the professor's study, pursuing theological lore; for, whatever the young man's ultimate expectations with regard to his career and fortune may have been, it was no part of his plan to allow his future father-in-law to suspect any tiling else than what he had already given him to understand.

After lessons were over he joined Sophie on the balcony, walked with her in the garden, or gave her his arm up the hill. Cornelia was seldom to be seen, at least within speaking distance. At the same time she did not keep entirely out of the way. Often, when wandering with her sister through the garden-paths, Bressant would catch a glimpse of her buoyant figure and rich-toned face upon the balcony; or, if himself established there, would presently behold her, in a garden hat and shortened skirt, raking the fallen leaves off the paths and flower-beds, and perhaps trundling them stoutly away in a wheelbarrow afterward. It thus happened that, although seldom exchanging a word with her, he was continually receiving fresh reminders of her, in one way or another; and he was, moreover, haunted by an idea that Cornelia was not unconscious that he was observing her.

Two or three days subsequent to Cornelia's conversation with Sophie on the hill-top, Bressant, on his afternoon way to the Parsonage, met the former coming in the opposite direction. It was nearly at the end of the long level stretch, which was now resplendent with many-colored maples, which were interspersed at short intervals between the willows. He had been walking; swiftly with his eyes on the ground, when, chancing to raise them, lie saw Cornelia walking on toward him.

How beautifully she trod, erect, her round chin held in, stepping daintily yet firmly; it seemed as if the earth were an elastic sphere beneath her feet, she moving tirelessly onward. She had plucked a branch of gorgeous leaves from one of the maples, which she brandished about ever and anon, to keep the flies away. A straw hat, narrow-brimmed, slanted downward over hair and forehead. Her oval cheeks were more than usually luminous from exercise; her eyes were

bright tawny brown, the lids shaped in curves, like the edges of a leaf. The vigorous roundness of her full and perfect figure was hinted here and there through the light drapery of her dress, as she walked forward. The October breeze seemed the sweeter for blowing past her.

"You must be rather late—I don't often meet you!" said she, with a smile which put Bressant traitorously at his ease.

"Early, more than late," responded he, stopping as he saw that she stopped.

"Are you?—well, then—I don't often see you—would you mind walking with me just a little way?" and she touched him lightly on the shoulder with her maple-branch, as with the wand of an enchantress.

He, in obedience rather to the touch than the words, turned about and walked beside her.

"I've a right to a sister's privileges, you know," continued she, slipping her hand beneath his arm, and letting it rest upon it.

How very delightful, as well as simple, to solve the problem of their intercourse on this basis! Bressant did not know how it might feel to have a sister, but he could, at the moment, imagine nothing more delightful than to be Cornelia's brother—unless it were to be Sophie's husband. But to be both!

"Do you know," pursued she, with apparent hesitation, looking up in his face, and then immediately looking down again, "I've had a notion, since coming back from New York, that you don't like me so well as you did?"

This might be either audacity or delicacy, as one chose to take it. Bressant, feeling himself put rather on the defensive, answered hastily and without premeditation:

"I like you more!"

"Oh! I'm so glad to hear you say so!" exclaimed she warmly, and as she spoke he felt her hand a little more perceptibly on his arm. "It takes such a load off my heart! seeing you and Sophie love one another so much, I couldn't help loving you, too, in my way; and it made me so unhappy to think I was disagreeable to you."

Bressant was quite unprepared for all this. Whatever had been his speculations

as to the future footing upon which he and Cornelia should stand, it had been nothing like that she was now furnishing. It did not seem at all in the vein which she had opened on the day of her return. He was puzzled: had he been more used to ladies' society, he would have mistrusted her sincerity.

"You could never be disagreeable to me!" was his answer: and he looked down at her oval cheek, with his first attempt at fraternal admiration. It turned out badly. She looked unexpectedly up: his glance fell through her tawny eyes, and sank down, burning deliciously, into her heart. She turned pale with the pain and the pleasure: but it was such pain and pleasure that she sought, and wanted more of.

"Well, then! it's all clear between us again—is it?" resumed she, drawing a long breath, which sounded more like the irrepressible out-come of a tumultuous heart, than a sigh of relieved suspense upon the point in question. "No more misunderstandings, or any thing? and you won't get out of the way ally more, as if I were poison—will you?"

"I never did!" protested he, laughing awkwardly. In the last few minutes he had developed a sentiment hitherto unknown to him—pique! He had been imagining Cornelia in love with him, and angry at his preference for Sophie; whereas, it would now seem that the only reason she cared for him at all, was because he was Sophie's lover: a most correct spirit in her, no doubt; but, instead of being gratified, as was his duty, he felt provoked.

"Oh! yes, you behaved shockingly!" rejoined Cornelia, laughing with him. "Mind! I don't care how devoted you are to Sophie—the more the better; but, when you do notice me, I want you to do it kindly—won't you?"

"I'll be sure to, now that I know you care any thing about it."

"And what made you think I didn't care about it, if you please, sir?"

"Why," stammered he, quite at a loss what to say, and so coming out with the truth, "I thought you were offended at my being engaged to Sophie!"

"But what should there be in that to offend me?" demanded Cornelia, with the mouth and eyes of Innocence.

"I don't know:—well—I knew you first!" he blurted forth, beginning to wish he had been satisfied to hold his tongue.

Cornelia took her breath once or twice, and then bit it off on her under lip, as if about to say something, and afterward hesitating about it.

"I don't quite understand you," she managed to get out at last; "do you—forgive me if I'm wrong—but perhaps you're thinking of that time—when—just before I went away?"

Saying this, she drooped her eyes in a confusion, which, because more than half of it was genuine, made her look very fascinating. Nothing is more seductive than a little truth. As Bressant looked at her, and thought of what lie had done at that last interview, soft thrills crept sweetly through his blood, and he felt a most extraordinary tenderness for her.

"I've often thought of it," answered he, in a tone which did not belie his words.

"Well—so have I, to tell the truth!" rejoined Cornelia, looking up for a moment with glowing candor. "But we won't either of us think of it any more, will we? It seems very long ago, now; and it'll never be again, and we ought to forget it ever was at all. But, oh! most of all, you must forget it if it will ever be a reason for your disliking me, or wishing not to see me! I know how disagreeable it must be to you to think of it now."

Did Cornelia know what she was about? had she netted beforehand all the meshes of this web she was throwing over him? the admirable mixture of frankness and subtlety, nature and art—must it not have been planned and calculated beforehand, to bewilder and mislead?—It may well be doubted. No preconceived and elaborated programme can come up to the inspiration of the moment, which is genius. Such felicitous wording of subject-matter so objectionable: such an unassailable presentation of so indefensible a principle—could hardly have been the fruit of premeditation. Cornelia was allowing things to take their course.

"It isn't disagreeable! it's—" Bressant broke off, unable or unprepared to say what it was. "Why must we forget it?" he added, with a half-assured look of significance. "You said we were brother and sister, you know!"

She laughed in his face, at the same time drawing her hand from his arm, and stepping away from him. How tantalizingly lovely she looked!

"It won't do to carry the privileges of relationship too far, my dear sir! at least, not until after you're married. There! go back to your Sophie—I didn't mean to

keep you so long—really! No, no!" as he made an offer to approach her; "go! and be quick, I advise you. Good-by!"

Bressant, as he walked on to the Parsonage, was possessed by an undefined conviction that he was learning a great deal not set down in the books. The page of the passions, once thrown open, seems to comprise every thing. The world has but one voice for the man of one idea.

Evidently, this man did not comprehend the nature of his position between these two women. Reason told him it was impossible he could love both at once; but there her information stopped. His senses assured him that, with Cornelia, he experienced a vivid rush of emotion, such as Sophie, strongly as he loved her, never awakened in him; but his senses could give him no explanation of the fact. His instinct whispered that he would not have dared, in his most ardent moments, to feel toward Sophie as he invariably felt toward her sister; but no instinct warned him of the danger which this implied. A sturdy principle, if it had not thrown light upon the question, would, at least, have pointed out to him the true course to adopt; but, unfortunately, principles, and the impulses which they are formed to control, are neither of simultaneous nor proportionate growth. Bressant, while partaking so liberally of emotional food, had quite neglected to provide himself with the necessary and useful correctives to such indulgences. Thus it happened that when he arrived, a little past his usual hour, at the Parsonage-door, his mental digestion was in a very disturbed condition.

In palliation of Cornelia's conduct, there is little or nothing to be adduced. Strong forces had been laboring within her during the last few months. Love, disappointment, a passionate nature, a sense of wrong—not least, her New-York experience—had developed, warped, and transformed her. Bressant's homage had been the first, of any value to her, which she had ever received. It had come unasked and unexpected, and had been all the more attractive, because there was something not quite regular about it. Being lost, she had felt a fierce necessity for repossessing it, under whatever form, under whatever name. To-day, it was but the turn of the conversation that had suggested the expedient of calling herself his sister.

The very beauty and purity of the fraternal relation cloaks the miserable rottenness of the imitation. So innocent does it seem, it might almost deceive the parties to the deception themselves. "I may love him, for I'm his sister!" said Cornelia; but could she in reality have become his sister, she would, beyond all else, have shrunk from it. "Nothing I do is in itself an impropriety," she could

say: but her secret sense and motive were enough to make the most innocent act criminal. She closed her ears to the inner voice, and her eyes, looking at her conduct only through the crimson glass of her desire, pronounced it good.

She walked swiftly, immersed in thought, along the October road, beneath the splendid canopy, and over the gorgeous strewn carpet, of the dying trees. She was going to call on Abbie, it having occurred to her that perhaps the kind of information she wanted concerning Bressant might be forthcoming there. Presently, the rapid rise in the road at the end of the level stretch checked the current of her ideas, and threw them into confusion. Out of the confusion rose unexpectedly one.

Cornelia stopped in her walk, with one foot advanced, her head thrown up, her finger on her chin. She looked like a glorious young sibyl, reading a divine prophecy upon the clouds. After a moment, she waved her autumn banner over her head, with a gesture of triumph, and, turning on her heel, began to walk back toward home.

The grandest discoveries are so simple! Cornelia laughed to think how blind she had been—how stupid! What a sense of power and independence was hers now! To turn homeward had been instinctive. So strong was the sense of an end gained —a point settled—that, whatever may have been the actual errand on which she had started, she felt that her work, for that day, at least, was done.

She had been planning, and speculating, and worrying, to discover a safe and sure method of separating Bressant and her sister. Peering into the past for materials, and searching on one side or another for sources of information, she had overlooked all that was best and nearest at hand. What need for her to scrape together a reluctant tale of what had been? for was not the future her own? Why rely for assistance upon this or that suspicious and unsatisfactory witness? What more trustworthy one could she find than herself? Suppose Bressant never to have done any thing that could make him unworthy of Sophie, was that a bar against his doing something in the future?

Yes; she had power over him, and would use it. She herself would be the means and the cause for attaining the end at which she aimed. She would be the accomplice of his indiscretion, and thus obtain over him a double advantage. No matter how intrinsically trifling the indiscretion might be, it would be just such a one as would be sure to weigh heavily in the balance of Sophie's pure judgment. So plain would this be to Bressant himself, that Cornelia would be able to rule

him (as she argued) merely with the threat of accusation. And, since his desertion of Sophie would appear to her causeless, the indignation she would feel thereat would save her from repining. Cornelia would have him all to herself!

Well! and what would she do with him when she had him? She did not stop to consider. Nor, going on thus from step to step, did she have a sense of the hideousness of the wrong she contemplated.

CHAPTER XXV.

ANOTHER INTERMISSION.

It was something of a surprise to Bressant, after his interview with Cornelia, that she still continued to avoid him. But, after what she had said to him, to set his mind at rest regarding the spirit and manner of their intercourse, she felt an intuition that it would be as well he should believe that she herself was not over-anxious to be on any terms with him whatever.

Still, he often saw her, and always carried away a charming impression of what he saw. Once, she had mounted a chair in the library, and was in the act of reaching down a book from a high shelf, when he entered unexpectedly. She turned, caught his eye, and dimpled into a mischievous smile. All day he could not drive the picture out of his head—the bounteous, graceful form, the heavy, dark, lustreless hair, the fascinating face, and the smile. He had but just left Sophie, yet the fine chords she had struck in him were drowned in Cornelia's sensuous melody.

Again, one day, coming into the house, he chanced to enter the parlor, and there sat Cornelia, in an easy-chair, her feet stretched out upon a stool, fast asleep. He came close up to her, and stood looking. What artist could ever have hoped to reproduce the warmth, glow, and richness of color and outline? He watched her, feeling it to be a stolen pleasure, yet a nameless something, surging up within him, compelled him to remain. In another moment—who can calculate a man's strength and weakness?—he might have stooped to kiss her, with no brother's kiss! But, in that moment, she awoke, and perhaps surprised his half-formed purpose in his eyes.

She was too clear-headed to regret having awaked, for she saw that he regretted it. And, because he did not venture, she being awake, to take the kiss, she knew he was no brother, and knew not what it was to be one. So she put on a look of annoyance, and told him petulantly to go about his business. Off he went, and passed his hour with Sophie, who was as lovely, as fresh, and as purely transparent as ever. But some turbid element had been stirred in Bressant's depths, which spoiled his enjoyment for that day, making him moody and silent.

Such little incidents—there were many of them—were far too simple and natural to be the work of deliberation and forethought. But Cornelia was disposed to use them, when they did occur, to her best possible advantage, and therefore they acquired potency to affect Bressant. She wished that to be, which he had not stamina enough to oppose: thus a subtle bond was established between them, lending a significance to the most ordinary actions, such as could never have been recognized between indifferent persons.

This was all progress for Cornelia, and she well knew it, and yet she was not at ease nor satisfied. She began to find out that it was no such light matter to usurp the place of such a woman as Sophie, though the latter was laboring under the great disadvantage of being ignorant of the plot against her. In most cases, indeed, the attempt would have been wellnigh hopeless, but Cornelia had two exceptionally powerful allies—her own supreme beauty, and Bressant's untrained and ill-regulated animal nature, which he had not yet learned to understand and provide against. And there was another thing in her favor, too, although she knew it not—the demoralizing effect upon the young man's character—of his failure to fulfil his agreement with the professor. The evils that are in us link themselves together to drag us down, their essential quality being identical, whatever their particular application.

Nevertheless, time went on, and November had stalked shivering away before the frosty breath of December, and still Cornelia had accomplished nothing definite; nay, she scarcely felt sufficiently sure of her footing to attempt any thing. And what was it that she was to attempt? On looking this question in the face, at close quarters—it wanted less than four weeks now of that wedding-day which Cornelia had promised herself should see no wedding!—when she found herself pressed so peremptorily as this for an answer, it might be imagined that she turned pale at what was before her. And, indeed, the prospect, viewed in its best light, was discouraging and desperate enough. For at what price to herself must success be bought, and at what sacrifice be enjoyed? She must either lose, or deserve to lose, all that a woman ought to hold most sacred and most dear—home, the esteem and love of friends, the protection of truth, and, above all, and worst of all, her own self-respect. All these in exchange for a baffled, angry, selfish man, at whose mercy she would be, with only one word to speak in self-defense and justification; and it was much to be feared that he would, considering the circumstances, reject and scoff at even that. The one word was—she loved him! and, if there be any redeeming virtue in it, let her, in Heaven's name, have the benefit thereof. She can rely on nothing else.

But Cornelia would not be disheartened. If she saw the rocks ahead, against whose fatal shoulders she was being swept—if she heard, dinning in her ears, the rush and roar of the headlong, irresistible rapids—if her eyes could penetrate the void which opened darkly beyond—she only nerved herself the more resolutely, her glance was all the firmer, her determination the more unfaltering.

The peril in which she stood but kindled in her heart a fiery depth of passion, such as overtopped and tamed the very terrors of her position. Because she must lose the world to gain her end, that end was exalted, in her thought, above a hundred worlds. The faculties of her soul, which, in her time of innocence and indifference, had been dormant—half alive—now sprang at once into an exalted, fierce vitality. The hour of evil found Cornelia a creature of far higher powers and more vigorous development than she could ever, under any other conditions, have attained. She showed most gloriously and greatly, when illuminated by that lurid light whose flame was fed by all that was most gentle, womanly, and sweet within her. She looked nearest to a goddess, when she needed but one step to be transformed into a demon.

In following out her psychological progress, we have necessarily outstripped, to some extent, the sober pace of the narrative. It was about the first of December that rumors began to be circulated in the village of an approaching ball at Abbie's. It was to be the grandest—the most complete in all its appointments—of any that ever had been given there. It was looked upon, in advance, as the great event of the year. Real, formal invitations were to be sent out, printed on a fold of note-paper, with the blank left for the name, and "R.S.V.P."—whatever that might mean—in the lower left-hand corner. There were to be six pieces in the band; dancing was to be from eight to four, instead of from seven to twelve, as heretofore; and the toilets, it was further whispered, were to be exceptionally brilliant and elaborate. Certain it was that dress-making might have been seen in progress through the windows of any farm-house within ten miles; and at the Parsonage no less than elsewhere.

Sophie had an exquisite taste in costume, though her ideas, if allowed full liberty, were apt to produce something too fanciful and eccentric to be fashionably legitimate. But, let a dress once be made up, and happy she whose fortune it was to stand before Sophie and be touched off. Some slight readjustment or addition she would make which no one else could have thought of, but which would transform merely good or pretty into unique and charming. Sophie had the masterly simplicity of genius, but was generally more successful with others than with herself.

As for Cornelia, she knew how she ought to look; but how to effect what she desired was sometimes beyond her ability. She had little faculty for detail, relying on her sister to supplement this deficiency. She was more of a conformist than was Sophie in regard to toilet matters; and—an important virtue not invariable with young ladies—she always could tell when she had on any thing becoming.

One December day, when a broad, pearl-gray sky was powdering the motionless air with misty snow, the sisters sat together at their sewing in what had been known, since his accident, as Bressant's room. There was no stove; but a rustling, tapering fire was living its ardent, yellow, wavering life upon the brick hearth, and four or five logs of birch and elm were reddening and crackling into embers beneath its intangible intensity. It made a grateful contrast to the soft, cold bank of snow that lay, light and round, upon the outside sill and the slighter ridges that sloped and clung along the narrow foothold of the window-pane frames. Presently Cornelia got up from the low stool on which she had been sitting, and, having slipped on the waist of her new dress, invited Sophie's criticism with a courtesy.

"Dear me, Neelie!" exclaimed she, in gentle consternation, "are you going to wear your corsage so low as that?"

"Yes, why not?" returned Cornelia, with a kind of defiance in her tone; "it's the fashion, you know. Oh, I've seen them lower than that in New York!"

"But there'll be nothing like it here, dear, I'm sure. Think how frightened poor Bill Reynolds will be when he sees you."

Sophie looked up, expecting to see her sister smile; but she, having in view the opinion of quite another person than Mr. Reynolds, remained unusually grave.

"Don't mind me, dear," Sophie added, fearing she might have given offense. "You know I'd rather see you look well than myself, especially as I may not be here to see you another year."

She drew a long breath of happy regret, thinking of what was to follow the next day but one after the ball.

Cornelia, looking into the fire, her pure, round chin resting on her bent forefinger, started, as the same thought entered her mind. Was it so near, though —that marriage? or would an eternity elapse ere Bressant and Sophie called one

another husband and wife?

"Are you glad the day comes so soon, Sophie?"

"Yes," answered she, with quiet simplicity. "A few weeks ago it frightened me—it seemed so near; but not now. I love him much more than I did—that's one reason. And he loves me more, I think."

"Loves you more! why? what makes you think so?" demanded Cornelia, a frown quivering across her forehead.

"His manner tells me so: he's more subdued and gentle; almost sad, indeed, sometimes. He's lived so much in his mind since we were engaged: I can see it in his face, and hear it in his voice, even. He's not like other men; I never want him to be; he has all that makes other men worth any thing, and still is himself. He has the greatest and the warmest heart that ever was; but when he first came here he had no idea how to use it, nor even what it was for."

"And he's found out now, has he?"

"Yes—especially in the last few weeks. Before, he used sometimes to be violent, almost—to lose command of himself; but he never does now."

"But doesn't he ever tell you that he loves you more than ever?"

"We understand each other," replied Sophie, with a slight touch of reserve, for she thought she was being questioned further than was entirely justifiable. "Nothing he could say would make me feel his love more than I do."

Cornelia smiled to herself with secret derision; she imagined she could give a more plausible reason for her sister's reticence. She took off her "waist" and resumed her place upon the stool.

"What should you do, Sophie, supposing something occurred to prevent your marriage?"

"Die an old maid," returned she: not treating the question seriously, but as a piece of Cornelia's wanton idleness.

Cornelia began to laugh, but interrupted herself, half-way, with a sob. She was seized by a fantasy that if Sophie died an old maid her sister would have been the cause of it—would be a murderess! The sudden jarring of this idea—tragical enough, even without the ghastly spice of reality that there was about it—against

the ludicrous element with which tradition flavors the name of old maid—caught the young woman at unawares, and threw her rudely out of her nervous control. It was a result which could scarcely have happened, had she been less morbidly and unnaturally excited and strained to begin with; as it was, it may have been an outbreak which had long been brewing, and to which Sophie's answer had but given the needful stimulus.

The sob was succeeded by a convulsion of painful laughter, that would go on the more Cornelia tried to stop it. At last, in gasping for breath, the laughter gave way to an outburst of tears and sobs, which seemed, in comparison, to be a relief. But at the first intermission, the discordant laughter came again: she hid her face in her hands, and made wild efforts to control herself: she slipped from her stool, and flung herself at full length upon the floor. Now, the paroxysms of laughing and crying came together, her body was shaken, strained, and convulsed in every part: she was breathless, flushed, and faint. But it seemed as if nothing short of unconsciousness could bring cessation: the sobs still tore their way out of her bosom, and the laughter came with a terrible wrench that was more agonizing to hear than a groan.

Sophie had never seen Cornelia in hysterics before, and was tortured with alarm and apprehension. She knew not what to do, for every attempt she made to relieve her, seemed only to make her worse.

"Let me call papa—he must be somewhere in the house—he will know what to do!" she said, at last, trembling and white.

"No! no!" cried Cornelia: and the shock of fear lest her father should see her, overcame the grasp of the hysterical paroxysm. She half raised herself on one arm, showing her face, red and disfigured, the veins on the forehead standing out, full and throbbing. "Come back! come back!" for Sophie had her hand on the door.

She returned, in compliance with her sister's demand, and knelt down beside her on the floor. Cornelia let herself fall back, her head resting on Sophie's knee, in a state of complete exhaustion. There she lay, panting heavily; and a clammy pallor gradually took the place of the deeply-stained flush. But the fit was over: by-and-by she sat up, sullenly shunning Sophie's touch, and appearing to shrink even at the sound of her voice. Finally, she rose inertly to her feet, attempting to moisten her dry lips, walked once or twice aimlessly to and fro across the room, and ended by sitting down again upon her stool, and taking up her sewing.

"Are you all well again, dear?" asked Sophie, timidly.

"Better than ever," replied Cornelia, with a short laugh, which had no trace of hysteria about it.

There was, however, a slight but decided change in her manner, which did not pass away: a sort of hardness and impenetrability: and so incorporated into her nature did these traits seem, that one would have supposed they had always been there. Some unpleasant visitors take a surprisingly short time to make themselves at home.

But Sophie, seeing that her sister soon recovered her usual appearance, did not allow herself to be disturbed by any uncalled-for anxieties. Love, at its best, has a tendency to absorb and preoccupy those whom it inspires: if not selfish, it is of necessity self-sufficient and exclusive. Sophie was too completely permeated with her happiness, to admit of being long overshadowed by the ills of those less blessed than herself. Not that she had lost the power to sympathize with misfortune, but the sympathy was apt to be smiling rather than tearful. She was alight with the chaste, translucent, wondering joy of a maiden before her marriage: the delicate, pearl-tinted brightness that pales the stars, before the reddening morning brings on the broader daylight.

She was not of those who, in fair weather, are on the lookout for rain: she believed that God had plenty of sunshine, and was generous of it; and that the possibilities of bliss were unlimited. She was not afraid to be perfectly happy. A little sunny spot, in a valley, which no shadow has crossed all day long, was like her: there seemed to be nothing in her soul that needed shadow to set it right.

Cheerfulness was soon reestablished, therefore, so far as she was concerned; and the remembrance of Cornelia's distracting seizure presently yielded to the throng of light-footed thoughts that were ever knocking for admittance at her heart's door. Once afterward, however, the event was recalled to her memory, by the revelation of its cause. Little that happens in our lives would seem trifling to us, could we but trace it, forward or backward, to the end.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BRESSANT TAKES A VACATION.

Friday, December 30th, was the day appointed for Abbie's ball, and the morning of the 28th had already dawned. Bressant stood, with his arms folded, at the window of his room, watching the downfall of a thickening snow-storm which had set in the previous midnight. There had evidently been no delay or intermission in the cold, white, silent business; to look out-of-doors was enough to make the flesh seem thin upon the bones.

In spite of the snow, however, the little room was feverishly hot, owing to the gigantic exertions of the small iron cylinder-stove. The round aperture over the little door was glowing red, like an enraged eye; and the quivering radiation of the heat from the polished black surface was plainly perceptible to the sight. The room had lost something of the neat and fastidious appearance which it had worn a few months before. The colored drawing of a patent derrick, fastened to the wall by a tack at each corner of the paper, had broken loose at one end, and was curling over on itself like a withered leaf. The string by which the ingenious almanac had been suspended over the mantel-piece was broken, letting the almanac neatly down into the crevice between the wall and a couple of fat dictionaries, which lay, one on top of the other, upon the ledge. It was quite hidden from view, with the exception of one corner, which was a little tilted upward, showing the hole through which the faithless string had passed.

The terrestrial and astronomical globes bore the appearance of not having revolved for a long time. A part of the pictured surface of the latter had scaled off, disclosing a blank whiteness beneath. Even the heavens, it seemed, were a sham; nothing more than a varnished painting upon a plaster-of-Paris foundation. The flower-pots still stood in the windows, but hot air and an irregular water-supply had made sad inroads upon the beauty of the plants. The lower leaves were turned brown; some of them had fallen off, and lay—poor, little unburied corpses—upon the narrow circle of earth which, having failed to keep life green within their cells, now denied to them the right of sepulture. A few of the topmost sprouts still struggled to keep up a parody of verdure, and one or two faded flowers had not yet forsaken their calices—a silly piece of devotion on

their part! Icy little blasts, squeezing in through the crevices of the window-sash, whistled about the forlorn stalks, cutting and venomous. The poor flowers would never see another summer; better give up at once!

Even the books which met the eye on every side, wore a deserted air. Not that they were dusty, for the chambermaid did her duty, if Bressant failed in his; but there was something in the heavy, methodical manner of their sleeping upon one another, such as they could never have settled into had they been recently disturbed or opened. The outside of a book is often as eloquent, in its way, as any part of the contents.

Bressant's arms were folded, and the perpendicular line up from between the eyebrows was quite in harmony with the rest of his appearance. He was weary, harassed, and divided against himself. Insincerity made him uncomfortable; it compelled continual exertion, and of a paltry and degrading kind; and it gave neither a sense of security, nor a prospect of future advantage. Five days from now he was to be married; the duties of a parish minister were to be undertaken, and he felt himself neither mentally nor morally fitted or inclined for the office. Five days from now the professor would expect from him that gift at which he had hinted during their drive; and he had done nothing, either in act or purpose, to fulfil his promise concerning it.

He was cut off from all sympathy. How could he confide to Sophie the very wrong he meditated against herself—the very deception he was practising upon her father? And what other person in the world was there to whom he might venture to betake himself? Cornelia?—not yet! he dared not yet yield himself to the influence he felt she was exercising over him; the surrender implied too much; matters had not gone far enough. But did there not lurk, in the bottom of his heart, a presentiment that it was to her alone he would hereafter be able to look for countenance and comfort? And would he avail himself of the refuge? When those whom their friends—whether justly or not—have abandoned, chance to stumble upon some oasis of unconditional affection, they are not squeamish about its source or orthodoxy; if the sentiment be sincere and hearty, that is enough. In the present case, moreover, Cornelia, as a last resort, was by no means so uninviting an object as she might have been.

But since the question lay between his fortune and Falsehood on one side, and a wife and Truth on the other, how was it possible for him to pause in his decision? Undoubtedly, had the young man once fairly admitted to himself that his choice lay between these two bare alternatives, he would have been spared much of the

misery arising from casuistry and duplicity. But people are loath to acknowledge any course to be, beyond all appeal, right or wrong; they amuse themselves with fancying some modification—some new condition—some escape; any thing to get away from the grim face of the inevitable. Bressant, for instance, might surely succeed in consummating his marriage with Sophie, no matter what else he left undone; and that being once irrevocably on his side of the balance, all that was vital to his happiness was secure; by a quick stroke he might capture the fortune likewise, and could then afford to laugh at the world.

This scheme, however, otherwise practical enough, involved a fallacy in its most important point. A marriage so contracted, with a woman of Sophie's character, could by no possibility turn out a happy or even endurable union. She would not be likely long to survive it; if she did, it would be to suffer a life more painful than any death; for no one depended more than Sophie upon integrity and nobility in those she loved; and the break in her family relations would be another source of agony to her, and of consequent remorse and misery to her husband. No: to bind her life to his, unless he could also compel her respect and admiration, would be a good deal worse than useless.

He must, then—and there was yet time—resign his fortune, and accept Sophie and a clear conscience, poverty and a country parish. But persons who have wealth absolutely in their power, to take or to leave, sec clearly how much poetical extravagance, hypocrisy, and cant exist in the arguments of those who advocate the beauties and advantages of being poor. Deliberately and voluntarily to forego the opportunities, the influence, the ease, the refinement, which money alone can command—let not the sacrifice be underrated! Few, perhaps, have had the choice fairly offered them: of those, how many have chosen poverty? In Bressant's case, the fact that the money was not legally his, was, abstractly, enough to settle the matter; but in real life, where every one is expected to do battle for his claims, it would only be an argument for holding on the harder. If he could but manage to be happily married and wealthy both! He would not confess it impossible; at all events, he would delay the confession till the very latest hour, and then trust to the impulse of the moment for his final decision and action. He had given up, it seemed, that promising idea of trusting to the generosity of the rightful owner; yet, considering their mutual relation, and one or two minor circumstances, he might certainly do so without misgiving, embarrassment, or dishonor.

"It's that infernal letter!" muttered the young man between his teeth, staring gloomily out at the cheerless snow-storm. "I wish it had never been written. No!

that I could feel sure there was no truth in it."

Turning from the window, he stepped over to the table, and dropped himself into his chair. He took from his pocket a well-worn envelope, hardly capable of holding on to the inclosed letter, which peeped forth at the corners, and through various rents in the front and back. He did not open it, for he had long known by heart every word and italic in it; but, placing it in front of him, he leaned upon his elbows, with his forehead resting between his hands, and gazed fixedly down upon it. It is an assistance to the vividness of thought to have some object in sight connected with the matter under consideration.

"Ought I to have answered it?" ran his soliloquy: for though he had frequently taken counsel with himself concerning this letter before, he recurred again and again to the subject, pleasing himself with the hope that still, in some way, a fortunate ray of light might be struck out; "but, if I had, what should I have gained by it? It's as well not to have risked putting any thing on paper; and if she really has the proofs she talks about, I shall hear from her again, and soon, for she knows which is my wedding-day; and it must all be decided, one way or another, before then. But she couldn't have made the assertion if she hadn't known some good grounds for it; and yet I can't understand it—I cannot." He pressed his temples strongly between his hands, and chewed his brown mustache. "As to my having 'no legal claim to a cent,' I knew that before. What puzzles me is, 'There is no consideration—not a *shadow* of relationship, or affection, or generosity—nothing to give you the least *prospect* of receiving any thing.' How can that be? And yet what she says at the end—it sounds more like a threat she knows she can fulfil than an attempt to humbug." Bressant took his right hand from his forehead, and tapped with his finger on the envelope as he repeated the words: "If this is enough—convinces you without your requiring proof—it would be much pleasanter for you, and a great relief to me. Oh! beyond *words*! But if not—if you will *go on* entangling yourself with this foolish girl, Sophie, and this boarding-house keeper, and all—I *shall* be obliged—I shall hate to *do* it, but there will be no alternative—to give you the *explanation* of what I tell you now."

"Well! let her!" cried the young man, rising roughly from his chair, and shouldering backward and forward across his room with short, incensed steps. "If her proofs can prevent my marriage, let her bring them. She'd better be quick about it! Four days from now! They'd better never have come at all. It's her interest as much as mine—more than mine. She's a half-crazy old creature. She can do nothing for herself. If she has any thing to say, let her say it. I'm no baby,

to shape my life after an old woman's story. Who is she? What is she to me?

"Let something happen, I say," continued he, stretching out his great arms, with the fists clinched. "I'm tired of this—the life of a dog with his tail between his legs. Is it *I* who go about, afraid to look man or woman in the face? Am I the same who came here six months ago? Did I come here to learn this? Who was it taught it to me, then? I say, I've been deceived; it's no work of mine. Professor Valeyon—he's made me a subject for experiment; he's tried his theories on me; dissected me, and filled in the parts that were wanting. It's a dangerous business, Professor Valeyon. You've lost one daughter; the other may go too."

Bressant's voice, which had been growing hoarser and more rapid as he went on, abruptly sank, at this last sentence, into a whisper; yet, had any one been there to listen, the whisper would have sounded louder and more terrible than the most violent vociferation of angry passion. It breathed a sudden concentration of evil intelligence, that startled like the hiss of a serpent.

He stopped his short, passionate walk, and leaned against his table, with his arms once more folded. The idea that he had been tampered with had gained possession of him, and nothing tends more to demoralize a man, and make him unmanageably angry. His was an uncandid position, without doubt: he was attempting to lay upon others the responsibility which—the greater part of it, at least—should have been borne by himself; but still, the vein of reasoning he pursued was connected, and comprehensible, and was rendered awkward by an ugly little thread of something like truth and justice, which showed here and there along its course.

"They've taught me to love; did they think they could stop there? that I shouldn't learn to lie, as well? and to hate, and be revengeful? and to be afraid? Was I so bad when I came here, that all this has made me no worse? I was happy, at any rate; my brain was clear; my mind had no fear, and no weariness—it was like an athlete; my blood was cool. Look at me now! Am not I ruined by this patching and mending? I can do no work. When I think, it's no longer of how I might become great, and wise, and powerful—of nothing inspiring—nothing noble; but all about these petty, heated, miserable affairs, that have twisted themselves around me, and are choking me up. I don't ask myself, any more, whether my name will be as highly honored and as long remembered as the Christian Apostles', and Mohammed's, and Luther's. My only question is, whether I'm to turn out more of a fool, or of a liar! And *I* love Sophie Valeyon! I'm to be her husband."

The young man came to a sudden stop, and slowly lifted his head. Through the sullen, unhappy, and resentful cloud that darkened his eyes, there glimmered doubtfully a light such as can be reflected only from what is most divine in man. It was a strange moment for it to appear, for at no time had Bressant's moral level been so low as now; but, happily, the phenomenon is by no means without precedent in human nature. God is never ashamed to declare the share He holds in a sinner's heart, however black the heart may be.

"No, no!" said he; and, as he said it, the first tears that he had ever known glistened for a moment in his eyes; "such as I am, I must never marry her."

The point on which this sudden and momentous resolve turned was so subtle and delicately evanescent as scarcely to be susceptible of clearer portrayal. To be consistent, the weight of his revengeful sentiments should have been directed upon Sophie, for she it was who had played the most effective part in changing his nature, and swerving him from his cold but sublime ambitions. By teaching Bressant love, she had, by implication, done him deadly injury, yet was the love itself so pure and genuine as to prompt him to resign its object; he being rendered unworthy of her by that same moral dereliction which she herself had occasioned.

But the very quality which enables us to do a noble deed dulls our appreciation of our own praiseworthiness. Bressant took no encouragement or pleasure from what he had done; probably, also, his realization of the extensive and fearful consequences of the action, to others as well as to himself, was as yet but rudimentary; so soon as the momentary glow was passed, he fell back into a yet darker mood than before, and felt yet more adrift and reckless. To make a sacrifice is well, but does not hinder the need of what is given up from crippling us.

Again the young man turned to the window, and, raising the sash, he secured it by the little button used for the purpose, and leaned out into the snow-storm. The flakes fell and melted upon his face, and caught in his bushy beard, and rested lightly upon his twisted hair. They flew into his eyes, and made little drifts upon the collar of his coat and in the folds of his sleeves. He gazed up toward the dull, gray cloud whence they came, and presently, out of the confusion, and carelessness, and morbid impatience of his heart, he put forth a prayer that some awfully stirring event might come to pass; let a sword pass through his life! let him be smitten down and trampled upon! let his mind be continually occupied with the extreme of active, living suffering! let there be no cessation till the end!

He could accept it and exult in it; but to live on as he was living now was to walk open-eyed into insanity. Rather than that, he would commit some capital crime, and subject himself to the penalty. Let God take at least so much pity upon him, and grant him physical agony!

It is not often that our prayers are answered, nor, when they are, does the answer come in the form our expectations shaped. Occasionally, however—and then, perhaps, with a promptness and completeness that force us to a realization of how extravagant and senseless our desires are—does fulfillment come upon us.

As Bressant's strange petition went up through the storm, a sleigh came along from the direction of the railway-station. It was nothing but a cart on runners, and painted a dingy, grayish blue; it was loaded with a dozen tin milk-cans much defaced by hard usage, each one stopped with an enormous cork. The driver was clad in an overcoat which once had been dark brown or black, but had worn to a greenish yellow, except where the collar turned up around the throat, and showed the original color. His head and most of his face were enveloped in a knit woolen comforter, and mittens of the same make and material protected his hands. His legs were wrapped up in a gray horse-blanket. He was whitened here and there with snow, and snow was packed between the necks of the milk-cans. He drove directly toward the boarding-house, and he and Bressant caught sight of one another at the same moment.

"Hallo!" called the stranger; "you're Bressant, I guess, ain't you? I've got something for you." Here he drew up beneath the window. "You see, I was down to the depot getting some milk aboard the up-train, and Davis, the telegraph-man, came up and asked me, 'Bill Reynolds, are you going up to Abbie's? 'cause,' says he, 'here's a telegraph has come for the student up there—him that's going to marry Sophie Valeyon—and our boy he's down with the influenza,' says he. 'I'm you're man!' says I, 'let's have it!' and here 'tis," added Mr. Reynolds, producing a yellow envelope from the bottom of his overcoat pocket.

Bressant had heard little or nothing of the explanation volunteered by the bearer of the message, but he at once recognized the yellow telegraph-envelope, and comprehended the rest. But, ere he could leave the window to go down and receive it, he saw the fat servant-girl, who had witnessed the scene from the parlor, run down to the front-gate, sinking above her ankles at every step, take the envelope from Bill's mittened paw, exchange a word and a grin with him, and then return, carefully stepping into the holes she had made going out.

Bill gave a nod of good-will to Bressant's window—for Bressant was no longer there—whipped up his nag, and jingled off with his milk-cans. In another minute the fat servant-girl, after stamping the remains of the snow off her shoes upon the door-mat, opened the door, and introduced the dispatch and her own smiling

physiognomy. Bressant snatched the former, and shut the door in the latter, before the hand-wiping and haranguing had time to begin.

Before opening the envelope, he stood up at his full height, and filled his lungs with a long, profound breath; then emitted it suddenly in a sort of deep, short growl, and took his seat at the table. He tore open the end of the envelope, pulled out the inclosure, which was an ordinary printed telegraph-blank, filled in with three lines of writing, as follows: "Been very ill come on at once at once must hear all no alternative" in the scrawly and unpunctuated chirography peculiar to written telegrams. The name signed was "M. Vauderp." Bressant read the message, and afterward carefully perused the printing, even down to the name of the printer's firm, which was given in very small type at the bottom of the paper. Then he glanced over the writing once more, and returned the paper to the envelope.

"At once, at once!" muttered he; "that's the only way of writing italics in telegraphy, I suppose. Well, I'll go at once; it's ten now; there's a train at half-past."

He unlocked a drawer in his table, and took from it a purse, which he put in his pocket. He buttoned a pea-jacket across his broad chest, pressed a round fur-cap on to his handsome head, took a pair of thick gloves from the mantel-piece, and walked away without giving one backward glance.

The snow blew and drifted through the open window into the empty room; the few remaining flowers were hustled from their stalks; the red eye of the stove grew dimmer and dimmer, and finally faded into darkness, and the colored drawing of the patent derrick broke loose at another corner, and flapped and fluttered against the wall in crazy exultation.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FACT AND FANCY.

The snow-storm continued all that afternoon. The customary hour for Bressant's visit to the Parsonage went by, and he did not appear. The professor smoked two extra pipes, and spent half an hour looking out across the valley trying to discern the open spot upon the top of the hill. Finally, the early twilight set in, and he returned to his chair, but felt no impulse to light a lamp and take up a book. He sat tilted back, pulling Shakespeare's nose with meditative fingers. A gloom gradually settled over the room, withdrawing one after another of the familiar objects around him from the old gentleman's sight; it even seemed to creep into his heart, and create a vague uneasiness there. He tried to shake it off, telling himself that he was the happiest and most fortunate old fellow alive; that every thing was coming out just as he had hoped and prayed it might; that one daughter, with the man of her choice, would be just far enough removed from his fireside to give piquancy to the frequent visits he should receive from her; while the other would still, for a time, continue to pour out sunshine in the house, and redouble her love for him by way of compensating for what he should miss in Sophie's absence. And then the professor built an airier and a fairer castle still: beneath it lay the heavy clouds of suffering, barren effort, and hope deferred; its sunlit walls were hewn of solid faith; the banner which floated over the battlements was woven with white threads of truth; over the arched entrance-gate was written "Constancy." Yet, fair and lofty as the castle was, the building-materials were taken from no less homely edifices than the village boarding-house and his own Parsonage!

By-and-by, however, the vision faded, or else the clouds upon which it was built rose up and hid it. The professor, returning to himself, found that he was now surrounded with thick darkness, and, strive as he would, he could paint no fancies upon it which did not partake more or less of the character of the background. Sophie seemed to have lost the steady cheer of her aspect; she was pale and fragile, and every moment took away yet more of earthly substance, till scarcely any thing but the faint lustre of her face and form remained. Then, all at once, the features which had heretofore been only sad, changed into an expression of horror and torture and despair; and, while the professor, himself

aghast, strained his old eyes to make out more clearly the half-indistinguishable image, it vanished quite away. But, at the last moment, it had spoken—at least, the lips bad moved as if in speech, though no sound had reached the professor's ears; yet he fancied he had caught a glimmering of the purport. He pressed his hands over his forehead to shut out the thought, and wondered no longer at the expression upon Sophie's face.

Then Cornelia moved across the hollow blackness of the room. She was sunshiny no longer, but morose and stern; her eyebrows were drawn together; a secret defiance was in her tigerish eyes; her lips were set, yet seemed, ever and anon, as she turned her face aside, to tremble with a passionate yearning. As he gazed, she disappeared, but the professor had a feeling that she was still concealed somewhere in the darkness. And, at last, she came again—she, or something that looked like her. The old gentleman shivered and recoiled, as though a snow-drift had somehow blown into his warm, old heart. Was it his daughter who looked with those unmeaning eyes, encircled with dark rings, in which life and passion burned out had left the dull ashes of remorse and hopelessness? Where were the luminous cheeks and the queenly step of his proud and beautiful Cornelia?—What words were those? or was it only fancy?—Ah!—The professor started with a sharp exclamation: but he was alone in his dark study, and the phantom of Cornelia was gone.

He composed himself in his chair again, and, presently, a third figure grew into form and color before him. At first, as a stately young girl, with the arched feet and hot blood of the south, and her eyes dark and soft as a Spaniard's; but her beauty lasted but for a moment. A withering change came over face and figure: she was cold and hard; her youthful ardor, warmth, and freshness, had been shrivelled up or worn away. The rich black hair grew rusty, and the dark, delicate complexion became dull and lustreless. Nevertheless, the professor continued to look with hopeful expectation, confident that a further alteration would ensue, which, though, it would not restore the grace of youth, would give a peace and happiness yet more beautiful. And, indeed, it seemed, for a moment, as though his expectation would be gratified. The figure raised its head, and held forth its hands, and the professor's bright anticipation was reflected in its eyes. But, alas! the brightness faded almost before it could be affirmed to exist. The hands dropped to the sides, the head was averted, and the whole form shrank back, and sank to the ground. For the third time—the professor's imagination was certainly playing him strange tricks this evening—the ghost of spoken words appeared to fall upon his ears, and sink like molten lead into his heart. He groaned, and there

was an oppression on his chest, so that he struggled for breath; but, in another moment, the crouching figure was gone, and the oppression with it; but drops of sweat stood upon the old man's broad forehead.

Still another vision awaits him, however, and he draws himself up sternly to encounter it, and a heavy frown lowers on his thick gray eyebrows. But the lofty form which confronts him, massive and stalwart, alike in mind and body, meets his gaze unflinchingly, and frowns back in angry defiance. The old professor pauses in his intended denunciation, being taken aback somewhat, at the unexpected counter-accusation which strikes out at him from the young man's eyes. Yet do his self-confidence and indignation become reconfirmed, for there, behind, the three former phantoms appear together, and seem to launch against the last a deadly shaft of bitter reproach and judgment. The professor watches it cleave a passage through the stalwart figure's heart, and he bows his head, and thinks—it is but justice! In the same instant, a cry of intensest pain and horror escapes him: the deadly arrow, additionally poisoned by the blood it has just shed, has passed quite through the spectre of his former pupil, and is buried up to the feather in Professor Valeyon's own vitals! This shock effectually wakened the old gentleman—for, after all, he had only been having an uneasy nap in his straight-backed chair!—and he started to his feet, and fumbled nervously for the match-box. Just then, Sophie appeared at the door with a lamp in her hand—the real Sophie, this time—no intangible shadow.

"Why, papa dear! What are you doing in here in the dark? Have you been asleep?"

"Come here, my dear!" said the professor, in a shaken voice, holding out his hand. He took her on his knee, and hugged her to him eagerly, passing his hand down her arm, and pressing her slender fingers. "Are you well and happy, Sophie?"

"Yes, papa," she answered, laying her head as usual on his shoulder.

"He—your—young man didn't come to-day?" continued the professor, with an attempt to be jocose. "He's getting very squeamish to be kept back by a snow-storm!" Sophie replied only by nestling closer to her father's shoulder.

"Where's Neelie?" inquired the professor, again breaking the silence.

"She's seeing about supper, I believe."

"Have you heard any thing about Abbie lately?" proceeded the other. He must have been either strangely anxious to keep up a conversation, or unusually inquisitive, this evening.

"Not very lately; I saw her about a week ago. She didn't look in very good spirits, it seemed to me."

"Not in good spirits, eh? not in good spirits? and that was a week ago! was she ill?"

"I don't think there was any thing the matter—with her health, I mean; she only looked very sad—as if something had almost broken her heart. But then she always is grave, you know."

"She has been of late years, that's certain," muttered the old man, gruffly; "and does she begin to be broken-hearted *now*!" he added, to himself. More thoughts, and angry ones, he might have had, but the memory of his untoward dream still hovered about him, and he suppressed them.

"What are you thinking of, papa?" demanded Sophie, with an inquietude of manner which attracted the professor's attention. He laid his finger on her pulse, and touched her forehead.

"You've taken cold, my dear," he said, with the most tender anxiety of tone. "What have you been doing? How have you exposed yourself?"

"I was out on the porch about an hour ago," replied she, languidly. "I wanted to —to see if he was coming, you know. The snow came on me a little, I believe, and I had on my slippers. But I didn't feel any thing—any cold. I was out only a moment."

Professor Valeyon turned his strong-featured face away from the lamp, so that the shadow covered his expression. He could feel the heat of Sophie's cheek through his coat, as she lay heavily on his shoulder; heavily, but not half so heavily there as upon his heart. But, with the physician's instinct, his voice was on that account all the more cheerful.

"Well, well, my little girl; it won't do to run any risks nowadays, remember! I shall make you drink a big cup of hot water, with a little tea and sugar in it, and go to bed early, with three or four extra blankets. Meanwhile, come! let's go and see whether Cornelia has got supper ready yet." So saying, the old gentleman gained his feet, offering his arm with a bow, took up the lamp with his other

hand, and off they went, leaving Shakespeare's plaster bust placidly to face the darkness alone, as he had often done before.

The next morning the storm was over, and the sun came dazzling over the spotless fields, but Sophie kept her bed, with bright, restless eyes, and hot checks. The professor dreaded a return of the typhoid pneumonia, and paced his study incessantly, in a voiceless fever of anxiety; physically exhausting himself the better to affect quiet and unconcern when in her room. He mentioned his fears to no one—not even to Cornelia; besides, if care were taken, she might recover yet, without fatal, or even serious danger. To herself, therefore, and to all who inquired, he spoke of her attack as merely a cold, which must be nursed for prudence' sake. Meanwhile, no signs of Bressant. Sophie said not a word, but Cornelia showed uneasiness, and kept making suggestive remarks to her father, and hazarding unsatisfactory explanations of his absence. She never ventured to say any thing to her sister on the subject, however. There was a gulf between the two that widened like a river, hour by hour.

Toward evening a letter came from the boarding-house, directed to Professor Valeyon. It was in Abbie's handwriting, and must contain some news of Bressant. The old gentleman shut himself up in his room, the better to deal with the intelligence, and the paper rustled nervously in his fingers as he read; but the news amounted to little, after all.

"For fear dear Sophie and you should feel anxious about Mr. Bressant, I will tell you all I know of his absence," said the letter. "A telegram came for him yesterday morning about ten. Joanna, the servant, who took it up to him, says Mr. Reynolds told her it was from New York. So I suppose some friend there—you will probably be able to say who—has been taken very dangerously ill, or perhaps is dead. The summons must have been very urgent, for he left his room not ten minutes afterward, and took the half-past ten o'clock train down.

"I feel sure he will be back by to-morrow evening. Don't let your daughters fail to be here to meet him."

After reading this, and without pausing to indulge in casuistry, Professor Valeyon betook himself straight to Sophie's chamber.

"You've heard something!" said she, in a low, assured tone the moment he entered. "A letter? give it me—I would rather read it myself."

The professor gave it into her hand, with a smile; but Sophie's eyes were too

deep and dark for any smile to glimmer through. As she opened it he turned his back upon her, and saw out of the window the sinking sun redden the snow-covered hill-top above the road.

"Yes, I'm sure he will be back to-morrow," said Sophie's quiet voice after a minute or two. She made no comment on his having allowed any thing to take him away at such a time—on the eve of his marriage—without first sending word to her; but gave Abbie's letter back into her father's keeping, and lay with closed eyes. He sat down in the chair by the bedside, and presently noticed that she lay more peacefully, and breathed inaudibly and easily, and that the feverish flush was leaving her cheeks. A slight moisture, too, made itself perceptible on her forehead.

"Her life is in this fellow's hand!" thought the professor, and he trembled to his very heart, but dared not ask himself wherefore.

"Do you really think it would hurt me to sew, dear papa?" said she, at length, looking up from her pillow.

"Better let sewing and every thing else alone for the present, my dear; it'll be enough work to get all well again by next Sunday."

Sophie sighed. "I did so want to finish my wedding-dress all myself," said she. "It needs only a few hours' work now, and Cornelia is so busy on her own account, it's hard to ask her. Oh, yes! dear papa, I know how glad she'd be to help me," she added quickly, seeing the old gentleman's eyebrows meet, and his forehead redden.

"I should hope she would! Must be very busy if she hasn't time to do so much as that!" growled he. "I'll send her up to you, my dear."

"Papa!" said Sophie, calling him back from the door; and it was not until she had possession of his hand and was holding it against her cheek that she went on. "Don't let the wedding be put off, if I shouldn't be able to sit up on Sunday. I'll be carried down into the guest-chamber, where he was ill for so long. Don't—papa, I know you won't think hardly of me; but I feel a kind of superstition about that particular day and hour: that if all is not done then, it never will be. Am not I foolish? But do let it be so, and never mind wisdom!"

There was a vein of strenuous earnestness only partly concealed beneath her words and manner, which the gruff old gentleman, who was as sensitive as a

photographic plate, where his affections were concerned, did not fail to note. He kissed her on both cheeks—a fully sufficient answer to her request, and shuffled out of the room in his old slippers; which, thanks to Sophie's filial attentions, still held together with dying faith fulness.

The rest of the day the two sisters passed together—Cornelia working upon her sister's wedding-dress, and Sophie guiding her by directions and suggestions. Not since they first began to grow apart, had there been between them so great an appearance of sisterly love and cordiality. Yet, if Cornelia allowed herself to think at all, it must have seemed, in the light of her purpose regarding Bressant, as if she was preparing a shroud rather than a wedding-garment. Or, perhaps, as she observed the change which even so brief and light an illness had made in Sophie's delicate face, there may have lurked, in the secret places of her mind, a darker and guiltier thought than that. But let not our condemnation be too unconditional, lest the precedent come home, some day, to ourselves. It may astonish us, hereafter, to discover how many of our most respectable acquaintances are murderers—only in thought!

But Sophie's condition seemed steadily to improve, and, by the morning of the 30th, the professor apprehended no danger but from imprudence. That she should attend Abbie's party was, of course, out of the question; but there was no longer any obstacle in the way of Cornelia's availing herself of the entertainment, if she were so inclined.

Deadly and immitigable as woman's purpose is often represented to be, it may, especially before she becomes thoroughly hardened to crime, be swayed by shades of feeling or sentiment which would appear, to a man, ridiculously trifling, and which, indeed, she could not herself explain or calculate upon; and there is the more likelihood of this, in proportion to the depth to which her emotions and affections are involved in the affair. As to Cornelia, there are no means of determining whether she ever wavered in her designs against her sister's happiness, and her friend's constancy, or not; she, at any rate, decided to go to the ball, and even condescended to accept Mr. Reynolds's tender of his escort thither. There are a host of respectable motives always on hand for such occasions, and Cornelia might be going either from a curiosity to find out whether Bressant would return, and in order, if so, to bring her sister the latest news; or, to obtain relief from the monotony of home-life; or, to oblige Abbie, who counted upon her appearance; or, to display her ball-dress, cut after the latest New-York pattern; or, all these small matters may have been the wheels whereon rolled the invisible car, but for which they would not have existed.

As she was attiring herself, Sophie, who was seated in her deep invalid-chair, looking at her, was seized by an uncontrollable longing to put on her wedding-dress, and satisfy her mind as to its being a good fit. There it lay, upon the sofa, and nothing could be easier than just to slip into it. Cornelia, absorbed in her own crowded thoughts, never dreamed of opposing the idea, and lent all necessary assistance to carry it out. It was not until Mr. Reynolds had sent up word that the sleigh waited at the door, and, gathering up her cloak and tippet, she had kissed Sophie, left her, and was hurrying down-stairs with rustling skirts, that she realized that she had given her parting salute to one dressed as a bride!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A DISAPPOINTMENT.

There could not have been a better night for sleighing. The temperature had risen considerably since the storm, and the snow, which had fallen to the depth of a foot, was already packed down hard upon the road, so that the runners seldom sank beneath the surface. Moreover, there was a full moon, just pushing its deep orange circumference above the horizon. It had chanced to come up just where a black skeleton forest stood out against the sky, encouraging the fancy that it had somehow got entangled in the branches, and had grown red in the face from struggling to get out. But, ere the young people reached the scene of the entertainment, the struggle was over; the perfect circle was calmly and radiantly uplifting itself above the world, far beyond the reach of the outstretched arms of the gnarled and black-limbed forest; yet did the dark earth benefit by its defeat, in the chaste illumination which descended upon its wintry countenance.

Mr. Reynolds was perfectly happy; it is pleasant to reflect how small an amount of bliss can overflow some souls. Cornelia was brief but kind in her answers to his turbid and confused pourings forth; not that she paid heed to any thing the poor fellow said—she was only occasionally aware of his presence. Her mind was revelling in dreams of heated and exalted imagination; she was filled with inspiration, as with the rich, palpitating blast of a mighty organ; but the tumultuous chorus of her thoughts produced upon her an effect of magnetism which found its expression in a gentle graciousness of words and manner.

She had made up her mind that the first person she should meet would be Bressant; and, so full did she feel of victorious power, it seemed as if, with scarcely a conscious effort, she could overbear and bring him to her feet. Yes, and dictate the terms upon which she would consent to receive his homage. What a pity that the key-notes of so few natures correspond, at the critical moment, with our own; and that Providence sees fit to forward, by even negative help, so small a proportion of our superbly-conceived plans!

It was half-past eight when they drew up at the boarding-house door. No sooner had Cornelia set foot within the threshold, and caught sight of Abbie's face, than it was borne in upon her that Bressant was not there; and the former, after

questioning her about Sophie's non-appearance, confirmed her fear. He had not come, nor was it now probable that he would arrive before morning. It would have been useless to expect him by the late train, due at half-past ten, since, to avail himself of that, it would be necessary to make a difficult connection by walking two or three miles from one railway to another.

After climbing to such a height, it was terrible to fall. Cornelia had not allowed herself to anticipate the disaster, precisely because it was so crashing. In a moment the great, rainbow-tinted bubble of her hope and imagination had burst, leaving only a bitter and unpleasant sense of the paltry and unclean materials—the soap-suds and clay-pipe—wherewith it had been created.

Furthermore, the polite fictions which she had lubricated her conscience withal, regarding her desires and intentions, were shown up at precisely their true value, and a very discreditable spectacle they made. Nothing is more exasperating after a failure than to be stared out of countenance by the unworthy means we have employed. During her progress up-stairs to the dressing-room, and brief stay there, Cornelia had ample leisure to review her thoughts and deeds during the latter months of her life. What a waste of time, opportunity, and emotion! It was a tragedy of ridicule and a farce of profound pathos.

Her perception of these things was assisted by the depression which reacted upon her previous excitement: it had an embarrassing way of presenting, in the clearest colors, whatever in her conduct had been most unwise and indefensible. She could have borne it easily had there been as much as one stirring struggle for victory, even had the struggle resulted in defeat. Her state of mind might have borne analogy to his who, having deeply caroused overnight in celebration of some glorious triumph, learned, upon coming to his racked and tortured senses the next day, that it was a triumph for the other side.

Had the sense of despair been less overwhelming, had Cornelia been merely disappointed, rage would have taken the place of depression, and her thoughts would have run in far different channels. But there was no hope: this was her last chance of all: hereafter a rampart would be erected against her, which she neither was able nor dared to scale. There was no element in her position that could make it endurable, and yet there was no escape. She had not enough spirit of enterprise left to return home at once, but yielded herself with torpid insensibility to whoever chose to make a suggestion. She wonderingly speculated as to how she had ever been able to originate an idea herself.

The evening dragged its slow length along, and dragged Cornelia with it. To be where she was, was insupportable; but to go back to the Parsonage was worse still; and the thought of the solitary drive thither with the overflowing Mr. Reynolds filled her with a nauseating pain of anticipation.

It could not have been far from midnight when she awoke to a sense of being alone and not far from the side-door into the yard. Her partner—whoever he was—had gone to get her some ice-cream or a cup of coffee. Cornelia did not wait for his return, but walked quickly and unobserved to the door, which stood a few inches ajar, opened it, passed through, and stood in the unconfined air. The keen intensity of the tonic made her nostrils ache, and her uncovered bosom heave. She unbuttoned one of her gloves, and, taking some snow in her hand, pressed it to her warm temples, and then let it drop shivering into her breast.

"It must feel like that to die, I suppose," thought she. "If I were Sophie, now, that snow would be the death of me in two days: as it is, I shall only have a cold in the head to-morrow. There seems to be no reason in these things."

A dark figure turned the farther corner of the house, and came ploughing through the snow immediately under the eaves, dragging one hand along the clapboards as it came. The crunching of the snow caught Cornelia's ears, and she turned and recognized the figure in half a breath. The great height, the massive breadth, the easy, springing tread—it was Bressant from head to foot. He was buttoned up in a short pea-jacket, and there was a round fur cap on his head. As Cornelia turned upon him, he stopped a moment, standing quite motionless, with the fingers of one hand resting on the side of the house. Then he came close up to her and grasped her wrist with his gloved hand.

"Where is Sophie?" demanded he in his rapid, muffled voice.

"She's ill: she caught cold: she's at home," answered Cornelia, who, at the first recognition, had felt a kind of twang through all her nerves, and was now trying to control the effects of the shock. There was something queer in Bressant's manner—in the way he looked at her.

"But you came," rejoined he, stooping down and peering into her beautiful, troubled face. He broke into a laugh, which terrified Cornelia greatly, because he laughed so seldom. "One might know you'd come. You thought I'd be here: you came to see me, and here I am. Will Sophie get well?"

"Oh, yes! she was much better. When I left she had on her—wedding-dress."

Bressant drew in his breath hissingly between his teeth, and his fingers tightened a moment round Cornelia's wrist. The pain forced a sob from her and turned her lips pale. He paid no attention to her, presently dropped her wrist, and put his hands behind him, grinding the snow beneath his heel, and looking down.

"Whom is she going to marry?" was his next question, asked without raising his head.

"You!" exclaimed Cornelia, in astonishment and fear. The answer sprang to her lips without forethought or reflection, so much had the strange question startled her.

But he again stooped down and peered into her eyes, watching the effect of his words on her as he spoke them.

"No, no! I am not he who promised to marry her. She wouldn't have me, if I asked her: she don't know me. I'm going to marry some one else. *She'll* love me, no matter who I am. Shall I tell you her name?"

Cornelia could only shiver—shiver—with dry mouth and dilated eyes. Bressant put his hand on her shoulder, and drew her forward a step or two, so that the white moonlight fell upon her.

"Cornelia Valeyon is her name," said he, and then, as she remained rigid, he bent forward, with a whispered laugh, and kissed her on the face.

"There! now we belong to each other—a good match, aren't we? Quick! now; run into the house, and get your things on. You must walk home with me, and we'll arrange every thing. Go! I shall wait for you here."

She reentered the house, cold and dizzy, just as her partner arrived with the coffee. She explained—what scarcely needed to be told—that she felt faint: she must go up-stairs. In three minutes she had put her satin-slippered feet into a pair of water-proof overshoes, pinned up her trailing skirts, thrown on her long wadded mantle, with sleeves and hood, and had got down-stairs again before "assistance" could arrive. All the time, there was a burning and tingling where his lips had been, but she would not put up her hand to touch the spot, and relieve the sensation. It was, in a manner, sacred to her; albeit the sanctity was largely mingled with bewilderment, remorse, and fear. When she came out, Bressant was standing where she had left him, tossing a couple of snow-balls from one hand to another. He dropped them as she approached, and brushed the

snow from his gloves. She took the arm he offered her—timidly, and yet feeling that it was all in the world she had to cling to. It was true—by that kiss she belonged to him, for it had made her a traitor to all else on whom she had hitherto had a claim. Yet upon how different a footing did they stand with one another from that which she had prefigured to herself! This was he whom she was to have brought vanquished to her feet! With one motion of his strong, masculine hand he had swept away all her fine-spun cobwebs of opportunity and method, and had laid his clutch upon the very marrow of her soul. But though she had lost the command, she was party, if not principal, to the guilt. It was he who had taken fire from her.

"You remember last summer," said he, "that night when an arch was in the sky? We didn't understand one another then, and I didn't understand myself. But, during the last day or two, I've been thinking it all over. I've had too good an opinion of myself all along."

"What is it that you've been thinking?" asked Cornelia, feeling repelled, and yet driven, by a piteous necessity, to know all the contents, good or bad, of this heart which was her only possession.

"Of all that had been said or done this last half-year. There's nothing you care for more than me, is there?" he demanded, concentrating the greatest emphasis into the question.

"If you care for me—if I can be every thing to you"—Cornelia's voice was broken and tossed upon the uncontrolled waves of fighting emotions, and she could give little care to the form and manner of her speech.

"I love you—of course I love you!—what else is there for me to do? But I've been all this time trying to find out what love was. I thought I loved Sophie, you know."

Bressant's strange words and altered manner dismayed Cornelia. What was the matter with him? She could not get it out of her head that some awful event must have happened, but she knew not how to frame inquiries. Bressant continued—a determined levity in his tone was yet occasionally broken down by a stroke of feeling terribly real:

"I was a great fool—you should have told me; you knew more about it than I did. It was my self-conceit—I thought nothing was too good for me. When I saw you I thought you were the flower of the world, so I wanted you. Well—you are

—the flower of the world!"

"He does love me!" said Cornelia to herself, and she knew a momentary pang of bliss which no consideration of honor or rectitude had power to dull or diminish.

"But, afterward," he went on, his voice lowering for an instant, "I saw an angel —something above all the flowers of this world—and I was fool enough to imagine she would suit me better still. You never thought so, did you, Cornelia?" he added, with a half laugh; "well—you should have told me!"

How he dragged her up and down, and struck her where she was most defenseless! Did he do it on purpose, or unconsciously?

"I mistook worship for love—that was the trouble, I fancy. Luckily, I found out in time it won't do to love what is highest—it can only make one mad. Love what you can understand—that's the way! See how wise I've become."

Bressant's laugh affected Cornelia like a deadly drug. Her speech was fettered, and she moved without her own will or guidance.

"I found out—just in time—that I needed more body and less soul—less goodness and—more Cornelia!" he concluded, epigrammatically.

So this was her position. It could hardly be more humiliating. Yet how could she rebel? for was not the yoke of her own manufacture? Indeed, had she been put to it, she might have found it a difficult matter to distinguish between the actual relation now subsisting between Bressant and herself, and that which she had been, for months past, striving to effect. He had met her half-way, that was all.

But surely it was only during this absence that this idea of abandoning Sophie, and turning to herself, had occurred to him. Half as a question, half as an exclamation, the words found their way through Cornelia's twitching lips—

"What has happened to you since you went away?"

"Oh! since we love each other, there's no use talking about that at present. If I had any idea of marrying Sophie, now, I should have to go and tell her every thing. It's so convenient to be certain that *nothing* can change your love for me, Cornelia! No, no! I wouldn't be so suspicious of you as to tell you now."

"When am I to know, then?" she asked, fearful of she knew not what.

"After we're married, there shall be a clearing up of it all. You'll be much

amused! By-the-way, I found out one queer thing—what my real name is!"

"Your real name!"

"Yes—who I am; you know I said I wasn't the same who was engaged to marry Sophie. Well, I'm not; he was a myth—there was no such person. I always thought 'Bressant' was an *incognito*, didn't you? But it turns out to be the only name I have! I hope you like it; do you think 'Mrs. Bressant' sounds well?"

"What does all this mean? What are you going to do with me? Are you making a sport of me?" cried Cornelia, clasping both hands over Bressant's arm, in a passion of helplessness. Much as she loved life, she would, at that moment, have died rather than feel that she was ridiculed and deserted by him.

They had come to the brow of the hill on which the village stood, overlooking the valley, which moon and snow together lit up into a sort of phantom daylight. The moon hung aloft, directly above their heads, and the narrow circumference of their shadows, lying close at their feet, were mingled indistinguishably together. Cornelia, in the energy of her appeal, had stopped walking, and the two stood, for a moment, looking at one another. Seen from a few yards' distance, they would have made a supremely beautiful and romantic picture.

The stately poise of Bressant's gigantic figure—the slight inclination of his head and shoulders toward Cornelia—presented an ideal model for a tender and protecting lover. She, in form and bearing, the incarnation of earthly grace and symmetry, her lovely upturned face revealed in deep, soft shadows and sweet, melting lights, her rounded fingers interlaced across his arm, her bosom lifting and letting fall irregularly the cloak that lay across it—what completer embodiment could there be of happy, self-surrendering, trusting, young womanhood? And what were the fitly-spoken words—the apples of gold in this picture of silver?

"Cornelia," said Bressant, throwing aside the levity, as well as the underlying passion, of his tone, and speaking with a slightly impatient coldness, "don't you begin to be a fool as soon as I leave it off. You may call what joins us together love, if you like, but it's not worth getting excited about. You take me because you were jealous of Sophie, and because you've compromised yourself. I take you because you're beautiful to look at, and—because nobody else would have me! We shall have plenty of money, which will help us along. But what is there in our relations to make us either enthusiastic or miserable?—Come along!"

This was the consummation of Cornelia's passionate hopes and torturing fears, of her dishonorable intriguing and reckless self-desecration. She became very calm all of a sudden, and, without making any rejoinder, she "came along" as he bade her, and they descended the hill.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FOUND.

Sophie, having carried her point regarding her wedding-dress, had nothing better to do after Cornelia had left her than to give herself up to reverie. She had a private purpose to sit up until her sister's return, that she might hear all about Bressant, and why he had stayed away so long and sent no word. That he had returned, expecting to meet her at the ball, she entertained not the slightest doubt; nor was there at this time any suspicion or misgiving in her mind about his fidelity and love.

Mankind's ignorance of the future is, beyond dispute, a blessing; yet we could wish, for Sophie, that so much presentiment of what was to come might be hers as to lead her to concentrate all possible happy thoughts into the few hours that remained wherein she might yet be happy. She had full scope and freedom to think what she would—no less than if a hundred years of earthly bliss had awaited her. Her life had been full of all manner of spiritual beauties and perfumes—a divine poem, though written upon clay. Let only the harmony of sweet music float about her now, and the shadow of what was to come be not cast over her.

She sat in her deep, soft easy-chair, with its high back, and square, roomy seat. An open-grate stove furnished light to the room, for Sophie had blown out her candle. As the flame rose or sank, the various objects round about stood visible, or vanished duskily away. Endymion, over the mantel-piece, still slept as peacefully as ever, and the smile, though forever upon his lips, seemed always to have but that moment alighted there. How tenderly the lustrous touch of the moon brightened on his white shoulder!

The golden letters of the Lord's Prayer gleamed ever and anon from the shadow above the bed, and sent the shining beauty of a sentence across to Sophie's eyes; and the face of the cherub, with his chin upon his hand, was turned upward in immortal adoration. Sophie's glance rested thoughtfully upon one and then the other. They were incorporated into her life. Would they have power to protect her from evil and suffering? Well, the words of the Prayer settle that question most wisely.

How silent the house was and how light it was out-doors! Sophie rose from her chair by the fire and walked slowly to the window. A board creaked beneath her quiet foot and a red coal fell with a gentle thud into the ash-receiver. Then, as Sophie leaned against the window, she heard the little ormolu clock, in the room below, faintly tinkle out the half-hour after eleven. Before long—in an hour, perhaps—Cornelia would be back, rosy with the cold, fresh, laughing, and full of news. Dear Neelie! How Sophie wished that she might find a love as deep and a happiness as perfect as had come to her. It hardly seemed fair that she should monopolize so much of the world's joy. True, God knows best; but Sophie, with her forehead against the cold window-pane, prayed that Cornelia might speedily become as blessed as herself. Then she turned to go back to her chair, casting a parting glance at the white road, with the glistening track of sleigh-runners visible as far as the bend. No moving thing was in sight. In stepping from the window her foot caught in the skirt of her wedding-dress, and she narrowly escaped falling. The loose board creaked again, dismally; but Sophie laughed at her clumsiness, and, recovering her balance, reached her chair and sat down in it. How warm and pleasant it was! The walls of the room seemed to draw up cozily around the stove, and nod to one another good-naturedly. They loved Sophie and would do all they could to make her comfortable and secure. She sat quite still, and perhaps fell into a light, half-waking slumber.

A while afterward, she suddenly started in her chair, her head raised, as if listening. The fire burnt as warmly as ever, but Sophie was trembling incontrollably, and her heart was beating most unmercifully. She walked quickly and blindly, with outstretched hands, to the window. This time the ominous board forbore to creak. Its omen was fulfilled.

Without hesitating, she threw up the window, and, unmindful of the tingling inrush of cold air, she leaned out, and looked down through the arched window of the porch. The bare vines that struggled across it afforded no interception to the view of the two figures standing within. Sophie gazed at them as a bird does at a snake; she could not take her eyes away; she could not move nor utter a sound. It was like the oppression and paralysis of a fearful dream. Was she dreaming?

It was a terribly vivid dream, at any rate. She seemed to see one of the figures—a woman—clasp the man's hand passionately in hers and speak. The voice was known to her; it was as familiar as her own; but the words it uttered made her sure she was asleep. Thank God! it wasn't real. She would wake up in a moment, and shudder to think how ugly a dream it had been. Oh, if she could only awaken

before this conversation went any further! It was breaking her heart: it was killing her. She had heard of people who died in their sleep—was it from such dreams as this?

She seemed to have heard two voices—voices that she loved and knew as well as her own heart—talking a horrible, unholy jargon about some purpose—some plan—something that it was a sin even to listen to or imagine; but, as in a dream, she had no choice but to listen. She tried to shake off the delusion—to see, to prove that what she saw and heard was false. But still it lasted, and lasted. Still those wicked sentences kept creeping into her ears and deadening her heart. O God! would it never cease—would there never be an end?

At length the end seemed about to come. But, ah! the end was worst of all. Shame—shame to her that such sinful imaginings should visit her brain. She saw the figure of the man turn away as if to go; but the woman caught him by the arm, and lifted her beautiful, guilty face up toward his as if beseeching him for a parting kiss. She saw him stoop his dark, bearded head, with a half-impatient gesture, and kiss the beautiful woman's mouth, then motion her toward the house. "Make haste and put on your travelling dress," he seemed to say; "I'll walk up the road a little way and wait for you."

Sophie found power to slip down from the window after that, but she knew she was dreaming still. She heard a stealthy footstep on the stairs and along the entry; it seemed to pause, and hesitate a moment at her door; but then it went on and entered Cornelia's room. If she only could go to her lover, Sophie thought. If she only could speak to him and feel his arms around her. And why should she not? he had but just gone up the road. She would slip out and run after him. It was deadly cold: she was in her white wedding-dress. Yes; but then it was a dream—nothing but a dream—no harm could come of it.

She lifted herself softly from the floor, and moved toward the door. She passed the looking-glass on the dressing-table as she went, and cast a darkling glance into it. A haggard ghost seemed to stare back at her, with crazy eyes. A braid of brown, silky hair had become loosened, and was creeping down upon the spectre's shoulders.

Sophie stole along as noiselessly as a cat. She descended the staircase, glided down the passage, opened the outer door, and was on the frozen porch. The chill of the air passed through her as if she had been indeed but a spirit. The dream must surely be a dream of death. She ran down the icy path to the gate, and,

looking along the road, saw that a tall figure had nearly reached the spur of the hill, around which the road turned. By hurrying she would yet be able to overtake him. She passed through the gate without causing a creak or a rattle, gathered up her light skirt, and started to run as speedily as she might.

The cold snow penetrated through her thin slippers and made her feet ache and sting. The breeze forced a cruel entrance through the bosom of her dress, as if to freeze the heart that was beating so. As she ran on, she began to pant so heavily it seemed as if every breath must be her last. The familiar road, the well-known outline of the hills, the stone-walls, the stretch of woods to the left, where she had walked so often last fall, all looked now ghastly and unreal—a world whose only sun was the moon—a fitting world for such a dream as this.

Still she staggered onward, slipping in the polished ruts of the sleigh-runners, plunging into the deep snow. Her body was cold as the winter itself, but her head was burning as if a fire were within it. She reached the bend, and her eyes strained wildly up the road. There! far ahead, marked black against the ghastly snow—there! still moving away—farther away. Would she ever reach him?

It was hopeless, and yet she kept on. Rather than let him go without having assured her it was all a wicked dream—without having hugged her in his arms, and given her her good-night kiss—without having called her his own, only Sophie, and promised he would always love her and no other—rather than give up all this, she would die in the pursuit, and it were well that she should die. So on she ran: her brain reeled, she could scarcely feel whether her limbs yet moved: there was a griping in her heart, and her breath came in short gasps of agony. The earth darkened and tipped before her eyes, but her resolve never faltered. To reach him, or die. Oh! how gladly she would die, if only she might reach him. Was not that he—there—only a short way on? Might not her voice reach him? Would not some good angel bear it to him? Even then she stumbled, and fell forward on her knees; but, ere she sank quite down, she threw forth a wild, piercing, despairing cry, giving to it her whole desolate soul—

"Bressant! Bressant!"

Then blackness obliterated every thing. But Bressant, as he walked heavily along, encompassed with bitter and miserable thoughts, suddenly halted, as if an iron hand had been laid upon his shoulder. Either he had actually heard a faint echo of that unearthly cry, or his spiritual ear had taken cognizance of the call of Sophie's soul. He turned himself about, with a quaking heart. There was the long

white road, but no human being was visible upon it. Yet he knew that Sophie's voice had called him. She must be near. Slowly he began to walk back, half dreading to behold her image rise before him, with deep, reproachful eyes.

He had not gone twenty yards, when he started back, having almost set his foot upon something which lay face downward in the snow, clad in a dress almost as white. He would not have seen her but for her brown hair, which, falling loosely about, was caught and stirred by the inquisitive breeze. She herself lay quite still.

Bressant took her beneath the arms, and lifted her up. Crouching down, he supported her head against his shoulder, and brushed away the snow that had adhered to her face. There was a cut upon her chin, but the blood, after running a few moments, had congealed. Her eyes were not quite shut, but the lids were stiff and immovable. The mouth, too, was a little open. Was it the moonlight that gave her that death-like look? or was she dead indeed?

The young man broke out into a long, wavering cry. It was not weeping; it was not laughter; yet it bore a resemblance to both. It curdled his own blood, but he could not repress it. It was the voice of overstrained, unendurable emotion, and a horrible voice it was to hear. He feared he was losing his senses—looking in that white, motionless face, and uttering such a cry! At last, however, it died away, and there was silence. The silence was almost worse than the cry—the utter silence of a winter night.

"What shall I do?" he said to himself, helplessly.

The unearthly voice, and the discovery to which it had led, following the other events of the night, had made Bressant unfit to deal with this matter after his usual ready and practical style. But he would have found the problem an awkward one at his best. How could he appear at the Parsonage? What account could he give there of this lifeless body? What account could he give of it to himself? He was utterly bewildered and aghast. It seemed that the dead had risen from the grave, to drag him relentlessly back to the fullest glare of earthly ignominy—to the keenest experience of human suffering. And yet, did he quite deserve it? Was there no grain of leaven in his lump of sinfulness and weakness, if all were known? He is a hardened criminal, indeed, who can find no hope in the thought of appealing from human judgment to Divine!

Meanwhile, Mr. Reynolds had been luxuriating in a very unmistakable sense of injury. To some persons there are a positive relief and gratification in being really wronged: it raises their estimate of their own importance: by virtue of their

title to feel angry, disappointed, or deceived, they can take their place in a higher than their ordinary rank. So Mr. Reynolds, finding himself qualified to plead a clear case of absolute and unwarrantable desertion, held up his head, and bore himself with becoming dignity.

His dignity did not, however, interfere with his seeking to drown his slight in the good, old-fashioned way. He solaced himself beyond prudence with the varied products of the hotel bar, and then settled himself solitary in his sleigh and jingled homeward. His road took him past the Parsonage, and he enlivened the lonely way by scraps of songs, reflections upon the perfidy of women, and portentous yawns at intervals of two or three minutes. In fact, by the time he had gone a mile the most predominant sensation he had was sleepiness, and half a mile more came very near making a second Endymion of him. From this, however, he was preserved by the very sudden stoppage of his sleigh, which threw him on his knees against the dasher, and forcibly knocked his eyes open. He rolled over to the ground, but, happening to light on his feet, he stood unsteadily erect, and asked a very tall and powerful man, who was holding his horse's head, when he was going to let that drop?

Receiving no intelligible answer, he stumbled in the powerful man's direction, perhaps contemplating the performance of some deed of desperate valor. Meanwhile the object of his hostility had relinquished his hold of the horse, and appeared kneeling on the ground, supporting the form of a woman, dressed in a tasteful white dress, with dark, disordered hair lying around her colorless face.

CHAPTER XXX.

LOST.

Mr. Reynolds immediately paused, and regarded this group for some moments with an air of singular sagacity and archness.

"I say, young fellow," ejaculated he, at length, with an evident effort to attain distinctness of utterance, "that sort of thing won't do, you know."

Bressant looked up and recognized the rustic bacchanalian for the first time. He had always had a peculiar antipathy to this young gentleman; but at this moment it was intensified into a loathing. How could he ask assistance from such a degraded creature as this?

The recognition had been mutual, and Mr. Reynolds, tacking unsteadily around, brought himself to bear in such a position as to catch a fair view of Sophie's face, with the spot of blood on her chin. The first glance so terrified him, that he utterly, forsook his footing, and came abruptly to the ground, never once taking his eyes from the face, all the way. But the shock of his fall, and the awful solemnity of what he saw, sobered him considerably. He turned to Bressant, and eyed him with anxious earnestness.

"Why, you're the fellow she's engaged to, ain't you? What on earth's been the row? She ain't dead, is she? How did she get here? In her wedding-rig, too, by golly!"

Bressant's frame vibrated with a savage impulse; but Mr. Reynolds, not being of a sensitive temperament, was not at all disconcerted.

"Well, say, I guess she'd better be fetched home, first thing," said he, bestirring himself to arise from the chilly seat he had taken. "Lucky I happened along, too. Guess you was hoping I might, wasn't you? Well, you hoist her under the arms, and I'll hang on by the feet—ain't that it? and we'll have her into the sleigh in no time."

"Don't touch her!" said the other, fiercely. "Let her alone, you drunken fool!"

"Now, look here, Mr. Bressant," rejoined Bill Reynolds, resting his hands on his

knees, and looking intently in Bressant's face, "I may not be rich and a swell, like you are; but I guess I'm an honest man, any way, as much as ever you be; and I ain't insulting nobody by helping take home a poor frozen girl. I don't care if she is engaged to you. You don't mean to keep her here till morning do you? and seeing she ain't married yet, I guess the right place for her to be in, is her father's house."

Perhaps it was the moonlight, glinting on Bill's immovable eye-glasses, that gave extraordinary impressiveness to his words; or it may have been Bressant's reflection, that this young country bumpkin, sullied with drink, coarse and ignorant though he was, would have probably found his sense of equality in no way diminished, had he known more of the facts to which the present catastrophe was a sequel; at all events, he made no further objections. His manner changed to an almost submissive humbleness, and, without more words, he helped Bill to place the insensible woman in the sleigh.

"That's the talk," remarked Mr. Reynolds, as he drew the sleigh-robe over her. "Now, then, Mr. Bressant, just you jump in and hold on to her, and I'll lead the horse along. We'll be there in half a shake."

"No," replied Bressant, after a mental conflict as violent as it was brief; "I'll lead the horse myself." The only pleasure now left to this young man was to insult and torture himself to the utmost of his ingenuity. He had forfeited all right to protect or care for Sophie, and it was with a savage satisfaction that he resigned it to Bill Reynolds, as being the worthier and better man. It was the quixoticism of self-degradation, but was doubtless not without some wholesome influence.

In three minutes more they were at the Parsonage-gate. They made a stretcher of the sleigh-robe, and carried Sophie in on it. The gate, flapping-to behind them, sounded like a fretful and querulous complaint. As they mounted the porch-steps, which creaked and crackled beneath their weight, the door was opened by Cornelia, in her travelling-dress. Her face expressed so vividly the unspeakable horror which she felt as her eyes rested on her sister's half-opened lids, that Bressant, seeing it, was stricken anew with the perception of his own misery. As Cornelia looked up from the pure and innocent features—which never had worn an awful and forbidding expression until now, when all power of expression was gone—her glance and Bressant's met; but, after a moment's encounter, both dropped their eyes, with an involuntary shudder. Their trial and sentence were condensed into so seemingly brief a space.

But Bill Reynolds neither dealt in nor appreciated such refinements upon the good old ways of communicating sentiments.

"Good-evening, Miss Valeyon," exclaimed he. "I guess we didn't expect to see one another again to-night. Pray don't imagine, miss, that I bear you any grudge. At times like this personal considerations don't count—not with me. I'll shake hands with you, Miss Valeyon, first chance I get, and we'll be just as much friends as ever we was before. That's the right way, I guess."

The door of the guest-chamber stood open, and the sleigh-robe, with its burden, was laid upon the bed whereon Bressant had spent so many weary days. Then the voice of the professor, who had been awakened by the noise and the sound of feet, was heard from the top of the stairs, demanding to know what was the matter.

"Come down," said Bressant, stepping to the guest-chamber door. "Be quick!"

He spoke more slowly and deeply than was his wont. In spite—or perhaps in consequence—of his abasement, forlornness, and unworthiness, he showed a dignity and impressiveness which were novel in him. The boyishness, vivacity, and motion, had quite vanished. There were a depth and hollowness in his eyes which gave a singular power to his face. There must have been a vein of genuine strength and nobleness in the man, or he would have been too much crushed to show any thing but weak despair or brutal sullenness. Had Professor Valeyon's attention been directed to the point, he might have recognized his pupil as being now thoroughly grounded in the elements of emotional experience.

The old gentleman, in dressing-gown and slippers, came thumping hastily down-stairs, in response to Bressant's summons. The strange solemnity in the latter's tone, no less than the ominousness of the hour, probably gave him premonition of some disaster. He reached the threshold of the room, and paused a moment there, settling his spectacles with trembling fingers, and looking from one silent face to another. The room was lighted only by the declining moon, which shone coldly through the windows. The bed, and that which was on it, were in shadow. In an instant or two, however, the professor's eyes made the discovery to which none of those who stood about had had the nerve to help him. And then the old man proved himself to be the most stout-hearted of them all. He only said "Sophie" in a voice so profoundly indrawn as scarcely to be audible; then walked unfalteringly across the room, bent over the bed, and proceeded to examine whether there were yet life in his daughter or not. Even the moonlight seemed to

wait and listen.

"Bring a candle," said be, presently, breaking the awful silence.

Cornelia brought it, and the warmer light inspired a sickly flicker of hope into the expectant faces. The little ormolu-clock on the mantel-piece whirred, and struck half-past one. As the ring of the last stroke faded away, Professor Valeyon raised himself, and turned his face toward the others. So strongly did his soul inform his harsh and deeply-lined features, that it seemed, for a moment, as if there were a majestic angel where he stood.

"Be of good cheer," quoth the old man—for no smaller words than those which Christ had spoken seemed adequate to clothe his thought; "she is not dead; we shall hear her speak again."

Bressant threw up his arms, as if about to shout aloud; but only gave utterance to a gasping breath, and, stepping backward, leaned heavily against the wall, near the door. Cornelia, standing in the centre of the room, broke into quivering, lingering sobs, opening and clinching her hands, which hung at her side. Bill Reynolds, however, being overcome with joy, at once gave intelligible manifestation of it.

"Good enough!" cried he, slapping his leg, and looking from one to another with a giggle of relief. "Bully for her! Bless you, *I* knew Sophie Valeyon warn't dead. Speak again! I believe you. *She'll* tell us what's the matter, I guess."

Professor Valeyon rapidly and collectedly gave his directions as to what steps were to be taken, and in a few minutes every thing was being done that skill could do. Snow was brought in to encourage back the life it had dismayed, and camphor and coffee awaited their turn to take part in the resuscitation. Slow and reluctant it was, like dragging a dead weight up from an unknown depth. More than another hour had passed away before Sophie's eyelids quivered, and a slight tremor moved her lips. By-and-by she opened her eyes, slowly and uncertainly, let them close again, and once more opened them; and, after several inaudible efforts, there came, like an echo from an immeasurable distance, one word, twice repeated:

"Bressant! Bressant!"

They looked around for him, but he was not in the room, nor in the house. Questioning among themselves, none could tell whether it were an hour or a

minute since he had departed. When life began to take fresh hold on her he had so loved and wronged, his heart had failed him, and, without a word, he had gone out and away. But not to escape; for on no heart was the weight of sorrow and suffering so heavy as on his.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MOTHER AND SON.

The grand ball at Abbie's was still in progress, though showing signs of approaching dissolution, when Bressant entered the house quietly at a side-door, and crept up to his room. He wished not to be seen or heard by anybody; but it happened that Abbie saw him, and the sight partly alarmed and partly relieved her. She could now account for the mysterious disappearance of Cornelia some hours before. But why had Bressant returned so secretly? and why were his movements all so surreptitious? Something must be out of order, either at the Parsonage or elsewhere. She reflected and conjectured, and of course became momentarily more and more uneasy. Nor did a short visit to his door relieve her apprehensions: a confused and non-descript sound had proceeded from within, as if the young man were packing up. Whither could he be going, she asked herself, on the very eve of his marriage?

It is never difficult to find cause for anxiety; but it seemed to Abbie that the misgivings she entertained were reasonable and logical. Bressant had made up his mind to desert Sophie, because the fortune which he had all his life considered his own turned out to belong to another, on whose generosity he was too proud or too suspicious to depend. He was going off, either to struggle through poverty to a fortune of his own making, or, giving himself up to his misfortune, to remain all his life in want and misery; or, perhaps—Abbie did not openly admit this alternative, but still, knowing what she thought she did of his nature and the circumstances, the suspicion had existence—perhaps, in conjunction with a certain evil-disposed person in New York, he contemplated fraudulently absconding.

Now, Abbie imagined that the key whereby alone all these difficulties could be unlocked, lay in her own hands. It was a key of which, so long as her own interest alone had been concerned, she had refused to avail herself; but, when the welfare of those she loved was called into question, she made up her mind (in spite of pride—her strongest passion next to love) to make use of it without hesitation.

When the last guests had taken their departure, Abbie went to her room, and

looked at herself in the glass, by the light of a kerosene-lamp. She was dressed plainly, though becomingly enough, in black silk; a lace cap rested on her gray hair; her face was worn and wrinkled, but had a fine expression about it, that would have recalled former beauty to the memory of any one who had known her in early life. She was deeply excited, without being at all nervous, the excitement being so profoundly rooted as to be really a part of herself.

"Why am I happy?" she asked herself. "No, not because I've buried all my pride. Because I've found a reason to justify me in burying it: that's why!"

She went, for the third time that night, to Bressant's door, and this time turned the latch and pushed it open. He was sitting at his table, with his head on his arms. His trunk and a large iron-bound box lay packed and strapped beneath the window, which was thrown wide open. The rush of air between that and the door roused the young man: he got slowly to his feet, and came forward.

"I don't want to see you," said he, with a heavy utterance. "I warn you to go away. You and I had better have nothing to say to each other."

"We must; the time to speak has come!" she returned. "I've come to you, because you could not bring yourself to rely on me. It's your own want of faith—"

"You'd better not go on," interrupted Bressant, with a strange smile. "I had more faith than you imagine. But there are some mountains that faith can't move."

"Why do you still keep me off?" cried Abbie, in a tone which might have made his heart bleed, except that of late it had been stabbed so often. "Good God! am I so repulsive to you that, for the sake of being happy and comfortable all your life, you can't bring yourself to recognize my existence? Don't imagine I want to buy your love or toleration with this money of mine. I want nothing in exchange —nothing! I can't help the knowledge that I shall have made you rich, and so put happiness in your power; but I ask no acknowledgment—no return. Take every thing and go! Leave me here and believe that I am dead! Is that enough?"

"A great deal too much! You'll be sorry you've said all this. If you knew what you were talking about, you wouldn't have said a word of it."

"Oh, you are hard to please, indeed!" exclaimed Abbie, gazing at him and shuddering. "I pray God your heart is so cold to no one else as to me! Poor Sophie! She would die at one such word."

"Don't speak her name," said Bressant, in a tone so stern as to be equivalent to a

threat.

He held his eyes down, so that the ugly gleam in them was hidden. Abbie had no thought of fearing him as yet, and she would have her say.

"Do you think I don't know you're going to leave her? If it's because you don't love her, I can say no more. You are beyond any help in this world. But if you do, let me save her, even if I must oblige you in doing it! You know little of her love, though, if you think she can be happier with you rich than poor. Oh! are you so cold yourself as to believe you are acting generously to her in this? Go back to her, or she will die!"

The old woman took fire as she spoke, and many of the signs of age were for the time obliterated. Some of the power and brilliancy of her youth shone again in her eyes; her form seemed to acquire a different and statelier contour. In the earnestness of her speech, involuntary gestures accompanied her words; free from all exaggeration, and so truly and gracefully fitted to her meaning as to be virtually invisible. But Bressant was not won by it: his expression grew more ugly and repellent with every successive sentence.

"You fool!" said he, coming one heavy step nearer, and frowning down upon her; "I warned you away; I told you to be silent. You've meddled with what was no concern of yours; you've thrust yourself where you had no right to come—"

"No right!" she interrupted, with an intensity of indignant emphasis that seemed adequate to smite to the ground the towering figure that faced her. Then, clasping her hands, and in a voice of yearning, ineffable tenderness, she added, "Oh, I have prayed for you, and wept for you, and loved you so! For your own sake, my darling, do not use such words to me!" Here she held out her arms, and tears ran hot down her faded cheeks. "Am I not your mother? Are you not my son?"

"No!" answered Bressant.

He threw so tremendous a weight of malignant energy into the utterance of this single word, although not raising his voice higher than his usual tone, that the moral effect upon the woman was as if he had dealt her a furious blow on the breast. Completely stunned at first, she stood as if dead, except that her body, upright and rigid, vibrated slightly from side to side, like a column about to fall. So sudden, too, had been the shock, that her arms still remained outstretched, and the track of her tears still glistened upon her cheeks, tears shed so utterly in

vain as to acquire a trait of ghastly absurdity.

As sense and reflection began to dawn again, the first instinctive defence she attempted was that of incredulity. It was to gain breathing-space rather than from any hope in its efficacy. But afterward, following the ability to hear and the capacity to comprehend, the grim reality settled darkly down. Her life for the last twenty-five years, then, had been a miserable blunder; her love, hopes, and fears wasted, and turned to ridicule; her self-sacrifice, a wretched self-deception, a throwing of all possibilities of happiness into the bottomless pit, whence no return could ever come to her; every thought, aspiration, and desire, which had visited her heart had been a mockery—meaningless and empty. This was the reality to which she was awakened. And, lest this should not be sufficient, here stood one before whom she had abased and humbled herself, whose insolence she had borne meekly and lovingly, whose feet she had set upon her neck. Here he stood, insolent and unfeeling still; a false impostor, whom might God refuse to pardon!

And who and what was he? Oh, what punishment was terrible enough for him? Surely—surely God would not allow him to escape! What was he?

These thoughts must have written themselves in the woman's eyes, which were now awful to behold—eager, questioning, and malevolent. Bressant forced a harsh laugh, as men will when they find themselves opposed by impotent rage. Certainly Abbie had no other claim to be considered an amusing spectacle. Had not her revengeful rage upheld her, she must have swooned. But it was a hideous kind of vitality, unwholesome to contemplate. Bressant laughed by main strength.

"You can't solace yourself even with that," said he, shaking his head. "Up to three days ago I was as much in ignorance as you. It was no fault and no concern of mine; you and Professor Valeyon chose to deceive yourselves, and me. Nobody can be more innocent than I! Nobody can regret more, on some accounts, that our relationship is no closer!".

In this last sentence the tone of mockery he had assumed was somewhat overstrained; a suspicion of underlying sincerity grated through it.

"Don't say you didn't know!" said Abbie, in a guttural voice, clasping and wringing her hands, and turning her head from one side to another; "don't dare to say it! No—no! you did—you did! You did know it, and God will punish you—God will condemn you! He must—He will!" She could not endure to believe

that, having been defrauded in her love, she was to be defrauded also in her hate and thirst for revenge. She could live by either; but to be deprived of both was death!

Bressant made no reply to her uncanny petition, and a silence followed. Abbie stood wringing her hands, waving her head, and drawing her breath sobbingly between her teeth. Was she the same woman—stately, and almost beautiful—who had spoken so loftily and tenderly but a few minutes before? Are human generosity and affection founded on no securer basis? Her appearance was now revolting. Suddenly a thought struck her.

"Ah! but she—*she* can't escape," she broke forth, seizing upon the idea with a grisly eagerness of exultation. "You can't get *her* away from me; I know her, oh! I know her, and I condemn her, I hate her—God! how I hate her. She shall never be forgiven—never, never. You can never cheat me out of *her*, for I know her."

Abbie pressed both hands to her head.

"You had better hold your tongue, old woman," Bressant said, in a low voice, and a deadlier passion than anger looked from his eyes as he fastened them upon her. "You're so hungry to send a soul to hell, take care you don't find yourself there. Do you think your past life can save you? Wait till I've told you what it has been. You began by blasting a true man's life, trusting too easily, against all internal evidence, to the lies that were told you about him. Next, you married the liar, not loving him, but so that the other might hear it, and believe you had forgotten him; so you acted a lie to him, and prostituted yourself bodily and spiritually to gratify your pride and revenge. Not the sort of thing that gets people to heaven, so far, is it?"

Abbie still pressed her hands to her head, and stared before her without speaking.

"You were false to your marriage vows; after that, you neglected your husband no less than he you; you never tried to make yourself lovable to him; you were the only wronged one! you could do no wrong yourself! At last you had a son."

She raised her eyes, which, during the last few minutes had become bloodshot, and fixed them fearfully upon the young man's face, as he continued:

"You loved him, as most females do love their young, and yet not so generously as most. It was not as his father's child, but only as your own, that he was dear to

you; he was *your* child, a part of yourself, and you loved him only because you loved yourself.

"When he was still a baby you left your husband's house, and thereby, if justice were done, forfeited the recognition of good women, and pure society; but you took great credit to yourself because you left your son and your money behind you. Was it nothing in the balance, then, the scandal, worse than any poverty, which the recovery of your property would have caused? Nothing but self-sacrifice, to leave a sickly child to all the advantages that wealth could give it? Well, a month afterward, in spite of wealth, your son died."

At this announcement, Abbie's convulsive strength, which had thus far served to keep her erect and motionless, exhaled itself in a long groan, and left her placid and nerveless. Seeing her about to fall, Bressant put forth his hands and grasped her arms below the shoulder, holding her thus while he went on. Her eyes were closed and her head fell forward on her bosom; but, so blinded was the young man by the remorseless passion which had gradually been working up within him, he failed to perceive that the old woman's ears were no longer sensible to his voice, nor her heart sensitive to his words.

"He died, and I was younger than he, but stronger, and more like my father. I was put in his place, and was called by his name. I grew up proud of what I thought my aristocratic birth! I resolved to become the most famous of mankind, and I found an angel and was going to marry her. But the evil began to come with the good: it began long ago, and in many ways, and I tried to overcome it, or provide against it, one way or another. You benevolent people had led me into a battle-field, unarmed, and then left me to fight my way through; and I should have done it, too, but at the last I had myself to fight against, and then *I* gave in. Why, *I* had been dead and buried more than twenty years—why don't you laugh at that?—and had been imposed upon all that time by this miserable nameless outcast, myself! whose father's name was Adultery and his mother's Sin. That was a parentage to be proud of, wasn't it? And yet, I swear before God, I'm better contented it should be so, than to be the son of an honest marriage, with such a woman as you for my mother."

As he loosened the hold of one hand, to emphasize this oath, the senseless body, which he had been upholding, swung round, and swayed, toward the floor. He dropped the arm which remained in his grasp, and the red flush on his cheek and forehead died away into pallor, as he looked down at the dark heap of clothes lying at his feet. Finally he stooped down, and lifted her on to the sofa.

"She's not dead," muttered he, after scrutinizing the woman's face for a moment; "she has her punishment, though, like the rest of us."

He wrote an address on a couple of pieces of paper which he found in the drawer of the table, and fastened them to the box and trunk with some mucilage. Then he took his fur cap, and having banged on the fat Irish servant-girl's door, and told her that her mistress was lying insensible in his study, he left the house without delay. It wanted still an hour to the time for the earliest morning train to New York, and, as the young man did not care to subject himself to questions and remarks from the officials at the village depot, he determined to walk down the track, a distance of between four and five miles, to the station below. Off he started accordingly, and, arriving there in ample time, was able to eat a good breakfast of cold meat, hard-boiled eggs, and crackers—all the solid contents of the refreshment-room—before his train got in. He bought his ticket, stepped on board, flung himself into a seat, and left all behind him.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WHERE TWO ROADS MEET.

The velvet-cushioned seat on which he sat felt very comfortable, and the great speed at which he was being carried along was agreeable to him. He had been busily occupied, with little rest of any kind, and scarcely any sleep, for nearly three days; and his mind had been all the time engrossed by the most harrowing thoughts and experiences. It was all over now; nothing could ever again give him apprehension or anxiety; the past was dead and never could live again; the future was arranged, and it was simple enough: he, and the woman who had given him birth, would sail together for Europe on Monday morning, at twelve o'clock. He would have abundant wealth—all the property had been converted into ready money, and would be taken with them—and he might live as luxuriously, as sensually, as much like a pampered animal as he pleased, or as he could. He would forget that he had a mind, or a heart, or a soul; they had none of them served him in good stead; but he had some reliance on his body. There were few that could compare with it in the world, and he felt convinced that he should be able to derive a great deal of enjoyment out of it before the time for its death and decay came round. At all events, he was resolved that no form of indulgence to his bodily appetites should go unproved; and when one grew stale he would try another. With such enormous vitality and capacity to be and to appreciate being voluptuous, he could hardly fail to avenge himself for the hardships he had undergone thus far.

So he leaned back on the crimson velvet-cushion of his seat, and felt very comfortable and composed, thinking of nothing in particular. He became pleasantly interested, as the daylight began to make things visible without, in trying to count the number of wires on the telegraph-poles. It would have been easy enough if they had only kept along at an invariable level; but they were always rising—rising—then jumping through the pole with a snap!—then ducking suddenly—sinking, crossing one another—sometimes scudding along close to the ground, then flying up beyond the range of the window—anon scooting beneath a dark arch—now indistinguishable against a pine-wood—then rising—rising—jumping—ducking—sinking—as before. Though exerting all his faculties of observation, it was impossible to be quite certain how many wires

there were.

He was nearly alone in the car, and would probably continue to be for an hour or so at least. He reversed the seat in front of him, and put up his feet, leaving the telegraph-wires to scud and dodge unnoticed. He fixed his eyes upon the sweltering stove in the farther corner of the car. There was a roaring fire within, as he could tell by the vivid red that glowed through the draught-holes beneath the door, and showed here and there along the cracks. The sides of the car against which the stove stood was protected with zinc; a number of short sticks of wood were piled beside it, ready to replenish the fire, and some of them were already smoking a little, as if in anticipation. Presently the brakeman came in, with a flurry of cold air, his neck and head rolled up in a dirty-brown knit woolen tippet, and clumsy gloves on his hands. He took the poker, and opened the stove-door with it, peeped into the red-hot interior a moment, grasped a solid chunk of wood from the pile, and popped it in cleverly; then he stood for a moment, patting the stove with his gloved hands, to warm them, till, in response to the whistle, he dashed out, slamming the doors as only car-doors can be made to slam, and Bressant could dimly distinguish him, through the frosted window, working away at the brake.

They drew up, with much squeaking and grating, at a small, snuff-colored, clap-boarded depot, where a boy, about sixteen, with a big green carpet-bag, kissed an elderly lady in a black hood, who was evidently his mother, and jumped aboard with his bag, in a great hurry, lest she should behold the tears in his eyes. He entered the car in which Bressant sat, and established himself and his bag on the seat immediately in front of that upon which the former's feet were resting.

The snuff-colored station and the woman in the black hood slipped away, and were seen no more. The boy, after scratching a peep-hole through the frost-work on his window, and taking a last survey through it of the snow-covered fields he was leaving, produced a large blue-spotted handkerchief from the pocket of his trousers, and retired with it into the privacy of his own feelings.

He was a rather delicate-looking boy, with large gray eyes and soft brown hair, and was evidently not much in the habit of traveling. Perhaps this was the first time he had ever left home, thought Bressant, in the idleness of his inactive mind. His mother was a widow; her dark dress and black hood, and pale, over-worked face looked like it. Besides, if the boy had had a father, of course he would have been down to see him off. Probably there were sisters, too; the boy looked somehow as if he had been brought up with sisters; but they would not

have followed him down to the station; they kissed him good-by at the house-door, leaving it to his mother to see the very last of him. For be had resolved to go forth into the world and make his fortune, not to encumber his poor mother with his support any longer. He was going, probably, to New York, to be a clerk or an errand-boy in some dry-goods store, or banking-house, or insurance-office. Once a week—oftener, perhaps—he would write home to his mother, sending his love to her and to the girls, telling them how much he wanted to see them all again, but that he was doing pretty well, and was working, and going to work, very hard. He would be rich some day, and they should all come to New York then and live in his house on Fifth Avenue!

Bressant, comfortably extended on his two seats, with his long future of bodily case and indulgence opening before him—his freedom from all ties to bind him to any spot, or necessities to compel him to any labor—Bressant found that the thought of this innocent boy, going forth into the world, with his green carpet-bag, his loving heart, his assurance of being loved, his ambition to establish his mother and sisters on Fifth Avenue, was becoming quite annoying to his mental serenity. He would think of him no more, therefore, and, to aid himself in this resolve, he closed his eyes, so as to avoid seeing him. Being really somewhat weary after his manifold exertions and continued sleeplessness, his eyes closed very naturally.

But the boy was not to be so easily got rid of. He almost immediately turned round in his seat, and directed a steadfast gaze out of his gray eyes at Bressant's reclining figure. Presently, he pronounced, in a low voice, yet which was distinctly audible to the deaf man's ears, two words, the effect of which was to make the other start up in his seat, and stare about him in amazement and alarm.

The boy met his glance with great calmness and gentleness, and held out his hand as if to grasp Bressant's.

"Was it you?" exclaimed the latter, bewildered. "How did you know that name, and who are you?" As he spoke, he mechanically took the extended hand in his own.

"Why, don't you know me?" answered the boy, smiling, and, at the same time, drawing him, by a slight but decided traction, to sit down by him. "Me—your best friend?"

Something in the voice, something in the manner, and in the expression of the eyes, but, most of all, the smile, seemed strangely familiar to Bressant. The

touch of the hand, too, he thought be recognized—it soothed and yet controlled him. Still, he was unable to recall exactly who the boy was, or where he had seen him before.

"I've had so much to think of lately," murmured he, partly to himself, partly by way of excusing his forgetfulness, passing his hand over his forehead.

"Yes, indeed!" returned the latter, in a tone of tender sympathy, that vibrated gratefully along Bressant's nerves. "But we know each other, and we are friends —that is enough."

"How strange that I should meet you here, and at such a time!" said Bressant, musingly. And he wondered at himself for feeling glad, instead of sorry, that the encounter should have taken place. But the boy looked up in surprise.

"Strange? No! I'm sure it's the most natural thing in the world. How could it have happened otherwise? Should I have been your friend if I had failed you now?"

"But do you know every thing?" Bressant demanded—less, however, because he doubted that it should be so than as wishing to receive full assurance thereof. "Do you know all that has happened during these last six months, and yet are willing to be with me and speak to me?"

"It has been a terrible time, to be sure," said the boy, sadly; "you should have kept your promise and come to me at your first trouble. It might have saved you from a great deal. And yet I can see how, in the end, it may all be for the best."

Bressant shook his head dejectedly. "I've lost what I never can regain!" said he, "and there are three stains—falsehood, dishonor, and treachery—that never can be washed out."

"Don't say that!" exclaimed the boy, earnestly and hopefully. "God teaches us, you know, not to be in despair, because without hope—hope of becoming better —we can't be really repentant."

"I'm not repentant, certainly—I have no hope," rejoined Bressant. But, even as he spoke the words, he was conscious of that within him which contradicted them. Either the influence of the boy's gentle and trustful spirit, or a new opening of his own inward eyes, had borne in upon him a vision of hitherto unconsidered possibilities.

The boy seemed to read his thoughts. "You do not believe all you say," observed

he. "Remember, it was because you repented of your dishonest purposes toward Abbie, and felt that you had wronged your better self with Cornelia, that you first resolved to give up Sophie, as being no longer worthy of her, and that proved that your love for her at least was noble and unselfish."

"But afterward—afterward I became worse than ever!" exclaimed Bressant, who would not dare to entertain a hope until the full depth of his sin had been brought forward for the pure and clear-sighted eyes of his companion to look upon and judge. "When I found out my shameful secret—when I learned what a thing I was, even with no sin of my own to drag me down—I didn't care what crime I committed! A kind of evil intelligence seemed to come to me. I saw that Cornelia loved me, and that I had her in my power, so I went back to get her, to take her with me to Europe. There was no repentance in that!"

"It would have been a terrible sin!" said the boy, with a slight shudder. "But God prevented you from committing it."

"But I'm a thief still, and a coward, for I sneaked away in the night, fearing to meet Sophie's eyes, and afraid to tell the professor what I was and what I had done. I left all the burden of my sins to be borne by women and an infirm old man, and I am going, with a stolen fortune, to forget I ever had a heart or a soul."

"Are you going, and do you think you can forget?" asked the boy, with a smile.

"Don't you give me up yet?" returned Bressant, trembling. "What is left for me?"

"Why, every thing is left for you!" exclaimed the boy, his smile brightening in his eyes. "You seem to forget that you haven't gone off with any stolen money yet! You must begin at the next station, and devote your whole life—no less will answer—to redeeming yourself. Only be sure not to delay, and not to hesitate."

Bressant looked at his companion, and thought there was something divine and unearthly almost in his manner, and especially in the light that came from his gray eyes.

"As for the stolen money," the boy continued, "all you have to do about that is, to let it alone; it is safe, and will be cared for. But you must go straight to the Parsonage. Your marriage-day is Sunday; be sure you are there by noon. It may be you will not find Sophie there; but she will leave a gift for you, at any rate, and you must be in time to claim it."

"But how can I ask Sophie's forgiveness, and the professor, and Cornelia?"

"Trust wholly in Sophie," returned the other, with an accent of loving reproof, "never doubt her love and forgiveness. You must make your peace with the professor as best you can; but perhaps he has found that to forgive in himself which will enable him to be more charitable to you. As for Cornelia, she and you must recompense each other for the evil you have mutually wrought upon each other."

"How recompense each other?" questioned Bressant, in surprise; "it was not a high nor a true love that we felt for each other; it was a love of the passions and senses."

"Therefore let it be the work of your lives—a work of penitence and punishment—to elevate and refine your love, which has been degraded, until it become worthy of the name of love in its highest sense. You have lowered each other, and now each must help to raise the other up. The work can be delegated to no one else."

"But Sophie," murmured Bressant, pressing his hand over his eyes.

"Sophie is lost to you," responded his companion, with a tremulous sigh. "Perhaps if you had kept yourself pure and true through all temptations, she might have been yours. But you failed, and every failure must bring its loss. The air of such a love as that is too fine for you to breathe now; you could not be happy nor at ease; but do not grieve for her—only mourn for your own deterioration, and strive faithfully, and with constant effort, to make it good. Sophie—she will be happier, and better cared for, than, as your wife, she could ever have been."

"But I shall go back to poverty and disgrace, and perhaps to hatred!"

"The evil you have done will be a clog upon you; but its very weight will assure you that your face is turned toward heaven. Life will never be to you what you dreamed of making it six months ago. You will find it hard and practical, weary and monotonous; but once in a while, perhaps, you will catch a breath of air from heaven itself, and will be refreshed, or a ray of its light will glimmer on your path, and show you where to tread. The end may be a long way off, but you cannot say you have no chance of reaching it."

"Oh, if I only might!" sighed he; "but I've been nothing but a curse, so far, to every one I've known!"

"Not so, either," returned his companion, with a smile so celestial that Bressant knew at last it could be no other than the spirit of Sophie herself that had been speaking to him. "You have shaken Professor Valeyon's confidence in his wisdom and judgment, and the value of his experience; you have made him realize that the more God has to do with education the better; you have broken down Cornelia's self-complacency, and shown her that a beautiful body cannot be safe or happy without a soul to take care of it. Abbie has learned from you that love, and generosity, and self-sacrifice, may all be worthless if they be founded only upon individual grounds, to the exclusion of humanity; and Sophie has been taught, by the love she has felt for you, to be humble and charitable, and to see how easily self-interest and pride may be made to look like zeal for others, and benevolence."

And then Bressant seemed to be conscious that Sophie was bidding him farewell, but he could not see her nor touch her; he was shaken with grief, and yet was filled with a strange kind of happiness, and a feeling of resolute power. Gradually the influence of her presence faded away, and he seemed alone.

Some one shook him by the shoulder. He looked up and saw the conductor; in the background a lady and gentleman waiting to sit down. The car was full of people.

"Come, sir," said the conductor, "you're a pretty big man, but you didn't pay for more than one seat, I reckon. You've been sleeping-here for more than a hundred miles; if you want to sleep any more I expect you'd better get out and go to an hotel."

Bressant removed his feet from the extra seat, and, the conductor having reversed it, the lady and gentleman took their places. As for the boy with the green bag and the blue-spotted handkerchief, he was nowhere to be seen; he must have left the train at a previous station.

The train had stopped, and Bressant, glancing out of the window, saw that they were at some large railway-junction.

"How far are we from New York?" he asked of the conductor, with his hand to his ear to catch the reply.

"Be there in two hours," shouted back that gentleman, in reply.

"When does the next train go through here in the opposite direction?"

"We're just awaiting for one to come along and give us the track—and there she is now," returned the conductor, as he took his departure.

The whistle screamed malevolently, and, with a jerk and a rattle, the car began to move off. Bressant rose suddenly from his seat, walked quickly along the aisle to the door, passed through to the platform, grasped the iron balustrade with one hand, and swung himself lightly to the ground. The whistle screamed again like a disappointed fiend.

"Guess that young man was up late last night," remarked the conductor to the brakeman; "a powerful sound sleep he was in, anyhow."

"Off on a spree to New York, most like," responded the brakeman, tightening his dirty-brown tippet around his neck, "and thought better of it at the last minute."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TILL THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

Her fruitless call for Bressant seemed quite to exhaust Sophie. For a long time afterward she hardly opened her mouth, except to swallow some hot black coffee. The professor sat, for the most part, with his finger on her pulse, his eyes looking more hollow and his forehead more deeply lined than ever before, but with no other signs of anxiety or suffering. Cornelia came in and out—a restless spirit. She awaited Sophie's recovery with no less of dread than of hope. Her life hung, as it were, upon her sister's. The moment in which Sophie recovered her faculties enough to think and speak would be the last that Cornelia could maintain her mask of honor and respectability, for Cornelia knew that Sophie was in possession of her secret; she had been up in her room, and the open window had told the story.

It was a time of awful suspense. Cornelia wished there had been somebody there to talk with; even Bill Reynolds would have been welcome now. He, however, had departed long ago, having bethought himself that his horse was catching its death o' cold, standing out there with no rug on. She was entirely alone; she hardly dared to think, for fear something guilty should be generated in her mind; and, though every moment was pain, without stop or mitigation, every moment was inestimably precious, too; it was so much between her and revelation. She almost counted the seconds as they passed, yet rated them for dragging on so wearily. Every tick of the little ormolu clock marked away a large part of her life, and yet was wearisome to so much of it as remained. Sometimes she debated whether she could not anticipate the end by speaking out at once, of her own free-will; but no, short as her time was, she could not afford to lose the smallest fraction of it—no, she could not.

Bethinking herself that her father would be lost to her after the revelation had taken place, Cornelia felt a consuming desire to enjoy his love to the fullest possible extent during the interval. She wanted him to call her his dear daughter —to hold her hand—to pat her check—to kiss her forehead with his rough, bristly lips—to tell her, in his gruff, kind voice, that she was a solace and a resource to him. The thousand various little ways in which he had testified his

deep-lying affection—she had not noticed them or thought much of them, so long as she felt secure of always commanding them—with what different eyes she looked back upon them now. Oh! if they might all be lavished upon her during these last few remaining hours or minutes. Should she not go and sit down at his knee, and ask him to pet her and caress her?

No; she would not steal the love for which her soul thirsted, even though he whom she robbed should not feel the loss. She had stripped him of much that would doubtless seem to him of far more worth and importance; but, when it came to taking, under false pretenses, a thing so sacred as her father's love, Cornelia drew back, and, spite of her great need, had the grace to make the sacrifice. Let it not be underrated: a woman who sees honor, reputation, and happiness slipping away from her, will struggle hardest of all for the little remaining scrap of love, and only feel wholly forlorn after that, too, has vanished away.

At length, about daybreak or a little after, Sophie spoke, low, but very distinctly:

"I'm going to sleep; don't wake me or disturb me;" and almost immediately sank into a profound slumber—so very profound, indeed, that it rather bore likeness to a trance. Yet, her pulse still beat regularly, though faintly, and at long intervals, and her breath went and came, though with a motion almost imperceptible to the eye.

"Is it a good sign? Will she get well now?" asked Cornelia, as she and her father stood looking down at her.

"She'll never get well, my dear," said Professor Valeyon, very quietly. "Her mind and body both have had too great a shock—far too great. More has happened than we know of yet, I suspect. But we shall hear, we shall hear. Yes, sleep is good for her: it'll make her comfortable. Her nerves will be the quieter."

"O papa! papa! is our little Sophie going to die?" faltered Cornelia; and then she broke down completely. She had not fully grasped the idea until that moment; but the very tone in which her father spoke had the declaration of death in it. It was not his usual deep, gruff, forcible voice, shutting off abruptly at the end of his sentences, and beginning them as sharply. It had lost body and color, was thin, subdued, and monotonous. Professor Valeyon had changed from a lusty winter into a broken, infirm, and marrowless thaw.

He stood and watched her weep for a long while, bending his eyes upon her from

beneath their heavy, impending brows. Heavy and impending they were still, but the vitality—the sort of warm-hearted fierceness—of his look was gone—gone! A young and bitter grief, like Cornelia's, coming at a time of life when the feelings are so tender and their manifestation of pain so poignant—is terrible enough to see, God knows! but the dry-eyed anguish of the old, of those who no longer possess the latent, indefinite, all-powerful encouragement of the future to support them—who can breathe only the lifeless, cheerless air of the past—grief with them does not convulse: it saps, and chills, and crumbles away, without noise or any kind of demonstration. The sight does not terrify or harrow us, but it makes us sick at heart and tinges our thoughts with a gloomy stain, which rather sinks out of sight than is worn away.

"Will you stay and watch with her, my dear?" said the old man, at last. "She'll sleep some hours, I think. I'll take a little sleep myself. Call me when she wakes."

So Cornelia was left alone to watch her sleeping and dying sister. All the morning she sat by the bed, almost as motionless as Sophie herself. Her mind was like a surf-wave that breaks upon the shore, slips back, regathers itself, and undulates on, to break again. Begin where she would, she always ended on that bed, with its well-known face, set around with soft dark hair, always in the same position upon the pillow, which yielded beneath it in always the same creases and curves. By-and-by, wherever she turned, still she saw that face, with the pillow rising around it; and when she shut her eyes, there it was, growing, in the blackness, clearer the more she tried to avert her mind.

It seemed to Cornelia—for time enters involuntarily into our thoughts upon all subjects—that the present order of things must have existed for a far longer period than a single night. How could the events of a few hours wear such deep and uneffaceable channels in human lives? But our souls have a chronology of their own, compared with the vividness and instantaneous workings of which, our bodies bear but a dull and lagging part. Sorrow and joy, which act upon the soul immediately, must labor long ere they can write themselves legibly and permanently upon our faces.

Cornelia fell to wondering, too—as most people under the pressure of grief are prone to do—whether there were any sympathy or any connection between the world and the human beings who live upon it. Her eyes wandered hither and thither about the room, and found it almost startling in its unaltered naturalness. There was the same view of trees, road, and field, out of the window; and the

same snow which had fallen before the tragedy, lay there now. Even in Sophie's face there was no adequate transformation. Indeed, being somewhat reddened and swollen by the reaction from freezing, a stranger might have supposed that she was tolerably stout and glowing with vitality. And Cornelia looked at her own hands, as they lay in her lap: they were as round and shapely as ever; and there, upon the smooth back of one, below the forefinger, was a white scar, where she had cut herself when a little girl. Moreover—Cornelia started as her eyes rested upon it, and the blood rose painfully to her face—there was a dark, discolored bruise, encircling one wrist: Bressant's last gift—an ominous betrothal ring!

Thus several hours passed away, until, at length, Cornelia raised her eyes suddenly, and encountered those of Sophie, fixed upon her.

What a look was that! At all times there was more to be seen in Sophie's eyes than in most women's; but now they were fathomless, and yet never more clear and simple. Cornelia read in them all and more than legions of words could have told her. There were visible the complete grasp and appreciation of Cornelia's and Bressant's crime; the realization of her own position between them; pity and sympathy for the sinners, too, were there; and love, not sisterly, nor quite human, for Sophie had already begun to put on immortality—but such a love as an angel might have felt, knowing the temptation and the punishment. Before that look Cornelia felt her own bitterness and anguish fade away, as a candle is obliterated by the sun. She saw in Sophie so much higher a capacity for feeling, so much profounder and more sublime an emotion, that she was ashamed of her own beside it.

There was at once a comprehensiveness and a particularity in Sophie's gaze which, while humbling and abasing Cornelia, brought a comforting feeling that full justice, upon all points, had been done her in Sophie's mind. There was no lack of charity for her trials and temptations, no vindictiveness. Cornelia felt no impulse to plead her cause, because aware that all she could say would be anticipated in her sister's forgiveness. Nay, she almost wished there had been some bitterness and anger against which to contend. Perhaps it may be so with our souls in their judgment-day; God's mercy may outstrip the poor conjectures we have formed about it. He may see palliation for our sins, which we ourselves had not taken into account.

After a few moments, Sophie beckoned Cornelia to come near, and, as the latter stood beside the bed, took her by the hand and smiled.

"I've been all this time with Bressant," were her first words, spoken faintly, but with a quiet and serene assurance.

Cornelia made no answer; indeed, she could not speak. Strange and incomprehensible as Sophie's assertion was, she did not think of doubting but that in some way it must be true. Sophie continued:

"Before I went to sleep, I prayed God to send my spirit to him; and we have been together. Neelie, he is coming back!"

"Coming back! Sophie, coming back! For what?"

"Don't look so frightened, my darling. He will tell you why when he gets here. That will be to-morrow at noon."

"O Sophie! Sophie! the day and hour of your marriage!"

Cornelia sank upon her knees, and hid her face upon the edge of the bed. But Sophie let her hand wander over her head, with a soothing motion.

"No, dear; that's all over, Neelie dear, you know. Not the day and hour of my marriage any more. Neelie, I want to ask you something."

Cornelia lifted her head from the bedside; then, divining from Sophie's face, ere it was spoken, what her question was to be, faintness and terror seized upon her, and she clasped her hands over her eyes. The unexpectedness of Sophie's first awakening, and her subsequent strange speech concerning Bressant, had driven from Cornelia's head the matter which had monopolized her thoughts and fears before; and it now recurred to her with an effect almost as overwhelming as if the idea had been a new one.

"I couldn't do it," said she, huskily; "it seemed worse than killing myself. I believe it would have killed me to have stood before him, with his eyes upon my face, and have told him—told him—"

"Yes, dear, yes; it must not be you, Neelie. How is he? Does he seem well and cheerful?"

"I don't know—I've hardly dared to look at him, or speak to him. He's been lying down, I believe, since you went to sleep."

"Ask him to come to me," Sophie said, after a pause. "I will speak to him; I'll tell him; it will be best that I should do it; and you will trust me?"

"O Sophie!" was all that Cornelia could say; but it expressed at least the fullness of her heart. What must be the love and tenderness that could undertake such a task as this! How great the trial for a nature delicate and shrinking, like Sophie's, to bear witness before their own father of her sister's sin against herself! But Sophie was as brave as she was feminine and delicate.

Cornelia's gratitude, however, was mingled still with a despairing agony, and her life seemed to be escaping from her. If this cup might but pass!

"He will not be to me as you are, Sophie. He will never look at me again."

"Do not fear," replied Sophie, with her faint but incomparable smile. "If I can forgive you, surely he must. Go and call him, and then stay in your room till he comes to you."

But Cornelia, as she left the room upon her heavy errand, shook her head, and drew a shivering breath. She knew her father would look upon the matter more from the world's point of view than Sophie did; and it was a curious example of the strength of the material element in Cornelia, that she more feared to meet her father's eye, whom she felt would understand that aspect of her disgrace, than Sophie's, who probably had a more acute and certainly a more exclusive perception of her spiritual accountability.

As she was beginning to mount the stairs, she met her father already on his way down. He noticed the wretchedness depicted on her face, and, supposing it to be all on Sophie's account, did what he could to comfort her.

"Don't despair, my child," quoth the old man, laying his hands on her shoulders. "Nothing is so hopeless that we mayn't trust in God to better it."

The words seemed to apply so felicitously that Cornelia tried to think it a good omen sent from heaven. Then he bent over and kissed her forehead—perhaps before she was aware, perhaps not; but she took it, praying that it might prove a blessing to her hereafter, even if it were the last she were destined to receive. She passed on into her own room without speaking, and sat down there to wait.

To wait! and for what, and how long? till her father came to her? But suppose he were not to come? She would stay there, perhaps, an hour—that would be long enough—yes, too long; but still let it be an hour; and then, he not coming, what should she do? Go to him? No, she would never dare, never presume to do that. What then? steal down-stairs, a guilty, hateful thing, softly open the door which

would never open to her again, and run away through the snow? The world would be before her, but snow and ice would but faintly symbolize its coldness. Was it likely that heaven itself would yield her entrance after her father's door had closed upon her?

But would not Sophie prevail, and turn his heart to forgiveness? Oh! but why was it not probable, and more than probable, that the argument would result the other way?—that her father, by a clear and stern representation of the real heinousness of her offense, would convince Sophie that Cornelia was entitled to nothing but condemnation? There would be nothing to urge against the justice of such a sentence—nothing.

Perhaps Sophie's courage might fail her, or her strength give way, leaving the ugly story but half told, and then her father would come to her to learn the rest. What should she do then? How much more terrible to be obliged to tell him then, after having made up her mind that her sister was to take the burden off her shoulders, than it would have been before any such resource had presented itself! How much more awful to meet her father when aroused by suspicion and anger, and perhaps loathing, than to begin her confession while his face was as she had always seen it, when turned toward her—loving and tender!

She could not sit still, at last, but rose up from her chair to walk the room—not from the old, restless energy, which needed physical exercise to keep it within bounds, for Cornelia was now white and faint, from exhaustion of mind and body, but from the tumult of pervading fear and delusive hope—the attention strained to catch some sound from below, and the dread lest it should never come. As the suspense grew more painful, the rapidity of her walk increased.

She expected now, every moment, to catch herself shrieking aloud, or performing some mad action or other. How long had she been up there already? Was it an hour yet? It must be an hour. Oh! it was more. Was he never coming, then?—never? O God! was there no forgiveness? Cornelia's walk had gone on quickening until it was almost a run. She was circling round and round the room, like a wild animal—was growing dizzy and exhausted, but was afraid to stop: better her body should give way than her mind—and, all the time, her ears were alert for the slightest sound.

She halted, wild-eyed and unsteady on her feet, her hand trembling at her lips. A step in the passage below, ascending the stairs slowly and heavily. Oh! did it come in mercy? She tried to draw a meaning from the sound—then dared not

trust her inference. The steps had gained the landing now—were advancing along the entry toward her door. Did they bear a load of sorrow only, or of hate and condemnation likewise?

They paused at her threshold—then there was a knock, thrice repeated—not loud, nor rapid, nor regular, nor precise—rather as one heart might knock for admittance to another. Cornelia tried to say "Come in," or to open the door, but could neither speak nor move. Iron bands seemed to be clasped around all her faculties of motion. Would he go away and leave her?

The door opened, turning slowly and hesitatingly on its hinges, until it disclosed her father's venerable figure. His limbs seemed weak; his shoulders drooped; but Cornelia looked only at his face. His eyes were deep and compassionate. He held out his arms, which shook slightly but continually: "Come, my daughter," said he.

She was his daughter still! She cried out, and, walking hurriedly to him, laid herself close against him, and he hugged her closer yet—poor, miserable, erring creature though she was.

So the three were reunited—and not superficially, but more intimately and indissolubly than ever before. They would not be apart, but remained together in Bressant's room—Sophie on the bed, with an expression of divine contentment on her face, Cornelia and the professor sitting near.

"Papa," said Sophie, as the afternoon came on, "I want to make my will."

Cornelia caught her breath sharply, and, turning away her face, covered her eyes with her hand. Professor Valeyon's gray eyebrows gathered for a moment—then he steadied himself, and said, "Well, my dear."

It was not a very intricate matter. The various little bequests were soon made and noted down as she requested. After all was disposed of, there was a little pause.

"Neelie, dear," then said Sophie, turning her eyes full upon her, "I bequeath my love to you."

Cornelia perceived the hidden significance in the words, and blushed so deep and warm that the tears were dried upon her cheeks. Sophie went on, before she could make any reply:

"And I have something left for you, too, papa, though I know no one needs it

less than you. But you may be called on for a great deal, so I bequeath you my charity. I haven't had it so very long myself."

The professor bowed his head, and, the will being complete, he took off his spectacles, and wiped them with his handkerchief.

"I was telling Neelie this morning, papa," resumed Sophie, after a while, "that I had been—that I'd had a dream that I was with Bressant; and I feel sure—though I suppose you'll think it nothing but a sick fancy of mine—that he will be here to-morrow noon."

The professor looked at Sophie, startled and anxious; but her appearance was so composed, straight-forward, and full of faith, he could not think her wandering.

"Do you know where he has been, my dear? or where he is now?" asked he, gently.

"I cannot tell that. I knew and understood a great deal in my dream that I cannot remember now," she answered. "I only know that he will be here to-morrow, and, papa, and you, Neelie, whether you believe as I do or not, I want you to get ready to receive him. Let it be in this dear old room—I lying here as I am now, and you sitting so beside me. We'll wait for him to-morrow morning until twelve o'clock. If I should die before then, let my body stay here until noon, for I want him to see my face when he comes, so that he'll always remember how happy I looked. But if, after that little clock on the mantel-piece strikes twelve, still he isn't here, then you may do with me as you will. I shall not know nor mind."

After this little speech, Sophie became very silent, being, in truth, too weak and worn out to speak or move, save at long, and ever longer, intervals. All that night, Professor Valeyon carried an aching and mistrustful heart; but Cornelia had a red spot in either cheek, never fading nor shifting. Sophie appeared to wander several times, murmuring something about darkness, and snow, and deadly weariness. A snow-storm had set in toward evening, and lasted until daybreak, a circumstance which seemed to cause Sophie considerable anxiety.

By ten o'clock all the preparations were made according to Sophie's wish, and there was nothing to do but to wait. Cornelia sat brooding with folded arms, and the feverish spots on her cheeks. Occasionally she restlessly varied her position, seldom allowing her eyes to stray around the room, however, save that once in a while they sought Sophie's colorless, ethereal face, as a thirsty soul the water. The professor stood much at the window, and once or twice he imagined he

caught a glimpse, somewhere down the road, of a darkly-clad woman's figure; but she never came nearer, and he decided it must be a hallucination of his fading eyes.

Eleven o'clock struck from the little ormolu timepiece. A few moments afterward Sophie stirred slightly as she lay, and the professor and Cornelia listened breathlessly for what she would say.

She lifted her heavy lids, and turned her eyes, a little dimmer now than heretofore, but steady and confident, first on her father, then on her sister.

"Till noon—remember!" said she.

Nothing more was heard, after that, but the hasty ticking of the little ormolu clock, as its hands traveled steadily around the circle.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE HOUR AND THE MAN.

Bressant jumped on to the platform of the newly-arrived train. The cars were pretty full; but, coming at last to a vacant seat by the side of a clean-shaven gentleman with a straight, hard mouth, and a glossy-brown wig, curling smoothly inward all around the edge, he dropped into it without ceremony.

The train left the depot and hurried away over the road which Bressant had just traversed in the opposite direction. He sat with his arms folded, appearing to take no notice of any thing, and his neighbor with the wig read the latest edition of a New-York paper with stern attention, occasionally altering the position of his stove-pipe hat on his head. By-and-by, the conductor, a small, precise man, with a dark-blue coat, cap to match, a neatly-trimmed sandy beard, shaved upper lip, and an utterance as distinct and clippy as the holes his steel punch made in the tickets, came along upon his rounds.

Bressant put his hands into his pockets, and discovered, with some consternation, that he had but a comparatively small amount of money left; his newly-accepted poverty was certainly losing no time in making itself felt. However, such as it was, he handed it to the conductor, and inquired how near it would take him to his proposed destination.

"Eighty-one miles, rail," responded the official, as he took and clipped the ticket of the gentleman with the newspaper; "comes shorter by road, seventy-four to seventy-five," and he proceeded down the aisle, snapping up tickets on one side or the other, as a hen does grains of corn.

Bressant covered his eyes with his hand, and amused himself by performing a little sum in mental arithmetic. The amount of money he had given the conductor represented a distance which it would take a certain length of time—say four hours—to traverse. It was now four o'clock in the afternoon, and consequently would be eight before that distance was accomplished. From eight o'clock Saturday night, till twelve o'clock Sunday noon, was sixteen hours, and in sixteen hours he must travel, on foot, and through the snow, seventy-five miles of unknown roads.

"Four and a half miles an hour, and nothing to eat since breakfast," said Bressant to himself. He took his hand from his eyes, and passed it down his face to his beard, which he twisted and turned unmercifully. "It's lucky it isn't any more," remarked he, philosophically.

In the course of half an hour or so, the straight-mouthed gentleman, having finished the last column of his paper, folded it up into the smallest possible compass, and handed it politely to Bressant. The latter accepted it abstractedly, and, opening one fold, read the first paragraph which presented itself, his interest increasing as he proceeded. It was in the column of latest local news, and, after bewailing, in choice language, the frightful prevalence, even among the highest aristocracy, of opium-eating and kindred indulgences, it went on to particularize the sad case of an esteemed lady, of great wealth and high connections, widow of a scion of one of our oldest families, who, having unwisely yielded herself, during many years past, to an inordinate use of morphine, as an antidote to nervous disorder, had, on the previous evening, in a temporary paroxysm of madness, succeeded in taking her own life. "No other cause can be assigned for the rash act," pursued the paragraph, "Mrs. V—— being, in all other respects than as regarded this unfortunate weakness, blessed beyond the average. She was at the moment, it is understood, contemplating immediate departure for a lengthened sojourn in Europe, taking with her an only son, a young man of fine attainments, and a recent graduate of one of our first theological seminaries, who desired to seek, among the European capitals, at once for the recreation and culture, which the arduous preparation for and the enlightened prosecution of his exalted calling rendered respectively necessary and desirable. It is not known whether this sad casualty will cause him to relinquish his design."

After finishing this paragraph, which discreetly suppressed any further personality than to remark that the deceased bore one of those quaint old Knickerbocker surnames which are in New York synonymous with *haut ton* and gentility, Bressant folded up the paper, and, resting his arms upon the back of the seat in front of him, made them a pillow for his forehead. This position he maintained so long, that his neighbor with the wig came to the conclusion that he must be either asleep or drunk; and, by way of arriving at some solution of the question, abstracted from his hand the rolled-up newspaper which protruded out of it. At this the young man roused himself, and presently turned to him of the wig, and thanked him for his loan with an earnestness which appeared to him, under the circumstances, rather uncalled for. He began to doubt the prudence of sitting next to so large a man, of so singular a behavior, and took advantage of

the next vacancy that occurred to shift his quarters, carrying the newspaper with him.

Darkness had fallen, and the lighted interior of the crowded car had duplicated itself, through the medium of the glass window-pane, upon the black vacancy without, long before the train halted at the station which marked the boundary of Bressant's riding privilege. He got out, and was immediately smitten in the face by the cold, impalpable fingers of a thick falling snow-storm.

A bobbing lantern, carried by an invisible man, was all that came to welcome him. He walked into the waiting-room, which was lighted by a lamp with a dirty tin reflector behind it, and was furnished with a few well-worn chairs, painted gray, and polished by use; a couple of spittoons, and a pyramidal stove containing the ashes of the day's fire. The plaster walls were ornamented by many-colored railway cards, and by a fly-spotted and dusty map. A clock was fastened over the door.

He turned to the man with the lantern (who was standing in the door-way, looking as if he rather suspected Bressant contemplated stealing some of the valuables of the place), and asked him whether he could tell him the nearest road to his destination. After considerable questioning and delay, the man finally announced his entire ignorance in the matter; and Bressant was just about to make him a sharp rejoinder, when his eyes happened to fall upon the map. He stepped up to it, and found it to be of the State in which they were.

By the aid of the lantern, and a good deal of dusting, he finally discovered the spot in which he then stood, and managed to trace out a doubtful line of road, between that and the place whither he was bound. There seemed to be few cross-roads, however, and such as there were he rapidly noted in his memory. In one place the road ran off in a kind of loop, to pass through an outlying village, and, by making a cross-cut at that point, he might save himself five or six miles. But since, on calculation, he found it would be at least six o'clock in the morning before he got to the loop in question, he decided not to risk abandoning, in the state he would then be in, the beaten track for any such problematical advantage.

As he left the dirty waiting-room, and the invisible man with the lantern, the clock over the door marked five minutes past eight. Although it was more than twelve hours since he had eaten food, he was not (owing to having passed so much of the day in sleep) so hungry as he might have been. Nevertheless, appreciating what a task was before him, he would have given any thing that he

could call his own for a good meal before starting. But he had handed over his last cent to the conductor, and now, time pressed him.

He was young and strong, and no one was more tireless in walking than he; his joints were firm as iron, yet supple and springy; his muscles tough and lean, of immense enduring power; his lungs were deep, and he breathed easily through his nostrils; his gait was long and elastic; but, had he been twice the man he was, the journey upon which he was now started would have been no child's play; being what he was, it was nothing less than a hazard of life and death. But Bressant seemed to think the peril quite worth encountering, in consideration of the chance of arriving by noon next day at the Parsonage-door; and, for the first time in his life, he felt grateful to God for the mighty bones and sinews he had given him. This was the time to use them, if they were paralyzed forever after!

Having gained the road, he set off with a long, swinging stride, such as the Indians use, half-way between a walk and a run. As long as he could keep that up, he would be making six miles an hour—a mile and a half over the necessary rate; but he well knew he would need all his surplus before morning broke, and was determined to make it as large as possible before want of food weakened him. The road, except for the snow, was favorable for speed, being nearly level and tolerably straight; but the flakes flying into his eyes made it impossible to be sure of his footing; and the various ruts and inequalities, common to all American turn-pikes, and aggravated by the half-frozen snow covering, caused him several slips and stumbles; trifling matters enough at other times, but now, when every unnecessary breath and false step would count up terribly, in the end, quite sufficiently serious.

The vigorous motion, however, sent the blood singing through his body from head to foot. He felt exhilarated and braced. The driving snow melted pleasantly on his warm face, and ran down into his thickly-curling beard, crusted over with frozen breath and sleet. The cold air came long and refreshingly into his wide-open nostrils. He took off his fur cap and threw open the breast of his pea-jacket. His exuberant physical sensations wrought a corresponding effect upon his previous mental gloom: he found himself looking to the future with dawnings of a new hope and cheerfulness. At no time in his life had he felt himself existing through so wide and full a range. He was a man now in full breadth and height, and, as he looked back upon his previous life, he could trace, as from a lofty vantage-ground, the plan and bearing of his former thoughts and deeds.

He remarked the wide discrepancies between what he had proposed and what he

had accomplished. How insignificant circumstances had effected momentous results! He saw how, whenever failure and dishonor had filtered in, it was where weakness, self-indulgence, or untruthfulness, had left an opening. He saw how one wrong had been a sure and easy path to another, until in the end he had groveled face downward in the mire.

His mind turned on the two women between whom his path had lain: how highly he had aimed, and how low he had fallen! How enviable would have been his fate had he consistently kept to either! for each had been peerless in her way. How despicable was his position having greedily grasped at both! And now the one was dying, and the other degraded like himself. A worthy record that!

One was dying: yes, that he knew, and felt that upon his speed and resolution did it depend whether in this world he might hope for the blessing of forgiveness from her lips. The thought urged him on, like an ever-fretting spur. He butted yet more swiftly into the darkness and against the reeling snow-flakes, and the road lay in steadily-lengthening stretches behind him. She was waiting for him—that he felt—and was striving, with all her kind and loving might, to hold herself in life until he came. God help him, then, to be there at the appointed hour!

And Cornelia? Of her he ventured not much to think. She was, perchance, the key whereby, for her and for himself, this dark riddle should hereafter be resolved. As Adam might labor for redemption only with his sin about his neck, so they, out of the fabric woven of their disgrace, must seek to fashion garments in which worthily to appear at heaven's gates.

As his mind rambled thus, he came to the outskirts of a long, wooded tract, which—for the map, as he had seen it at the railway-station, was clearly marked out in his memory, from the beginning to the end of his route—he knew was upward of ten miles from his starting-point; and, as near as he could judge (his watch, lying at the bottom of the fountain-basin in the Parsonage-garden, had never been replaced), it must be rather more than half-past nine o'clock. He maintained the same long, swinging trot, as unfalteringly as ever, though, perhaps, a trifle less springily than at first. The footing was deep and heavy, the thick fir-trees having kept the snow from being blown off the road, as in more exposed situations. Bressant was wet to his skin, for the temperature had risen, and the flakes melted as fast as they fell. Most of his glow and vigor remained, however, and he was no whit disheartened or doubtful. But the sky bent darkly over him, and the tall trees shut out all but a strip even of the scanty light that came thence. The moon would not rise for hours yet.

Another hour passed on over the toiling man. He had now begun to get among hills, and his course was always either up or down. This was in some degree a relief, affording change of movement to his muscles; but it probably lost him some little time, and certainly gave plenty of exercise to his lungs. Something of the superabundant warmth was leaving his body. He replaced his cap and buttoned up his jacket. What would not half a dozen biscuits have been worth to him now!

On and on. The hills opened, and in the inclosure they made lay a small village, with its white meeting-house and clustering dwellings. The windows were many of them alight: the people were sitting up for the new year. Bressant wondered whether it would dawn for any of them so strangely as for him! As he hurried along the empty street, a sign over one of the doors, barely discernible in the darkness, attracted his attention. He paused close to it, and made out the words, "West India goods and groceries;" and at once his fancy reveled in the savory eatables stored beyond his reach. What cheese and butter, what hams, biscuits, and apples; what salted codfish and strings of sausages, were there! Had the store been open, he would have been tempted to rush in, knock the salesman senseless, and make off with whatever he could carry. Strange thoughts these for a man bound on an errand of life and death! But hunger is no respecter of occasions, however inopportune, or of emotions, however incongruous. Bressant passed on. He was now twenty-five miles on his way, and as he came beneath the meeting-house clock, it struck twelve: the new year had come! To Bressant it brought only the knowledge that he was seven miles ahead of his time; and this served in some measure to counteract the depression caused by his hunger. But on—on! There were still fifty miles to go!

The village vanished, like the old year, behind him. He was now crossing a lofty plateau, over which swept the wind, strong and chilly. He began to feel the cold now, and his wet clothes, once in a while, made him shiver. His physical exhilaration had left him, and his long trot, save where a downward slope favored him, had gradually sobered into a quick walk. His shoes, soaked with snow-water, began to chafe his feet. But he knew better than to stop for rest: the only safety lay in keeping steadily on; and on he kept, his mouth set grimly, and his head a little bent forward.

From the top of the plateau was a gradual descent of some five miles; and here Bressant again fell into a run, reaching the bottom, without extraordinary exertion, in a trifle less than three-quarters of an hour. He felt the need of his watch very keenly now; it would have been a great assistance and

encouragement to know just how much he was doing. He could no longer afford to waste any strength, even in making calculations; he was fully occupied in putting one foot before another.

How dark, and cold, and blankly disheartening it was! He had now completed fifty miles, though he knew it not; but it seemed to him as if he had been full a hundred. His feet, rubbed raw, and stiffened by the cold, were beginning to retard his pace alarmingly. His face and lips were pale; a sensation of emptiness and chilled vitality pervaded his body. It had come down to grim hard work; every step was a conscious effort; and yet he had no time to spare.

The storm had lightened considerably, but the young man's eyes were dull and heavy; it was a constant struggle to keep awake. He scarcely attended to the road, but plunged along, careless of where he trod. Suddenly, however, and for the first time since starting, he came to a dead halt, and, after gazing about him a moment, cried out in dismay. And well he might, for he stood in a field, with no sign anywhere of road or path! In his sleepy inattention, he had lost his way and wandered he knew not whither.

At first he was too much paralyzed by this discovery to think or act. He threw himself face downward on the snow, and lay like a log. God was against him! How could he go on? Ah, how sweet felt that cold bed! Let him lie there in peace, to move no more! Surely he had done his best; who could blame him for a failure beyond his power to avert? The darkness would pass over him, and leave him stretched there motionless; the first light of morning would mark the dark outlines of his prostrate figure, and he would not turn to greet it. Daylight would succeed, the sun would climb the sky and shine down upon him warmly; but he would be insensible as to the darkness or the cold. Twilight would settle over the field again, and night, following, would find him as she had left him, prone upon his face, with outstretched arms. For he would be dead—dead—dead—and at rest!

But the end had not yet come. Ere he had quite sunk into insensibility, he was conscious of a feeling within him, as if some one were pulling—pulling at his heart, with a force benign and loving, yet strong as death itself. He staggered to his feet, and, stumbling as he walked, set his face against the cold and cheerless sky once more. The pulling at his heart-strings seemed to draw him steadily in one certain direction; he traversed acres of field and pasture-land blind and insensible to every thing save this mysterious guide. In his weak and exhausted state his spiritual perceptions were doubtless less incumbered than when he was in full possession of his strength. So he was drawn undeviatingly on and on, until, unexpectedly, he found himself in a road again. Then he recognized that it was Sophie's spirit which had rescued him from death and failure. He had unconsciously made the short cut across the fields, which he had noticed and decided not to attempt when examining the map. He had saved five miles in distance, equal to fully an hour in time. The thought inspired him anew, and gave him further strength. With such divine encouragement, he could falter and hesitate no more.

Morning began to break dully over the sullen clouds as he resumed in earnest his weary journey. Each yard of ground passed was now a battle gained—every breath drawn a sobbing groan. Hills and dales rose successively before him, clothed in the dead-white snow that had become a nightmare to his darkening sight. He reeled sometimes as he walked, dizzy from lack of sleep; a thousand fantastic fancies flitted through his hot brain; a deadly lethargy began once more to creep over his senses, but he gnawed the flesh of his lips to keep back consciousness. And still, when will grew powerless, he felt the mysterious strain upon his heart.

Only ten miles more! But they seemed by far the longer part of the whole way. He was now within the range of his walks while living at the boarding-house, and could see in his mind every slope and ascent, every curve and angle, that lay between him and the Parsonage-door; and he felt the weight of every hill upon his shoulders. At the risk of falling, he stooped, snatched a handful of snow, and put it inside his cap, so that it lay, cold and refreshing, upon his brain. Then he took a handful in either hand, and so kept on.

The minutes grew into hours; the hours seemed to become days; but there, at last, the well-known village lay! How reposeful and unconcerned the houses looked, as if there were no such thing in the world as effort, despair, or victory! As he came near, Bressant tried to nerve himself, to walk erect and steady, to clear and concentrate his swimming sight and confused head. He dreaded to meet the village-people, to have them come staring and questioning about him, whispering and laughing among themselves, and asking one another what was the matter with the man who was engaged to the minister's daughter on this his wedding-morning. Just then he felt a gentle pulling at his heart!

Presently he was in the village. There was a disjointed vision of faces, some of which he knew, floating around him. Once in a while he caught the sound of a voice through the humming in his ears. Were they offering him assistance? warning him? calling to him? He knew not, nor cared. He passed on, feebly but desperately. He saw the clock on the church-steeple mark half-past eleven; still in time, thank God! but no time to lose.

How well he knew the road, over which he was now groping his staggering and uncertain way! In how many moods he had walked it, actuated by how many different passions and impulses! And now he was as one dead, whose body is dragged strangely onward by some invincibly-determined will. A great fear suddenly seized upon him that here, upon this very last mile of all the weary ones he had trod since the previous night-fall, he was going to sink down, and give up his life and his attempt at the same moment. Oh, Heaven help him to the end! O Sophie, let not the tender strain upon his heart relax!

For nothing less than that can save him now! His eyes see no longer; his feet stumble in ignorance; he sleeps, and dreams of events which happened—was it long ago?—upon this road. Here he met and talked with Cornelia, that autumn day. Back there, they paused on the brow of the hill, one moonlight night, was that so long ago, too? Here, some time in the past, he had found a lifeless body in the snow, clad in a bridal dress; here, he had caught a runaway horse by the

head, and—

He fell headlong to the ground. The shock partly awoke him. He struggled up to his knees—was there any one assisting him?—another struggle—he was on his feet. Right before him lay the house—the old Parsonage; there were the gate, the path, the porch. He made a final effort—it forced a deadly sweat from his forehead—and still there was a vague sense of being supported and directed by some one—he could not stop to see or question who; but, had it not been for that support, he must have failed. The gate opened, with its old creak and rattle, before him; a hand he saw not held it till he passed through.

Now, at the moment when he had fallen in the road, of the three who had all along been awaiting him within—of these three, two only were left. But, so quietly had the third departed, the others perceived not that she was gone. The features, which remained, wore an expression of angelic happiness. It was as she had wished.

At the same moment, too, through a rift in the dull sky, a little gleam of sunshine —the first of that gray day—descended, and rested upon Bressant. It accompanied him to the gate, and, still keeping close to him, slipped up the path between the trees, and even followed him on to the porch, where it brightened about him, as he put his hand to the latch. Was it a symbol of some loving spirit, newly set free from its mortal body, come to watch over him for evermore?

An old woman, who stood without clutching the palings of the gate, saw Bressant open the door and pass inward, and the sunshine entered with him. The door was left ajar—might she not enter too? Just then, a little ormolu clock, on the mantel-piece inside, gave a preliminary whirr, and hastily struck the hour of noon. As if in answer to a signal, the sun smiled broadly forth, and quite transfigured the weather-beaten old Parsonage.

---

http://www.gutenberg.org/1/5/5/9/15596

Updated editions will replace the previous one--the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from public domain print editions means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for the eBooks, unless you receive specific permission. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the rules is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. They may be modified and printed and given away--you may do practically ANYTHING with public domain eBooks. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg-tm License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg-tm work in a format other than "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg-tm web site (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg-tm License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg-tm works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works provided that

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg-tm works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg-tm License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from both the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and Michael Hart, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread public domain works in creating the Project Gutenberg-tm collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH F3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS,' WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTIBILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg-tm work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg-tm work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg-tm

Project Gutenberg-tm is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need, is critical to reaching Project Gutenberg-tm's goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg-tm collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg-tm and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation web page at http://www.gutenberg.org/fundraising/pglaf.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's principal office is located at 4557 Melan Dr. S. Fairbanks, AK, 99712., but its volunteers and employees are scattered throughout numerous locations. Its business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887, email business@pglaf.org. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's web site and official page at http://www.gutenberg.org/about/contact

For additional contact information:

Dr. Gregory B. Newby
Chief Executive and Director
gbnewby@pglaf.org

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg-tm depends upon and cannot survive without wide spread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit http://www.gutenberg.org/fundraising/pglaf

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we

have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg Web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit:
http://www.gutenberg.org/fundraising/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works.

Professor Michael S. Hart is the originator of the Project Gutenberg-tm concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For thirty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as Public Domain in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Each eBook is in a subdirectory of the same number as the eBook's eBook number, often in several formats including plain vanilla ASCII, compressed (zipped), HTML and others.

Corrected EDITIONS of our eBooks replace the old file and take over the old filename and etext number. The replaced older file is renamed. VERSIONS based on separate sources are treated as new eBooks receiving new filenames and etext numbers.

Most people start at our Web site which has the main PG search facility:

http://www.gutenberg.org
This Web site includes information about Project Gutenberg-tm, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.

EBooks posted prior to November 2003, with eBook numbers BELOW #10000, are filed in directories based on their release date. If you want to download any of these eBooks directly, rather than using the regular search system you may utilize the following addresses and just download by the etext year.

http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext06/
    (Or /etext 05, 04, 03, 02, 01, 00, 99,
     98, 97, 96, 95, 94, 93, 92, 92, 91 or 90)

EBooks posted since November 2003, with etext numbers OVER #10000, are filed in a different way. The year of a release date is no longer part of the directory path. The path is based on the etext number (which is identical to the filename). The path to the file is made up of single digits corresponding to all but the last digit in the filename. For example an eBook of filename 10234 would be found at:

http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/0/2/3/10234