THE

HAVEN UNDER THE HILL.

A Novel.

BY

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THE HAVEN UNDER THE HILL.

CHAPTER I.

'EYES LOOKING UPWARD THAT FAIL.'

'Day and night
I worked my rhythmic thought, and furrowed up
Both watch and slumber with long lines of life
Which did not suit their season. The rose fell
From either cheek, my eyes globed luminous
Through orbits of blue shadow, and my pulse
Would shudder along the purple, veined wrist,
Like a shot bird.'

MRS. BROWNING.

THE spring passed on into summer—a hot, dry, pleasant summer. Hild's Haven shook off its wintry deadness; the usual stream of visitors poured into the place; and among them came an old college-friend of the Rector's, Mr. Harvey Taunton.

One hot August afternoon the two men walked up and down by the edge of the cliff, and talked, or were silent, just as their mood was. Their friendship was deep enough for that.

Harvey Taunton was a well-known man in that world of letters through which there is no beaten path but that which each one wears for himself. Mr. Taunton had made his way after years of sore fighting—fighting with poverty, with obscurity, with an indifferent public, with reluctant editors and publishers. He had written dramas, histories, poems, essays, novels, criticisms —in fact, his efforts had been made in directions almost as varied as those of Lord Lytton himself. But he had finally come to know that history was his true vocation ; and for some years past the world had heartily recognised his talent, and his fitness for the especial work to which he had devoted himself, with such earnest endurance of its pains and its labours.

He was over fifty years of age now, but he looked at least ten years older than he was. His scant grey hair, his worn face, his premature stoop, told all too plainly of that fierce fight through which he had passed on his way to distinction.

He had a book in his hand, a tiny volume of poems bound in grey-green cloth ; and as he

sauntered with Mr. Thesiger round by the cliff-top ways that led to the Rectory, he spoke of the little volume and its reception. He had heard of the book before leaving London, but he had not yet seen the author. He was to see her to-day; she was coming to the Rectory gardens for a cup of five o'clock tea.

Another friend of hers, a gentleman who was staying at the Victoria Hotel on the Cliff, had also promised to come for tea and tennis. The Miss Thesigers had pronounced Mr. Lancelot Wilderslowe to be the best tennis-player they had ever encountered.

He had only been a few days at Hild's Haven, and Hild's Haven being a place to which everybody came, there was no need for him to give special reasons for his coming, if even there had been anyone to require special reasons from him. The Rector had called upon him the very day after his name appeared in the list of visitors; and, for Lady Anna's sake, Mrs. Thesiger had received him warmly at the Rectory.

The Miss Thesigers were none of them behind their mother in the cordiality with which they came quickly to greet a young man who played tennis so well, and who looked so charming in his somewhat elaborate flannel costume. Before that August week was over Lancelot was quite as

much at home on the lawn at the Rectory as on the lawn at St. Dunstan's; and he pronounced the former to be inexpressibly the pleasanter place.

He was there, lying lazily under a copper-beech-tree, and being waited upon by the willing and admiring Juliet. The others were sitting near; Mrs. Thesiger was drawing under the veranda; the Rector and Mr. Taunton were now sauntering up and down under the shade of the trees in the avenue.

'You agree with me, then?' the Rector had said, when the small volume was returned to him. 'You agree with me that the poems have promise in them?'

Harvey Taunton hesitated a moment, as his way was; and his manner of speaking hardly agreed with the generosity of his words.

'There is more than mere promise,' he said brusquely. 'Had I come across the book without knowing anything of it, I should never have judged it to be by a 'prentice hand.'

'I am glad to hear you say that,' said Mr. Thesiger heartily; 'I am very glad. I wanted to interest you in Miss Gower; to ask you to help her if you can, in any way.'

'Help her!' said Mr. Taunton. 'That would be difficult now that she has got her poems

written, published, reviewed, and apparently fairly floated on the surface of the reading world—nay, below the mere surface, without help from anyone. I think it wonderful, the way in which she has scored her first run off her own bat. . . . If I help her at all it will be by advice which she will certainly not follow unless fate drive her to it. But we shall see. . . . You tell me she is not rich?'

There was a slight shadow upon the Rector's face as he replied.

'I fear she is poorer than we know,' he said. 'That is my one reason for wishing to do something to make the book a pecuniary success, if possible.'

Mr. Taunton smiled.

'*How* impossible it is, I fear I could hardly make you believe,' he said. 'She will be fortunate indeed if she is not considerably out of pocket.'

'And yet you say the poems are good.'

'They are very good. There are faults in them, of course, technical and other; but they have that true poetic quality which one writer will name individuality, another sentiment, while a third will attribute the charm to some virtue of style. To my thinking her secret lies in her moods, the mood in which a poem has been

written being certainly communicated to the reader if the expression be forcible enough, and felicitous enough to convey it. To me that is the most striking difference between the two great poets of the time, Tennyson and Browning.

'Browning is the greater, greater far as a thinker; and has more of the poet's true force and fire.

'But I am constrained to admit, half against my will, that Tennyson has in a greater degree the power of entering into a certain finely poetic mood, and taking you into it with him. And he can do it in marvellously little space. Take that brief poem, "St. Agnes' Eve," as an instance of what I mean. Nothing can be simpler; there is no straining after effort; and yet how completely one is carried into the atmosphere of that convent where the dying girl is laid! You see the very shadow with its sharp slant line creeping over the snow that is upon the roof; you feel the chill of the frosty moonlit and starlit night; and then you enter; and if you never felt before what the ecstasy of a dying saint might be you feel it now,—pure, intelligible, spiritual ecstasy. And all that is done in thirty-six brief lines.'

The two men went on talking a little while; Gladwyn and Juliet went on trying to amuse Mr.

Wilderslowe; Mrs. Thesiger went on drawing, wondering that Dorigen should be a little late; while Dorigen herself was hurrying up the lane, sorry to be behind the time, but sorrier far to leave old Than, whom she had stayed to comfort a little on her way. He was alone now, and very lonely, since his cousin Leenock had gone away so suddenly one night in the spring; and Dorigen feared much that his mind might fail him because of this drear loneliness.

'I would have come to live with you, Uncle Than, if I might,' she said, 'but my place is with —*with them;* and I must not leave it.'

And the old man only shook his head and wept. 'It's no place nohow for her,' he said to himself when she had gone. 'She looks thinner and whiter every day; an' that Crainie Cleminshaw gets fatter and fatter. . . . Eh, but it is a mystery! It is a mystery how they live at all!'

Old Than was right; it was indeed mysterious; and no one knew this better than Dorigen herself. True, the rent of the house was very low, twice over a magazine poem written between dark and dawn had brought enough to satisfy the landlord when the quarter-day came. But this was one of the least of the household expenses. Food of a certain kind had not yet been actually wanting; and as for dress, Dorigen

had brought enough with her from St. Dunstan's to have served her for years in Tenter's Close. But even now her drawers were being fast emptied. Hardly a week went by but some gown or cloak or hat was remodelled and made over to Lyddy and Crainie; and for a time each gift was as a peace-offering, and made life easier. And yet she could not but perceive that her gifts were not sufficient to enable the girls to dress as they did dress; and she could only conjecture that certain articles of adornment had been purchased out of the too-small sums which she set aside for the general housekeeping. The mere idea of girls like those getting dress on credit never occurred to her for a moment.

These were small matters, and would not have been worth a thought but for the increasing fear she had that her money would not hold out till her longer poem was done; or until the small volume but just published should have brought her some return. And the 'Idyll' was not going on rapidly.

It was impossible that such a work should go on with any regularity even under the best circumstances, and it could not but seem to Dorigen that her attempt was being made under the worst. The low, petty cares, the ceaseless jarring distractions broke in upon many a mood

that might have been productive; and this disappointment added to the other trials could not but affect her strength, and that grievously. But with failing strength came failing hope, for she knew that these things must tell disastrously upon such power as she had; upon that lightness of touch for which she had been praised, and upon every effort of her imagination. She had thought herself prepared for all these things, but she saw every day how little prepared she had been. And though her whole soul was yet set sternly toward that spirit of endurance for which she had prayed and striven, there were times when it seemed but too surely as if her spirit must fail. She might only save herself from failure by keeping that idea of perfect sacrifice for ever in her heart.

She knew of course now that she was on her way to meet a man whose name was just then on everybody's lips; a man who had fought much the same battle as she herself was fighting, and had won at length. She could not fail to have some curiosity mingled with her inevitable trepidations.

Lancelot Wilderslowe she had seen half-a-dozen times during the past week; seeing him always in Tenter's Close, and usually in the presence of the Miss Cleminshaws; a remembrance sufficient to account for the shadow of

pain that crossed her forehead as he greeted her this afternoon.

The pain was still there when the Rector came up by the path under the elms with Mr. Harvey Taunton, and Mr. Taunton saw that and many other things in that first long, keen, unsmiling look of his. He did not offer his hand until he had ended that inquiring gaze; then he shook Dorigen's hand cordially.

'I've been hearing of you from Mr. Thesiger,' he said in his brusque way, and in his usual low and peculiar voice, the tone of which gave you an instant impression of querulousness and dissatisfaction. But for that grasp of the hand Dorigen had felt sure beforehand of adverse opinions. 'I've been hearing of you,' he said. 'And I have read your poems. . . . But now come in here—into the study for a few moments—and tell me some things I want to know. Who introduced you to your publisher?'

'No one . . . . I sent the poems, and they agreed to publish them.'

'Some of them had appeared in magazines?'

'Yes.'

'And what sort of bargain did you make?'

'I did not make any—it was impossible. I knew nothing of business matters. I was compelled to leave the terms to them.'

'Very naturally. And how much are you to pay?'

Dorigen could only smile; and the usual blush came with the smile.

'I am not to pay anything,' she said. 'I am expecting they will pay me. . . . They are to give me a certain sum when a thousand copies are sold.'

'A thousand copies!' exclaimed Mr. Taunton. Then he laughed a long low laugh of exceeding amusement. 'I suppose you don't know that three hundred would be a very fair beginning for you?' he said. 'However, you have nothing to complain of. The book is well got up, and it is thoroughly advertised. Have you seen any critiques yet?'

'Yes,' was the reply, made with a quick flush of pleasure. 'Messrs. Mortimer sent me half-a-dozen this morning.'

'Leading reviews, any of them?'

'Yes,' she said, going on to name three or four publications, each of which was an authority to be deferred to with respect.

'And what do they say?'

Dorigen hesitated. 'I will send them to you if you would care to see them,' she replied. 'They are very generous. Even when there is fault-finding it is fair, and kindly, and done

altogether without animus. There is not a word in them all that gives me any real pain; though there are many words that give me pleasure. The publishers say that they consider the book already a *literary* success.'

'Are you acquainted with any literary people—people who could make interest with reviewers?'

'Not one. I believe Mr. Wilderslowe writes; but he does not publish what he writes.'

'Doesn't he? . . . I see! . . . It *is* rather vulgar to publish one's work. . . . But now with regard to your future. Mr. Thesiger has asked me to give you such help or advice as I may; and I need hardly say that I shall be glad to do anything I can. If experience entitles me to speak, I have had experience. I have been writing for nearly four-and-thirty years. In the first eleven years my earnings averaged exactly two pounds seven shillings and fourpence per annum. I do not mind telling you that there is no depth of want, no bitterness and humiliation of poverty that I have not known. But I would have died fighting rather than have yielded. And it is because I perceive in you something of the same spirit that I tell you for your enlightenment, that from fifteen to twenty years is the usual term of probation for poets in England, and for some prose writers.

. . . You are not a strong man, you are a frail-looking girl. And—pardon the question—how are you to live for twenty years? or for ten?'

Dorigen sat silently looking out of the window with some fears in her heart. What was coming next?

'You say the reviewers have been generous,' Mr. Taunton resumed. 'I should say that more likely they have done you justice, and I am glad that this has happened to you in the beginning. It does not always happen. If you go on you will not escape injustice; but if your work be deserving, rest assured that for one unjust or venomous attack there will be ten critics eager and ready to see the best in you. Your own brief experience proves their disinterestedness. And yet—yet I fear greatly that this experience will mislead you. I know you must be thinking that now you have made so fair a start, your worst difficulties are over; but believe me—for your own sake, believe me, they are but beginning. I acknowledge fully the value of the work you have done; I may even say that it surprised me repeatedly. It is not the work of a beginner. Your poems have a certain simple grace; a certain restrained strength, and there is in them a sense of natural beauty which is most refreshing. And your utterance is eminently

sincere, and being sincere it is inevitably original. All that I have read is stamped with originality; and yet I must warn you—yet I must say things that will make me seem harsh and uncomprehending. If I am to give you my best, most honest advice unhesitatingly, I must say this hard saying, *Do not write another poem.*'

Again Dorigen made no reply, unless the look on her face were taken for reply. It was the look of one who has received an unexpected blow from a friend, and means to take it quietly. Still there was more behind; and Mr. Taunton saw something of what was there.

'Understand me,' he went on again. 'We work that we may live; but we must live first that we may work. If you had standing-ground for a few years, I would never try to turn you from what is most evidently your true vocation; but since you have not, why should you not so use the talent that is in you that it may make you ground to stand on by the way? In other words, why should you not write your poems in prose?'

There was a pause, a look of surprise not altogether free from scorn, and then a sudden recovery.

'I would rather fail as a poet than succeed as a novelist,' was the reply; but even as the

words left her lips she remembered that her failure would not affect herself alone.

'I can understand that that should be your feeling,' Mr. Taunton answered. 'But remember it has been said, and truly, that "The Novel at its highest is a Prose Epic;" and apart from the mere rhyme there is hardly a single quality of good poetry which you do not find in really good prose. There is the same care, not merely in the choice of words and phrases, but in the cadence of each sentence; and in the best writing there is always something of the same music and melody which many suppose to belong to poetry alone. And if you look, as I am sure you do, at the good to be done by means of literature—you will perceive that you may reach a far wider audience as a writer of fiction, than you would be likely to do as a poet—that is for some time to come. These considerations alone might influence you, if there were no others.'

'It is very kind of you to care so much,' Dorigen said with sad earnestness. 'And I thank you; but as to writing novels, I do not think I *could* write one, not if I tried ever so seriously.'

'That is not a bad feeling to begin with,' replied Mr. Taunton. 'And, indeed, novel-writing is not quite the easy art it may seem

to some to be. No; it is not easy to decide upon a worthy yet unhackneyed *motif*, to invent an original plot by means of which to develop that *motif*, to conceive the chain of circumstances by which you may unfold your central idea, page by page, through three whole volumes. To take care that your incidents shall be sufficiently numerous, sufficiently natural; to conceive a variety of characters strongly in your own individual mind; and to develop these same characters stroke by stroke without seeming effort—these things are not easy. And they are not all that is required. You must have a fair setting for your characters, and an acquaintance with Nature sufficiently intimate to enable you to describe your scenes with the freshness and new beauty which can only come from your own personal and close observation; and you must be able to do this with clear rapid touches that will not weary. And all these things will fail to charm if you have not the attraction of a pure, original, distinctive style. Style alone will not carry you far, not so far as it is said to do, since so few ordinary readers are sensitive to it; indeed, no single or separate quality will make a good novel. You may think I am trying to deter you; on the contrary, I perceive that the mere pressure of great diffi-

culty will be very likely to stimulate you to enter upon the wiser way I would have you take. Not that I suppose that even then your life would be too smooth for you. Life is never smooth for the beginner in literature who is dependent upon his own efforts.

'Later you will perhaps find such smoothness as may come from "purple and fine linen," and bank-notes. I only hope you will find it before your life has lost its flavour; and has nothing left but the flavour of bitterness.

'That is the saddest part of it all.

'For myself, I cannot but remember that I had the same talent, or perhaps even more, when the world neglected me, when some in it insulted and stung me; and I cannot but perceive that I am popular now, not so much because I am a successful author, as because my success has been a pecuniary one. I regret, much, that I have permitted the world to discern this later fact.

'Do you think that if Milton himself were alive, and had written "Paradise Lost" for the last publishing season, and it were known that he had received £10 for it, that he would have dinner engagements three weeks deep, because of his eminence as a poet?

'No; you will certainly find that your work

itself will be more of a reward to you than aught else that it will bring. And I do not mean the completed work, but the act of working.

'The best a literary career in these days can bring you will be a few warm friends, who may learn to care more for you yourself than for anything you have done or may do.

'That is the highest reward of literature. I trust you will find it, and prove the value of it, as I have done; as I am doing now. The world has nothing so good as a good friend.'

There was a sound of swift footsteps flying along the terrace; Gladwyn's cheery voice crying:

'Where are you? Where are you?' coming nearer all the while.

'Oh, there you are!' she said at last, standing by the open window of the study. 'Don't you want any tea, good people? Why, how solemn you look! What has happened, Dorna dear?'

'Nothing has happened; and I want the very best cup of tea you can give me!' Dorigen said smiling, and looking very pale. She had a strange feeling as if life had been made to stand out in some new cold light that it would not bear. All the afternoon this feeling clung to her; and held her in a strange restraint and

bewilderment. Lancelot Wilderslowe could not but wonder what might have passed during that brief interview in the study.

'I think I shall be glad when Mr. Taunton leaves Hild's Haven,' he said, as they went up the shabby dusty little lane to Tenter's Close. 'I am going to leave it myself for a few hours to-morrow.'

'You are going to Thorsgrif?' Dorigen said, brightening suddenly. She remembered that Mrs. Fairfax and Lancelot had been good friends; and she had wondered before that he had not made an effort to see her. 'Give my love to Mrs. and Miss Salvain, and my kind regards to Mrs. Fairfax.'

'Isn't Mr. Salvain a friend of yours?'

'He is the oldest friend I have. . . . But I don't send messages to him.'

CHAPTER II.

'AY ME, THE BITTERNESS OF SUCH REVOLT!'

'More leaden than the actual self of lead,
Outer and inner darkness weighed on me.
The tide of anger ebbed. Then fierce and free
Swayed full above my head
The moaning tide of helpless misery.'

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

THE way that Lancelot went was not quite the self-same way as that by which Dorigen had gone in the old gig so many years before. He preferred to find for himself a path by farm and field nearer the edge of the cliff; and his horse being one that liked rather to walk through a hedge than to take it in more orthodox fashion, more than once he found himself in a difficulty. Still he was repaid. He did not forget that ride by the rugged cliff-edge to Thorsgrif.

It was a grey day, and somewhat chill for

August. The clouds were broken into shapeless swiftly-changing masses; rays of silver light gleamed through between fitfully, falling now upon the wide, grey, dreamy-looking sea; now upon the bare desolate rocks, which had such strange, and rude, and unintelligible form; and now again upon the green upland pastures that rose upon the left, and spread and widened with hardly a tree visible anywhere, except about the hill-top village of Threiplands. Lancelot rode through the fields below the village; the sleepy cattle lifted their heads for a moment to stare at him as he passed; the long grasses hardly stirred in the light air that came from the sea; the swallows were skimming close to the ground, not breaking that wonderful stillness that was upon the land everywhere.

He stopped for a moment close to the edge of the cliff at Thorsgrif to look down upon the busy scene below. The smoke was coming up out of the tall chimney; the white sulphurous vapour of the burning mine seemed half to hide the men and boys, who were at work among the sheds, and the great piles of alum shale. Beyond, on the ledge of dark grey rock; there were groups of children at cottage doors, women were spreading clothes to dry upon the small green bracken that here and there filled the sloping hollows of the

cliff. A few sheep crept about on inaccessible points above. Below all, there was ever the grey, placid, fitfully shining sea.

'This is the way to Mr. Salvain's house, I think?' Lancelot asked of an old man as he left the cliff-top hamlet.

'Ay, ay, you're reight, sir!' said the man. 'Follow them feaätins,* and ya'll seän be there.'

And in truth he was there very soon, riding over the grass-grown terrace to the door, startling Mrs. Salvain from her afternoon sleep, and half alarming poor Joanna, to whom the sight of strangers was never welcome. Still, she was courteous in her shy, sad way, and Mrs. Salvain grew quite nervous in her distress that Mr. Wilderslowe should have come on the very day when her niece had gone over to Hild's Haven, hoping to see him.

'She saw your name in the list of visitors on Saturday, and this morning she had a letter from St. Dunstan's, and she could not rest without making some effort to see you; so Enoch drove her over this morning. She had some shopping to do, and I am afraid she will not get back very early. But you will have a cup of tea or a glass of wine? Oh, please don't say no, and I will send for Michael. Since you are a friend of

* Feetings = foot-marks.

Ermengarde's, I should like you to see my son. . . . You will have heard that—that they are about to be married?' the old lady added with a break in her voice. 'It is not to be for a little while yet, though.'

It was perhaps fortunate for Lancelot that just then Mr. Salvain came up by the road through the copse, being on his way from Hunswyke. Naturally Michael had a moment of surprise. He had not expected that the affianced husband of Dorigen Gower would come to his house alone, and uninvited. There was no reason why he should not; and yet Michael required a moment or two for perfect reconcilement to the idea.

They talked, as was natural, of indifferent things for the first few moments. Mrs. Salvain had gone to help Rizpah to prepare some tea. Joanna was changing Zaré's pinafore for a tidier one, and Valerie was brushing her pretty hair before coming down to see Mr. Wilderslowe. For the moment Michael Salvain and Lancelot were alone.

'I think you said you had been to Hunswyke?' Lance was saying. 'Is that the curious-looking collection of houses which appears to be stuck on to the face of the cliff?'

'Yes,' Michael replied. 'You can see it better from the end of the terrace.'

And then the two men went out, and stood talking for a little while in the soft, sunless afternoon. The sea was rippling slowly up the sands, breaking with far, dull echoes. A few gulls were chuckling above the dark crown of the opposite cliff, rising and falling on wide white wing. By-and-by there came a brief silence between the two.

It was broken by Michael Salvain, who turned his strong rugged face to the younger man with a look of infinite pain written there.

'We are strangers to each other,' he said, speaking in a manner that seemed to Lancelot a little old-fashioned, 'yet I cannot let pass the opportunity of congratulating you. In winning Miss Gower's affection you have won such a prize as does not fall to the lot of every man.'

Lancelot paused a moment, seeming surprised.

'If I could only be sure that I had won it, or even that I was likely to win it, I should be very happy to accept your congratulation,' he replied, not without some natural confusion. Then he added, with something that was almost tremulousness in his voice, 'Would you mind telling me what makes you speak so certainly—that is, if you *can* tell me. Of course I do not ask you for one moment to betray any confidence of hers.'

Lancelot did not then understand that long and intense-seeming silence; he did not then understand that strange change which passed upon Michael Salvain's face, making him seem older and greyer, and giving him the look of one who has but just come through some terrible illness, and does not yet see the end.

How should he understand? For a time Michael Salvain himself understood nothing.

As soon as the power was his, he went over in his own mind that first meeting after Dorigen's return from St. Dunstan's. He remembered every detail, every word, with exactness. He had suffered then, he suffered now, and an almost maddening bewilderment was added to his suffering.

And yet he began to see—slowly yet surely, as he stood there—he began to see how Dorigen had discerned the treacherousness—he could call it by no milder name just then—the treacherousness of the woman who was to be his wife, and had attained that prospect by guile and subterfuge.

Dorigen had discerned it, but not till after he had declared himself bound to the frail and insidious and disingenuous woman by a tie only not the most sacred that can exist. Dorigen had discerned the lie, and, discerning, had re-

solved to cover it. And now disclosure had come, as sooner or later it was sure to come.

Was it *too* late?

This was the only question that remained to be considered, and he could not consider it there with a guest by his side to be entertained for the hour — this strange and overwhelming hour! What a passionate yearning he had to be alone!

His emotion had so overpowered him that he had made no answer to Lancelot's last plea; now he recollected himself, and made what answer he could.

'I have no special knowledge of Miss Gower's feelings or intentions,' he said, speaking with effort. 'I had understood that the engagement between her and yourself was a settled thing. . . . Forgive the mistake.'

'It is easily forgiven,' said Lance; 'the more easily since I hope it is prophetic. I shall not leave Hild's Haven without making another effort. I came for the purpose of making it.' Then, with a touch of that friendliness which always came so easily to him, he added with seeming carelessness, yet with real earnestness, 'Wish me good speed!'

'That I *cannot* do!' said Michael Salvain, with a sudden fevered haste and intensity in his tone.

'I cannot do that—not now. It is impossible. Forgive me if I seem to be in a cruel mood. My cruelty will make no difference to you.'

'Perhaps not; perhaps nothing will make any difference,' said Lancelot, feeling as if it were a little hard to have to stand outside complications, which, whatever the nature of them, were most evidently of some importance to him. For once Fate was using him rather hardly.

He put it all away to be thought over afterward; the sudden pain and confusion that Michael Salvain had betrayed; the fear that had entered his own heart, explaining all his previous disappointment. He could not disentangle these things, now that Zaré was there, putting up her little face to be kissed, and Valerie was dancing a pirouette on the terrace for very gladness. Lancelot had made much of the children during the time that their mother's sorrow was greatest, and children seldom forget.

'Come and see my darden,' Valerie said.

'And I dot a darden too,' said Zaré; adding, with a glance at Michael, which was curiously like her mother's glance, 'and we dot a new father: *dis* our father now!'

And then she put one of her tiny hands into Michael's and the other into Lancelot's, and drew the two men away over the terrace to where her

tiny bed of pinks and pansies were doing their best under a system of too active interference. The child did not dream that her baby words were very swords in the heart of one of the two who obeyed her imperious little will. These same words came back with strange force upon Michael Salvain when he sat alone in his own room that night when the house was still.

It *was* too late—all too late—this flash of light upon the thing he had done.

The more deeply he thought, the more deeply he felt the strength of the chains he himself had forged.

For awhile, before he thought at all, he had had the feeling that he was free.

Surely a tie like this could not be binding, even to the most sensitive conscience! He had entered into it because he had been made to believe an untruth—made wilfully, and with design to believe an untruth. And he had been honest enough himself. Ermengarde had known of his lost hope, his spoiled life. He had only offered her his name, his care, his kindness, his protection, and he had done even this in a moment of compassion, a compassion to which he had been moved by the tears of a widow and the words of a fatherless child. Surely, surely that mistake might be undone!

Once as he sat there he blamed Dorigen, and not lightly, for having lent herself even for a moment to the deception another had used. She had done it generously, this he knew, and she had spoken no false word. She had but kept silence, a silence which had perhaps cost her more than he might ever dream. He dared not think of that; he would not, and by-and-by his blame changed to sorrow. Her silence had done nothing, altered nothing. He had been as much bound before it as afterward. Any speech of hers would not have availed for his release.

That was a sore and sorrowful night for him. He perceived now why Ermine had been so anxious to go to Hild's Haven, to spare Mr. Wilderslowe the trouble of coming to Thorsgrif, and he understood also why it was that she had tried to find always some reason for preventing his mother from going to Tenter's Close. He himself had hardly seconded Mrs. Salvain's wish that Dorigen might be asked to spend a few days at Thorsgrif. He could not well have borne to see her there, passing in and out of the old rooms in the old way, flitting about the terrace in the twilight, or wandering up and down on the sands, through the fir-copse, by all the old ways where she had been used to wander so long ago. It was really long now, and yet it seemed as if it

had all been but yesterday. That was the worst of his sorrow, that the joy which had been before could not be forgotten, or lie still. It would never again lie still.

He had not seen Ermengarde on her return from Hild's Haven. As soon as Lancelot had gone Michael had started off at once for the works, and had remained in his office there till near midnight so as to free himself for at least that night from the need for acting a distasteful part. Now that he was in his own room at his own home, he knew that he must act a part for evermore.

There was no escape. He was bound in all honour. The manhood within him might be torn two ways, so sorely torn as to leave him hardly strength enough for a right decision. But he must decide; and he must decide now. At any cost to himself he must decide to keep that promise.

The compassion that was in him also helped him to prevail. He believed certainly that such love as Ermengarde had to give was his. She had been tender in her ways to him, and she had shown him deference as well as affection. There had been times when at least reconcilement with his fate had seemed possible, with enough of peace and trust for the satisfaction of the years

that remained to him. Now he knew that he would be reconciled no more. Below every hour of his life there would be this bitter knowledge.

But he would keep the knowledge to himself. There should be no scene, no reproach.

Ermengarde would not question him; this he knew. She would have her fears, her suspicions, since she had become aware of Lancelot Wilderslowe's visit to Thorsgrif. But she was too wise a woman to run any risk she might avoid. She was not at all likely to make any opening for a quarrel.

Still he sat there in the low dull room. The lamp burned dimly on through the night, and by-and-by the crowing of the cock gave notice of the coming day. He had fought his fight. It had wearied him as no physical fatigue could have done. For very exhaustion he did not move to seek complete rest.

And he had, too, the knowledge that his thoughts must no more be as they had been to-night. He must never again think with yearning, with wild, passionate yearning, of the woman he had loved and lost. She might perhaps never be another's—he had certainly the feeling that she would never be the wife of the man he had met to-day. And now he understood that strange feeling as of a barrier between Dorigen Gower

and the life he had been made to believe was awaiting her. Still, all the same, there was, and must now for ever be, a perfect separation between his soul and hers, so far as concerned that full and complete love which is the highest end and attainment of human emotion. From to-night, even in thought, she must be to him but the friend he would try with all possible earnestness to be to her.

And now more certainly than ever he knew that she must need all such aid as friendship could give. What was she doing—planning, thinking? How was she enduring? What was she hoping? He knew nothing certainly of the new career she had entered upon. That old belief and expectancy was not dead within him; nay, it was at the root of much of the misery he had in thinking of her. For had it not been a certain sense of his own inadequateness, his own inability to be to her a true guide and helpmeet in such ways as he had believed she would be drawn to walk in, which had held him back from full endeavour to secure for himself the happiness his soul had demanded? And now it might easily be that the consequences of his mistake were not falling upon himself alone.

It was terrible to think of her there in Tenter's Close without help or sympathy, or understand-

ing, and in all probability bewildered to distraction by the very weight and strangeness of the burdens she must certainly be bearing there. And he knew well that she would not be enduring aimlessly, supinely, without effort in the present, and outlook for the future. It was not in her to do that. And the things that she had it in her to do might be utterly impracticable in such adverse environment. The more he thought of it, the more certainly he perceived that he must not permit himself to remain in such unhelpful ignorance, not at least without making some effort to acquire knowledge. He might go down into Tenter's Close now, and he might speak there as only a true friend, who might never be either more or less than friend, could speak. He could yet thank heaven for the good that was left to him.

It was not wonderful that he knew nothing of the attempt that Dorigen was making. No one in Hild's Haven knew, or even suspected, save the inmates of the Rectory, and they had scrupulously obeyed her desire for obscurity. A curious desire it was, for with the strong and natural wish to remain personally unknown was mingled the equally strong and equally natural wish that the work of her brain might have the widest publicity possible; and yet even here she would have made

reservations. It was this latter instinct, and this alone, which had prevented her from revealing aught of this travail of her inmost soul to Michael Salvain. It was far too strongly touched and tinctured with her saddest and most secret sorrow to permit of her betraying it voluntarily to him. He would be able to read not only all that she had written, but by the light of that, all that she had left unwritten; and this she could not yet contemplate with any calmness. If he came to know of it later she might care less. There is often a merciful vagueness about what is to happen in the future.

The resolution which Michael made to go down into Tenter's Close was not the only resolution he made that night. The flame of suffering burnt on so fiercely within him that he was strengthened to determine to put an end at once to all opportunities for irresolution. Irresolution could only end in pain or wrong. He would have none of it now. His marriage with his cousin Ermengarde should take place immediately. He would have no difficulty in persuading her to this ; and it would be better—better for everyone concerned. There was neither haste nor anger in him when he came to this decision ; but neither was there that emotion that there should have been in his heart.

So it happened that at the very beginning of the next month there was what certain ladies of Hild's Haven termed 'a very pretty wedding' in the ancient church on the eastern cliff.

It was Ermengarde's wish that it should take place there rather than at Oswaldthorpe. And although, being a widow, she had no bridesmaids, she yet had attendant friends enough to almost fill the quaint old chancel with bright colour, eminent respectability, and almost boundless wonder and curiosity.

It was told afterward that Mrs. Fairfax passed to the altar with the carriage and dignity of a queen; and the lady who dared to suggest 'a stage queen' was rightly condemned for her uncharitable saying. In all truth, Ermengarde acquitted herself with nothing less than distinction; and her stately mien and bearing set off her really great beauty almost as much as did her costly and carefully-chosen dress of pearl-white satin and lace. It was no wonder that some there half-pitied her. For though it was admitted that Mr. Salvain was a fine-looking man, and not without some visible evidences of race, yet it could not be forgotten that he was a maker of alum, and that his wife was in all probability doomed to live out her days in the hollow beyond Thorsgrif.

Was Ermengarde herself conscious of any pang? Was it possible that the old ambition which had slept so quietly in the house by the sea, should awaken within her as she heard the murmur of admiration which accompanied her passage through the churchyard from the vestry door to the waiting carriages?

It was well, perhaps, that the pealing bells drowned the question that was in her heart before it fairly formed itself in words.

They went on pealing; and Dorigen Gower, sitting in her narrow attic in Tenter's Close, heard them, and made no sign. All day she heard them bursting out afresh at intervals, ringing out joy and hope and gladness across the mild September sunshine; all day she sat alone there. And not on that day could she turn her living sorrow into living song. It is in the fire of long-sufferance that the events of life are fused, and made fit for the poet's uses.

CHAPTER III.

AFTERWARD.

'The hope I dreamed of was a dream,
Was but a dream; and now I wake
Exceeding comfortless, and worn, and old,
For a dream's sake.'

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

INEVITABLY there came the time and the opportunity for suffering long and being kind; and the suffering was keener and more varied than any might dream.

Lancelot Wilderslowe was not slow to perceive the nature of some of the pains and sorrows the woman he loved was called upon to endure. He had not clearly understood the meaning of the things he had heard on the terrace at Thorsgrif; but now that Michael Salvain was actually married, and absent on his wedding tour, it was evident that he had nothing to fear there. But it was not difficult for any frequenter of the

house in Tenter's Close to discern that there might be many causes for the wanner and thinner look on Dorigen's face without seeking for a reason in disappointed affection.

Of course Lancelot knew from Lady Anne of Dorigen's efforts, and comparative successes, in the world of letters; almost he envied her the ease and facility with which she had invested her assumed name with a certain deference and expectancy. But he also knew that her success was purely of a literary nature; and it did not need acute perception to enable him to divine that a more mercenary success had been—in a certain sense—more satisfactory. He supposed, naturally enough, that the bare means of living and waiting were hers. If he had known the truth it may be that not only had his hope been bolder, but that his persistency had been such as to preclude all possibility of ultimate denial. He knew that many a woman has been won all against her will, and has lived to bless the day of her reluctant yielding.

But he might not even guess the depth and bitterness of the gulf into which Dorigen was fast descending, and, alas! with so little strength to bear such a descent. Slowly, day by day—it might almost be said post by post—her hope of immediate return for her labour was failing; and

finally, in answer to an inquiry of hers, there came a polite letter from her publisher which crushed even the little hope that was left to her.

It was not a desponding letter—quite the reverse. 'Her volume of poems had proved to be a decided literary success,' but again it was repeated, 'not a commercial success.' That would doubtless come later, it was added. An excellent beginning had been accomplished. Messrs. Mortimer begged sincerely to congratulate the author of 'Songs from the Northern Sea' on attaining such a position at a single bound.

But alas! alas! with a Crainie Cleminshaw in the background clamouring for a new outfit: a Lydia on the verge of marriage with a 'gentleman,' and demanding a trousseau, what was to be made of such shadowy congratulations? How look upon them, or classify them, or see the human meaning they might have for the woman pre-doomed to expression by such modes as the writer of to-day must use or forego? It is a canon of modern literary criticism, an unwritten one it may be, and not an unwise one, that no account shall be taken of the circumstances under which the work criticized has been produced.

Afterward, not only shall allusion be made, but every detail, seemly and unseemly, shall be dragged into the light, and the utmost made of it. You shall be asked to witness Beethoven composing the grandest and greatest of his works while harassed by the smallest of cares, the meanest of domestic worries. You shall be permitted to see Burns producing his living song worn by bodily suffering, tortured by pecuniary anxiety, nay, more, by the pangs of conscience for the misdeeds of his youth. You shall be invited to look upon Carlyle, struggling to deliver himself of his noblest ideas while fretted by ill-health, sleeplessness, social incompatibility, and by extremes of nervous exhaustion, the result of overwork. You shall have these and a thousand other such instances brought to your notice, and you shall be asked to take these untoward accidents most seriously into account, as being the lions that stood in the pathway of genius that is dead, lions that did but stand there to prove the courage, the resolution, the grandeur of soul which marked that vanished victor over the world and its manifold hindrances.

But while the victor is still alive, yet but in part victorious, there shall be no hint of hindrance, of palliation. You must judge his work alone, and it must stand on its merits and demerits, as

you—the judge—see them. There must be no suggestion of frail health, of darkening and desolating bereavement, of deep and overwhelming misery of many kinds. Produce your work, out of what dark slough of despond you may, it shall not even be placed to your credit that you have wrought at all under such circumstances, nor shall you utter one word that might seem to claim lightness of judgment by reason of extenuating environment.

This is right, and wise, and good for the true dignity of literature. But why reverse it all so completely—*too late?*

The Thesigers were kind and genial people, and full of faith and admiration; but they were people who had not known sorrow, except as a passing shadow, and were therefore slow to discern it when it did not obtrude itself openly. Gladwyn going to Tenter's Close saw enough to awaken suspicion of much domestic misery, much discord, much that might be a consequence of very narrow means; but she saw no proof of want—of keen, ceaseless, exhausting anxiety. She wondered over her friend's bravery in secret and openly, but she had no true idea of what it meant, what it cost.

No, there was none to see; but Lancelot Wilderslowe, staying on at Hild's Haven, wait-

ing, watching, hoping, began to discern more than he had hitherto suspected. And the things he discerned did not wholly grieve him. They might help much in the working of his fate—his fate and hers. For very misery and hopelessness she might yield, knowing that such yielding would mean the end of misery.

'How much longer do you mean to stay at Hild's Haven, Mr. Wilderslowe?'

It was little Juliet Thesiger who asked him this, one glorious and glowing October afternoon. They were walking up and down the pathway at the lower edge of the Rectory lawn, Juliet's hand within Lancelot's arm, and her happy, smiling, mocking little face turned up to his in unblushing admiration.

'How can you ask me such a question?' he said, speaking with his usual affectation of sadness and languor, and all æsthetic supineness. 'How can *you* ask me? You know that I have been trying to tear myself away from you for weeks past.'

'I don't know anything of the kind,' said Juliet. 'It isn't me. You don't care half so much for me as you do for Gladwyn or Dorna. And I can't make out which of them you care for most. Sometimes I think it's one, sometimes the other. Do you *always* flirt like that?'

'Always. . . . Flirtation is the salt of life.'

'I do believe you mean it.'

'Most certainly I mean it. How can you think that one would take the trouble to assert a thing that wasn't true?'

'Well, you're going to have another opportunity. Here's Dorna coming up the avenue, looking sadder and whiter and thinner than ever. Don't you think she looks awfully sad? . . . And oh! I've got my practising to do, which makes *me* sad! So I must go; I hate it, but I must. . . . Try to make *her* look less sorrowful, Mr. Wilderslowe.'

The child's word lingered on his ear, as he sauntered across the lawn and down the avenue to meet Dorigen, who lifted her wistful eyes to his, and greeted him with pale, unsmiling lips that yet seemed to quiver with emotion of some kind. He might not guess that she had come to walk in the Rectory grounds for awhile to try to calm a brain wearied with jarring, and contention, and recrimination; he might not guess that at that moment she believed herself to be almost willing to lie down and die rather than live and continue the strife to which life had of late reduced itself; he might not guess these things, yet he could not but see the look of tense, bewildering sorrow on her face; he could not but

perceive that her very gait and mien were expressive of an extreme weariness, an extreme hopelessness; and the manhood in him was strong as he contrasted his own life with the life of the woman before him. Had there been no thought of love in him at all, his compassion had been moved to the uttermost.

'Will you come across the fields a little way?' he asked, speaking in a tone quite different from that he had used in speaking to Juliet. 'It is mild, almost warm, to-day; and you shall not go far enough to tire yourself.'

The very manner of his speaking, the kind and tender tone of it, was enough to overcome her strength in that moment of reaction. And the great refinement of his voice and accent falling upon ears yet pained with the rudeness and coarseness of Tenter's Close came as food and wine come to the starving man.

'I will come anywhere,' she said, with an inevitable abandonment of tone and manner, and in that moment wholly forgetting that twice Lancelot Wilderslowe had asked her to be his wife, and share such an existence as assuredly would never be hers to accept or refuse again. 'I will come anywhere, I will do anything,' she said. 'Only don't ask me to decide about it. You shall think for me to-day; and you shall let

me be idle, and silent, and not ask me to speak, or think, or even look at anything. I am tired of "ever climbing up the climbing wave." Let me have a taste—just a little taste—of "dreamful ease." It is a very dreamful afternoon.'

CHAPTER IV.

IN TIME OF TEMPTATION.

'Thou who didst make, and knowest whereof we are made,
Oh, bear in mind our dust and nothingness,
Our wordless, tearless, dumbness of distress:
Bear thou in mind the burden thou hast laid
Upon us, and our feebleness, unstayed,
Except thou stay us.'

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

DORIGEN had turned as she spoke, half unconsciously, with Lancelot into the pathway that led down under the yellowing maple-trees and the glowing beeches to the field-path, on the edge of a tiny copse. She was silent now, glad to be silent, and Lancelot was too wise—it may be also that his emotion was too strong, to permit of his replying to her last words as he might have done. Latterly he had come to see the value of waiting and restraint.

'If you are so tired now, how will it be in

the future?' he said presently, lifting an earnest face to hers, and speaking with fervid sympathy. 'I have been thinking about your future. Almost continually of late I have found myself wondering about it; and among other things, I could not help wondering what your ideal future was like.'

'I could have told you six months ago,' she replied, with a deeper sadness and weariness on her face and in her voice. 'But now all is changed, confused; and I am beginning to suspect that even my highest ideal was not high at all, but very low.'

'You are not speaking of your career as a poet?'

'Yes; in a certain sense. It meant so much more for me than merely writing poetry.'

'Very naturally.

> '"If art be in truth the higher life,
> You need the lower life to stand upon,
> In order to reach up unto that higher."'

'Yes,' replied Dorigen; 'but my dream of that lower life was commonplace and mistaken. I wanted it to be all ease and peace, so that my mind should have no hindrance, but be allowed to work its work in an atmosphere of almost unearthly quiet and beauty. Now I am be-

ginning to perceive that I do my best work when I am stung and pierced beyond endurance, when every nerve is quivering under some new pain and humiliation. There have been times of late when I would not have altered one circumstance of my past or present life, if the power to do so had been given me ever so freely. The smallest pang may have its value; and I don't think we can judge clearly as to the relative depth and intensity either of our own sorrow, or other people's. Bishop Taylor says that a fly may cause one as much annoyance as a wound.'

'Exactly; and I suspect that the easiest life possible to such as you would be full enough of flies to satisfy any ordinary desire for annoyance. I can't at all agree with your idea that a life of perpetual pain and negation and contradiction would be the best possible life for any singer of sweet songs vouchsafed to us in these days.

'"It is not sweet content, be sure,
That moves the nobler soul to song.
Yet when did truth come whole and pure
From hearts that inly bleed with wrong?"

And, pardon me, I know you have endured, are enduring, things that seem as wrongs to me.

I know more than I can well bear to know. I *cannot* bear it and make no effort.'

'Oh, hush! hush!' said the girl, dreading the touch of even a friendly hand upon her worst bruises. 'Hush! and wait—wait awhile and you will see——'

'I *have* waited,' interrupted Lancelot. 'I have waited to see if there was anyone else to make effort; anyone else to care for you as I care; anyone for whom you cared. And I see nothing to constrain me to wait any longer. And all the while my love for you has been growing, deepening; it has so deepened that it seems to me you *cannot* reject it, *cannot* put it out of your life, and live as if neither I nor my love existed. Day and night I am thinking about you; my thought is one perpetual reverie, with you for its object; and I cannot change it, or break away from it. . . . Dear, you will listen, at least you will listen! Think of what my love has borne—the test of time, the test of rejection, and all this has but strengthened it. Now I cannot imagine a life for myself that I could live without you to share it. With you *any* life would be possible. . . . Say that you will make the best possible for me! I am pleading selfishly now, but I am doing so of set purpose, thinking to touch you more nearly so. Say that

you will save my life from human lowness, from spiritual deadness. Say it, dear, or keep silence. I will understand a long sweet silence.'

And for awhile there was silence.

While Lancelot had been speaking there had been emotion enough in Dorigen's heart and brain to have satisfied him if he had discerned its strength wholly. But it was well that he had discerned it only in part.

It was not the emotion he yearned for; but a wild and sudden contention, that threatened to change the whole tenor of her life and thought and hope, even as she stood there. Had she spoken that word he asked for she had spoken it then so passionately, so unreservedly, that no after repentance had served to deliver her soul from the consequence of error and mistake. There was danger in speech, there was danger also in silence.

'Give me one day to decide in,' she said, looking up into his face with pale lips and sad, solemn eyes.

'Another day!' he said, perceiving quickly the ground he had gained. 'Think of the time that has passed since we first met, of how you have known me in my own home, of the way in which my friends love you and care for you, and desire nothing better for me than that I should

call you my wife! . . . It is not like a question between two people who met but yesterday. . . . And I ask so little. I do but ask that you will give me chances of winning your love, chances of being kinder to you, chances of proving to you the influence you may have upon my life. Surely it is little—say that little now, dear! say it now, if it be but a single word!'

But that word was not said; for very confusion and emotion it could not be said. Her heart was beating wildly, more wildly than it was ever likely to beat again for aught but anguish, and her breathing came with so great an effort that no reply in words was possible.

'Tell me one thing—but one,' Lancelot said, bending down and taking her hand tenderly in his, 'tell me at least that you believe in my love for you?'

'Yes,' she said with tremulous simplicity; 'yes, I believe in it.'

'In its depth, its intensity?'

'Yes.'

'And you will try to give me back but a little for all this?'

Again there was silence, utter silence, save for the bird-note in the boughs above, and the gentle stir of the falling leaves, as a light breeze from the moorlands swept across the valley.

It was Lancelot who broke the silence, breaking it with words yet more earnest and impassioned than any he had yet used, having within himself the certain feeling that the present moment was a decisive one, and that even a temporary delay would be disastrous to the great wish he had.

And yet Dorigen herself was by no means so certain. In that hour, and for some hours after, her heart was oppressed with sinking and fear, and her spirit was faint within her, too faint for the battle that had to be fought and lost—or won. She had gained her request for one more day, yet it did not seem to her as she went down Tenter's Close alone in the twilight that the few hours' respite would mean much.

She had insisted upon walking back alone, going down into the busy, narrow little streets that were so homelike and so shabby, across by the bridge, where the lights were beginning to twinkle upon the river, and down through Shaddock Lane into Kirkgate. It was always with a little effort that she turned upward to Tenter's Close, and the effort was not less to-night. Dorigen was thankful for the increasing darkness, which hid her tears and her silent sobbing from the people passing in the street.

'You've been longer nor I thought you'd be,'

said Mrs. Gower somewhat fretfully, as Dorigen went in. 'Thomasin's been waitin' with her hat on this hour or more, to go some erran's for ya; an' I had but a shillin' i' the world. It seems to me you're gettin' despert close wi' money, an' I should never ha' thought *that* o' you. Your poor father allus reckoned 'at you were quite t' other way, an' would give all you had if anybody asked you.'

'I will give you all I have now,' Dorigen said, laying her purse on the table quietly, and passing through the kitchen to go up to her own room. Her tears were dried; her heart was still. It seemed as if the task before her were simply to reconcile herself to what was inevitable. She lighted the lamp which stood on her writing-table by the whitewashed chimney that went up through the attic. There was no fireplace. Her narrow white bed was in the corner by the door. On the wall there were a few photographs, which she had brought from St. Dunstan's; there was one of the Rectory, one of the little church, two or three of the garden, and some portraits. There was Lady Anna herself, and Bertie, and Dr. Wilderslowe. In an envelope on the table was one of Lancelot, which Lady Anna had sent a day or two before.

Whichever way she looked there was some-

thing to remind her of the four years she had spent at St. Dunstan's, of the happiness she had known there, the freedom from care, from pain, from responsibility. Her writing-desk, the lamp, the furniture of the table, had all been sent to her since Lady Anna had divined her need of them ; and almost every new book that she had had come to her by the same means. The very atmosphere of the place she loved was there in that little room, and she had always been glad to have it there. To-night it was as a reminder of bondage, from which she might never again be delivered. So far she had no wish to be delivered. As she sat there, with every nerve of her sensitive nature overstrung and tense, she looked quite deliberately upon a future toward which she had hitherto refused even to glance.

As Lancelot had reminded her, it was not a leap in the dark she was asked to take. She might not know very exactly the amount of his present income, but she knew well enough that Dr. Wilderslowe was considered by his neighbours to be a rich man, and that his riches would be nearly equally divided between his two sons. In addition to this Lancelot had expectations from a childless uncle, which were not likely to be disappointed.

'We will live wherever you choose until Adwalton is ours,' Lancelot had said. 'We will stay in England, or we will go abroad; we will live quietly, or travel ceaselessly, just as you may wish.' And nothing that he had said had more weight than these words. Her desire to travel had been an ever-growing passion for years. Only lately she had put out of sight some engravings of Rome and Venice which Dr. Wilderslowe had given to her on her birthday. She could take them out when her hope revived, she had said to herself; but she did not take them out to-night.

There was no doubt about it; this life which was offered to her was a life that promised gratification of every reasonable desire, and Dorigen was capable of appreciating such gratification to the full.

She could realize better than ever before what it would be to be quite free from care about money, to have to be careful for nothing but ease and luxury, and the fulfilment of her lightest desire.

And she knew that she need have no fear as to her duty to her stepmother and the girls. Lancelot had said as much as he could say, speaking quite delicately, of the power that would be hers of providing for them whatever was

needful; and as she sat there, looking into that easeful and tempting future, it seemed as if it might be almost a duty to accept it for their sakes alone. She might never be able to do for them by the labour of her own brain what she could do without any care or thought at all if she became Lancelot Wilderslowe's wife. The thought was like the forging of another link in the chain that was being bound about her. Her heart grew yet fainter within her, and the hour grew darker and more bewildering.

Slight as her experience had been, she knew that she might never live the double existence Lancelot had spoken of—the life of a perfect wife and competent mistress of a household, and the life of the absorbed, eager, devoted woman of letters. Others might do this, and do it efficiently; but it was not for her even to attempt it. She knew well enough that her nature failed on the side of desire for simple domestic happiness. It had no charm for her, and never entered into any dream she had.

Drawn by a great and passionate love—such a love as she had had for Michael Salvain—it would have been possible for her to attempt some compromise; but even then she might have failed in the attempt, and have wrecked not her own happiness only.

And yet it would surely now never be possible for her wholly to forego the life that was for her the only true life, and alone enabled her to be true to herself, to the faculties given her! It might not be a higher existence; she had never spoken of it, never thought of it as really higher, having insight enough to perceive that the highest life possible to a woman is the life that permits her the making and upholding of that one earthly paradise—a perfectly happy home, happy for her husband, for her children, for her friends, for her servants, and therefore inevitably for herself also. There is nothing better than this.

Dorigen saw and knew that there was nothing better, nothing so certainly the vocation of a truly womanly woman; but she also saw—how could she help it?—that it is not every woman's vocation. It was not hers, and could never be. Why, then, should a strong temptation deliver her to a life of pain?

If there must be pain, as assuredly it was written, why should it not be the pain that belonged to her own life?

As she sat there, passing through that night of sore temptation, she knew more certainly than ever that she had not deceived herself as to that life of hers. The mere strength of the pain that

came with the thought of renunciation was proof enough of the reality of her conviction.

But what if it were no more than a conviction —self-acquired, self-confirmed? What if it had been permitted so far but to make opportunity for a grander, greater, deeper renunciation than any she had ever dreamed?

Again it was as if thought were silenced within her, silenced by its own weight and stressful importance.

Could it be possible that all her life had tended to this ?—that stirrings and strivings had been awakened within her from her very childhood ; that others had been moved to prophetic words ; that, finally, sufficient proof had been given that her desire for utterance was not a vain one, and all for this, that there might be a great and desolating renunciation?

This was the sorest moment of the strife, the hardest, the most perplexing. The very depth and intensity of the sacrifice possible to her at that hour made it seem right and desirable.

And yet, was it a lawful sacrifice?—was it lawful beyond all question? This thought came suddenly, strongly. And it came after a brief and passionate prayer for light—nay, it came in the very midst of the prayer.

She had not made herself, her nature, her cir-

cumstances. All that she had done or desired to do had been determined by what she herself was. She could not change herself and be another ; why, then, should she dare to attempt to live another's life?

But the other day a writer said that it is an ever-memorable time for a man when he makes the discovery that whatever he is to do in the world must be done in a certain direction. 'It is almost as if a star woke to some subtle knowledge of itself, and felt within its shining frame the forces which decided what its orbit was to be. *Because it is the star it is, that track through space must be its track.*'

As strong and as clear as this the feeling is, and in proportion to the depth and strength of the nature is the impossibility of dragging the instinct from its place in the soul, and living as though it had never been vouchsafed.

All her life the instinct had been there ; some knowledge of it had been hers from the morning when she had sat at her father's feet in the Abbey of St. Hild, and had heard from his lips the story of the 'Inspiration of Cædmon.'

She had kept these things, and had pondered them in her heart, until at last they had been made plain to her. And now was she to decline upon a luxuriously-furnished house, a comfort-

able carriage, and a husband with a fine critical ability as to the capacities of his cook? She did not wrong Lancelot Wilderslowe. He cared for more than elaborate cookery ; but she knew that he cared much for that, and the knowledge had not increased her regard for him.

Some regard for him she had, some liking for his sympathy, some admiration for his quick and varied talent, for his social adaptability ; but there was nothing behind her feeling, nothing that could grow to reverence, or to love. This she saw more clearly than ever, and it helped her in her determination.

She hardly knew how the determination grew up within her, how her intention became a final, settled thing. The temptation was no more tempting. Insensibly relief came, and peace.

There was no joy mingled with the peace—how should there be? She might be free to live her own life, that life which has no earthly life quite like to it, so full of far-reaching possibilities, of half-incomprehensible dreamings, of ever-increasing aspirations. She was free to wait, and to hope, and to work for all this ; but she must wait in Tenter's Close, in a little town that knew not of her, and where not one heart beat in unison with her own heart's high hopefulness. The greatest earthly comfort she had was the

word of an unknown critic who had seen the faults of her premature efforts as no other critic had seen them, but who had also seen below the faults as no other critic had done. The concluding words of his long and careful review of her poems echoed the last and fullest assurance that was in her own soul. And to this slight support she turned trustfully ; but she did not turn to this alone.

No ; there was the Shadow of a Great Rock in this weary land, and in it she might rest when no other rest was possible. Being the overshadowing of Him who had brought her out into this wilderness, and set her there to fight her fight, she need hardly be too anxious for the winning or losing ; for her life's success, or what men might term her life's failure.

Supposing it failed here, as it was likely enough to do, what of it?

'Wilt thou trust death or not?' was the question asked of a certain grammarian we know of, and he answered 'Yes' heartily, knowing that beyond time and death lie life and eternity, offering opportunity for all that is denied us here. It is much to have arrived at the height from whence we can look calmly upon possible failure.

CHAPTER V.

'WHEREFORE I CHOOSE MY PORTION.'

'Many are the noble souls who have perished bitterly with their tasks unfinished. Some in utter famine, like Otway; some in dark insanity, like Cowper and Collins; some, like Chatterton, have sought out a more stern quietus, and turning their indignant steps away from a world which refused them welcome, have taken refuge in that stern fortress, where poverty and cold neglect could not reach them any more.'

CARLYLE: *Life of Schiller.*

IT was, doubtless, an easy matter for the rich and respectable Herr Körner to perceive that his non-respectable tenant, Jean Paul Richter, had no suitable garments to wear; but Herr Körner could know nothing of the life lived within that 'small, mean garden-house,' of which he was the owner. It is within the limits of possibility that the poverty-stricken tenant would not lightly have changed places with his wealthy and indignant landlord. It is not to be questioned that the

life of any artist, poet, painter, or sculptor, has in it such hours of enthusiastic and elevated happiness as may atone for much that is unhappy. These moments of uplifting, of enjoyment of the depths and exaltations of the intellectual life, the world does not see. If sight were vouchsafed, would it understand? Would it sympathize? Would there be as keen perception of these compensations as of the more patent and visible drawbacks which require no fineness of insight for their discernment?

There must be something, some sufficiently deep and high thing to evoke that spirit of martyrdom which is a necessity to him who would enter by the strait gate of poverty and suffering into that region where alone he can live and lift his face as one who lives in freedom.

To Dorigen these hours, when she sat alone in her attic room with her pen in her hand and her idyll of St. Hild, not yet completed, but seen clearly in her brain to the last line of it, were perhaps the happiest hours she had known, or now ever might know. She had hope to sustain her; and though it was a fluctuating hope, now bright and certain, and now timid and fearful, it never deserted her. Once let this more important poem be finished, and surely some good

would come, some fuller recognition, some more substantial reward. Alas! alas! the need for this reward was growing more pressing every day.

All her little trinkets and ornaments had been sold, though most of them had been birthday or Christmas presents from Dr. Wilderslowe and Lady Anna; and even the cashmere shawl, which Colonel Wilderslowe had sent to her for her kindness to his little boy, was no longer in its place in her drawer. These were small thorns in her path, but they were painful. She saw presently that she might not devote her whole time and strength to this one poem, of which her brain was so full. Briefer ones had to be written, with now and then an article in prose, an essay, a descriptive paper for a magazine. But her heart was seldom wholly in this lower work, and there was no true satisfaction in it. The grain of which it tasted was very common grain indeed, and might nourish no one.

Michael Salvain, coming and going during that time of probation, discerned much to test his strength and his patience. He knew now how Dorigen's time and thought were occupied; Lady Anna had unthinkingly betrayed the secret to Mrs. Michael Salvain, and Mrs. Michael had not considered it to be a secret at all.

'Was ever anything so mad?' she said, after reading the letter aloud at the dinner-table to her husband and his mother and sister. 'Fancy being insane enough to attempt to support herself and half-a-dozen other people by writing poetry! But Miss Gower is just the person to do some insane thing. . . . Find out all about it for me, Michael. It will be immensely interesting to watch her progress, whether it be upward or downward. . . . We might ask her to come to Thorsgrif for a few days in the spring.'

And her husband smiled, and through his brain swept the words of another woman-poet:

'Quite low-born, self-educated, somewhat gifted tho' by nature,
And we make a point of asking her, of being very kind.'*

It was not an easy thing even for him to find out all about the life that Dorigen was living just then. He knew, partly to his satisfaction, partly to his regret, that when Lancelot Wilderslowe had left Hild's Haven in the autumn he had taken with him a very definitely-written letter. Dorigen had taken pains to express her decision in language that could not be misunderstood or misconstrued. 'He will marry Gladwyn before a year is over,' she had said to herself as she posted the letter. And in truth she might have predicted unlikelier things.

* Mrs. Browning.

No ; Michael's feelings about this were not all satisfaction. There were times now when he would have been glad to know that Dorigen was protected and cared for, delivered from a life of pain and responsibility, and the low, small cares that deaden the soul, and dull the brain, and harden the heart. It was written on her face and in her manner that this strenuous experience was drawing the life from the years to be.

One day when he went to Tenter's Close—it was a dull March afternoon—he found that Dorigen was looking paler and more worn than ever. The two Miss Cleminshaws were there in the little room, sitting in the middle of a quantity of white tarlatane striped with pink. Michael stood for a moment biting his lip in the impatience which beset him. The Miss Cleminshaws were apologetic, and began tucking up the heap of finery into the smallest space into which it could be made to go. Thomasin meanwhile was smiling her most fascinating smiles, and darting glances from under her untidy shock of hair in a way that was wonderful to see.

'Couldn't you come up to the cliffs for awhile?' Michael asked of Dorigen. 'It is cold, but you could wrap up warmly;' and she instantly consented.

It did not take her a minute to put on her

black cloak and the crape-trimmed hat which seemed to make her look even whiter and thinner than before. And Michael did not fail to note the weary step, out of which all grace and lightness had gone; and it seemed certainly to him that her smile was 'worse than tears.' For awhile he walked on quite silently. They went up the narrow lane that led to the cliffs, the dreariest of the dreary lanes in the immediate neighbourhood of Hild's Haven.

Out on the cliff-top it was more chilly, but the sea was there, rippling and heaving in the soft grey light; and down on the rocks below the waves were breaking with soothing murmurs that seemed to deepen the silence in Michael Salvain's heart. Quiet, and grey, and sad as the scene was, it yet had beauty in it—a beauty as of beautiful poetry he felt it to be—recognising slowly that the echoes of some poems he had read of late were still sounding in his brain. Involuntarily he turned and looked into the wan, sad face beside him, and the two stood still and silent on the green cliff-edge.

'Well,' Dorigen said presently, looking up with a smile, 'have you *nothing* to say to me to-day?'

'I have much to say,' Michael replied gravely, and looking down into her eyes with the same

strong, half-pained look of compassion which had been on his face years ago in Wharram's Yard. 'I have much to say,' he replied, 'or rather, what I have to say is of great importance. . . . You must leave that house, and those people. You must leave them at once. You must promise me to-day that you will leave them.'

A flash as of pain came over Dorigen's face. The strength, the impetuosity of Michael's tone and manner was more than his words. For one instant the rush of old emotion made her feel as though she might faint, and instinctively she put out a hand to prevent herself from falling.

Michael caught it, and held her for a moment in dread and in surprise, but she recovered quickly.

'I know why you say that, and all that you mean,' she said. 'There is no need for us to put it into words. It is kind of you to care; it helps me as nothing else could help me, to find that you have thought for me, and that I can speak to you as I can speak to no one else. There is no one now but you who has known me all through, and understood me. And you will understand me still. I cannot leave Tenter's Close; not yet. Besides my father's wish and will, I have the consciousness that it is my place until—until it is changed for me. I should

expect no help, no blessing on my life, if I were to desert my appointed place merely because it is difficult. And I shall not be needed here always, perhaps not for long. The girls will marry; Lydia is going to be married soon; and Mrs. Gower will prefer to live with her own children when they have homes into which they can receive her. She has told me that. . . . Besides, I have other hopes,' Dorigen continued, smiling that wan smile again, and blushing faintly. 'I live on hope.'

'It doesn't seem to be a particularly nourishing thing,' Michael said sadly. 'I suppose your hope concerns your—your other life,' he continued, speaking of this 'other life' for the first time, and wondering how he should speak with sufficient carefulness. 'I should think no hope that you have of that kind is likely to be denied.'

'You can say that!' Dorigen exclaimed in a low, tremulous voice, and blushing deeply as she spoke.

'I could say much more than that,' he answered, remembering the night he had sat alone with her first book of poems in his hand, knowing that then he saw the inmost heart and soul of the woman he had loved as he had never dreamed to see it, and discerning more clearly

than ever his life's loss. Yet no surprise had touched him as it had touched others. This was in her; and more than this, he had said to himself, feeling instinctively that she might never express all herself, or even the best of herself; no poet, no writer does that. Some one else had said it, 'The best is that which can never be written.'

'Could you tell me more particularly about your hope?' Michael asked presently. 'I do not ask for curiosity.'

'Don't make little explanations like that,' Dorigen pleaded. 'I have no other friend to whom I could speak so utterly without reserve as I can to you, and it is good so to speak sometimes. It is like the sharing of a burden, giving you half its weight. Many a time I feel that certain ideas would crystallize themselves much more quickly if I might but see them through the light from some one else's brain. They would gain in weight and importance. And I think my times of despondency would neither be so dark nor so frequent if my life were but a little shared and understood; and even hope itself would be a finer thing. . . . The hope I spoke of just now has a small foundation, has it not?' she said, taking from her pocket a letter written on half a sheet of note-paper. 'I received this

yesterday, and it made the brightest day I have had this year.'

The note was from the editor of a new magazine, which had already started fairly, and with every prospect of success. It was published by an old-established firm; and the names appended to such of the articles as were signed were proof enough that the literary standard aimed at was a high one. It was published every two months, and the price of it was three shillings; so that it was not likely to be overlooked in the crowd of monthlies. The illustrations were excellent.

'DEAR MADAM (the note began),

'I have read your poem, "The Idyll of Saint Hild," which you were good enough to send me, with great interest and pleasure. I should like to have it for *The Trafalgar Square Magazine*, but I fear it is much too long. I could insert a poem in two parts, or even in three, but I should not like to go beyond this; and according to my computation your "Idyll" would require to be divided into five. I do not like to ask you to shorten it, for I know by experience what bitter work that is; but in its present state it is quite impossible that I should use it. I believe I could find room for it if it were but

twenty-five or thirty MS. pages shorter than it is. Would this reduction be possible to you? I do not ask you to do it; but I mention my requirement as a fact.

'I do not need to refer to the critiques of your published volume. I know your poems well, and have, I assure you, a very strong appreciation of their value. I should much like to have your assistance on the magazine under my charge.

'Very truly yours,

'JAMES D. REIGHTON.'

Dorigen did not read the whole of this to Michael Salvain, but she read enough to make him understand her satisfaction. He made no comment, however.

'Are you not going to congratulate me?' she asked in some surprise.

'I congratulate you on having written the poem!'

'Thank you,' she said; 'but

> '"When you drink
> Still wish some happier fortune to your friend,
> Than even to have written a far better book."'

'You will shorten your poem, of course?' Michael asked, knowing that she might not refuse a chance so good.

'Yes; as Mr. Reighton says, it will be bitter work, but it will not be so bitter as sending it from publisher to publisher, as I might have had to do.'

And in her own heart she added:

'And it will not be so bitter as to need bread, and fire, and clothing; not so bitter as to be fighting hopelessly with anxiety; not so bitter as being asked ceaselessly for money which I cannot pay.'

She was grateful enough for the prospect held out to her, and, as she had said, she was living on hope.

But, ah me! for the hope deferred, and the hope denied, that makes the training of him who would live by his pen alone.

'He must enter,' says one who had so entered, 'on a scene of oppression, distortion, isolation, under which for the present the fairest years of his existence are painfully crushed down. But this, too, has its wholesome influences on him, for there is in genius that alchemy which converts all metals into gold; which from suffering educes strength; from error, clearer wisdom; from all things, good.'

CHAPTER VI.

TWO LIVES LAID DOWN.

'Was I a careless woman set at ease
That this so bitter cup is brimmed for me?'
CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

IT was a few weeks after that day on the cliff-top that a sudden failure in old Than Rountree's health became noticeable. For some time Dorigen went frequently; then she insisted upon going to stay in the cottage in Salthouse Garth altogether. The peace of it was appreciably sweet after life in Tenter's Close.

The old man gave no trouble. He would lie silent in the tiny bedroom which opened out of the kitchen, not speaking for hours, and only rousing himself to be polite when the Rector went in, or when Gladwyn Thesiger came to sit with Dorigen, and turned to his bedside for

awhile to try to extract from him some wild and wonderful story of the sea.

Mr. Thesiger's curate, Mr. Frank Gerard, would come too, sometimes; indeed, he got into a habit of coming rather frequently as the weeks went on, and he was always made to feel that he was welcome. Dorigen enjoyed the coming of the clever, genial, kind-hearted clergyman quite as much as old Than enjoyed it. These were memorable days, and offered some strange contrasts.

There were times when it would certainly seem as if that ancient belief in the jealousy of the gods were not without foundation.

By slow degrees Dorigen's secret had crept out, and had awakened a certain interest, a certain curiosity concerning herself and her life that was not so wholly unpleasant as she had feared it might be. True, she came but very little into actual contact with it, so that she saw only the kindliness, the appreciation, which often enough had such odd little touches in it, as of a kind of pride of local possession. Her days were spent in ceaseless effort, now in this direction, now in that; every exertion that she could make being hardly enough for the home in Tenter's Close. That was her care by day and by night, and failure to do all that was required of her

hurt her conscience as a sin. Of all this there was none to know.

One of the heaviest of her secret troubles was arising out of that 'Idyll of Saint Hild,' concerning which her hopes had been so high and inspiring. She had spent nearly three weeks in reducing it to suit the requirements of the editor of *The Trafalgar Square Magazine*, re-writing several portions in order that the excisions might leave no very noticeable trace; and doing her best to make the poem worthy of its promised good fortune. This she had done in the spring of the year, sending the MS. off again on the very day after it was completed.

Since that time she had watched the list of contents of each number in vain; and she had waited for proof-sheets in vain. And each disappointment fell across the two months to come. So, mainly by old Than's bedside, the summer passed heavily yet not unhopefully. Had she not that kind and appreciative letter in her desk?

No one, save Michael Salvain, knew that she was expecting the appearance of the poem. Not even to Gladwyn Thesiger, who was a friend both kind and true, could she bring herself to speak of a yet unaccomplished purpose. She liked to think of the pleasure there would be at the Rectory, of the congratulations that would come

when at last her hope was fulfilled. There was always sympathy there with all she did; and more than once some brief unsigned poem or essay of hers had been recognised when she did not know of it.

'When is your next volume of poems coming out, Miss Gower? May I ask? is it rude to ask?' Mr. Gerard said one day in his usual tone of pleasant raillery. Gladwyn was there, and it was one of old Than Rountree's brightest hours, so that there was no special gloom in the homely little cottage where the old whaler was living out his last few days.

'Softly!' Dorigen said, understanding the tone and the man too well to feel any annoyance. 'Softly:

> '"A poet is a word soon said,
> A book's a thing soon written. Nay, indeed,
> The more the poet shall be questionable,
> The more unquestionably comes his book."'

'Well,' said Mr. Gerald, '*you* haven't over-flooded the world with books so far. . . . But tell me now, how did you feel when you awoke and found yourself famous?'

'That has yet to happen,' said Dorigen with a sudden gravity.

'Oh no, it hasn't! I saw your *nom de guerre* mentioned in the *Metropolitan Review* last week

with no end of praise and prophecy attached to it . . . . But now do tell me, do you *always* sleep with laurel-leaves under your pillow? That is said to be a sure way of obtaining inspiration.'

'No; I have never tried the laurel-leaves.'

'You prefer the Grass of Parnassus?'

'I don't know the Grass of Parnassus. Isn't that stupid of me? I am told that some of our cliffs are white with it in its time.'

'And you don't know it? Well, that is surprising! Fancy living on the sacred mount, and not knowing its chief flower!'

'Perhaps it doesn't grow so far down the slope?'

'Now that is mock humility, a thing I have no sympathy with. But do be serious, please! I like talking to a real live author, and one so seldom gets the chance.'

'You haven't the chance to-day. I am only half alive.'

'Are you not well?' Gladwyn Thesiger said sympathetically. 'I am sorry. But you work too hard; and you live too much alone. Is it good for you? Is it even quite good for your poetry that you never speak of it, never try its effect upon anybody till it is published?'

'I do sometimes sympathize with Molière,'

Dorigen replied. 'I am told that at one time, having no one else at hand, he used to have his housekeeper into his study, and read his plays aloud to her.'

'Ah! I—I sympathize with the housekeeper,' said Mr. Gerard gravely. And the next moment the cottage door was thrown open with a burst, and Crainie Cleminshaw appeared, hatless and excited, on the scene.

'Oh, Dorigen, you're to go home,' she said peremptorily, and turning her round eyes from Miss Thesiger to Mr. Gerard, as if determined to make an impression of some kind. 'You're to go at once, and I'm to stay with Than till you come back. And if you have any money here, you're to take it with you.'

Poor old Than heard as he lay in his little room, and his groan was audible enough.

'They'll kill her among 'em,' he said to Gladwyn Thesiger, who went to his bedside to offer to stay until Dorigen's return. But Miss Cleminshaw stayed also, and the old man lost an opportunity of saying something he had much wished to say to Gladwyn. He hinted at his desire, but all in vain, and the opportunity never came any more.

Of course it was a sudden demand for money which necessitated Dorigen's presence in Tenter's

Close. A stern-looking, but not quite sober man was waiting there with a bill which he insisted should be paid at once. And though Dorigen gave him all that she had, it was not enough.

'I will try to send you the remainder this week,' she said with pale lips, and a trembling that ran through her whole frame.

Then she turned and went to her room to write a letter.

She sat awhile trying to recover herself, trying to see if any alternative were left to her, but there was none. She must write and ask the editor of *The Trafalgar Square Magazine* if he would be kind enough to advance but a part of the money that would be due to her when her 'Idyll of Saint Hild' was published.

It was as if every sentence of that letter was written, if not with her heart's blood, then with her brain's essence. When her task was done she rose up weak and faint, as people rise from an illness.

It was the 7th day of September. She might never forget that date. And she might never forget the days that followed—days of waiting, of suffering, of keen, silent, unspeakable suffering.

Those who have known such crises in their

life may perhaps comprehend without written detail how the hours went on. Those who have not known, could not be shown more than the surface. The depth, the horror, the humiliation cannot be put into words.

Day by day it went on. Morning after morning broke in hope ; night sank to night in bitter despair.

The last shilling had been expended two days when the postman came one morning to the door of the cottage in Salthouse Garth. He had a brown-paper parcel in his hand, and Dorigen's heart sank instantly at the sight of it. She knew before she opened it that it contained the manuscript of the one poem of her life.

She had spent above a year in writing it. Her best thought had gone to the creation of it ; she had given so much of her life, so much of her suffering, of her soul's strength to its production. And there it lay, a soiled, nay, dirty, and torn, and dog's-eared heap of paper.

Neither fiction nor the drama takes much account of the passionate pains, the tragic disappointments of the intellectual side of human life and nature. Are they not as worthy of note, as pathetic, as deeply important as the things which touch the emotions of the heart only ? Man does not live by love alone ! Is it less to

have the hope of your brain struck down by a sudden blow, than to have the hope of your affections destroyed? Is there no interest in human life sufficient for the purpose of him who writes in parables, save that one interest which surrounds love and marriage? Assuredly we do not yet see so far in this matter as those who come after us will see.

There was no letter with the parcel; and when the first stun was over, Dorigen tried to hope that the MS. might have been returned for further alteration. But the evening post destroyed this hope. A letter came, similar in appearance exactly to that kindly and pleasant one in her desk. But this one had nothing in it of kindness or of pleasantness.

'DEAR MADAM,' began the editor of *The Trafalgar Square Magazine*,—

'I have made a very careful calculation of the length of your poem, and I find that it is longer by several pages than when I sent it to you to be reduced. I don't see that you can possibly shorten it further without destroying all proportion, and weakening it in every way. Under these circumstances I think it would be much fairer both to yourself and to me to withdraw "The Idyll of

Saint Hild." I should be glad to have a poem of suitable length from your pen.

'Yours very sincerely,

'JAMES D. REIGHTON.'

The roll of manuscript which Dorigen had taken from the poem in the spring was on the table by the window; sufficient proof, if there had been any to require proof, that the accusation contained in this most contradictory note was not true. Of course she was aware that there was something behind all this, though she might not then know what it was. And, indeed, it would have comforted her very little if she had been told—as later she was told—that Mr. Reighton was a very young man, new to the task of editing, and had accepted or partially accepted a far larger number of manuscripts than he was warranted in doing. Finally he had found it necessary to make a clearance, and very naturally chose to begin with such contributors as he could disappoint with impunity. This it was that was behind that hour of incomprehensible trial.

For some time after reading the letter she sat there silent, motionless, stupefied. Had the means of living been hers, she knew that she might have set to work at once to rewrite the

poem and restore it to its original completeness. Then she might have found a publisher for it. She had enough of brief poems, some of which had already appeared in various magazines, to make, with the 'Idyll,' a volume much larger than her first volume. But all this working and waiting was out of the question without even bread to eat while the working and waiting was being done.

Still she sat there. Old Than slept peacefully, only waking from time to time to taste of the jelly or the beef-tea that Mrs. Thesiger sent almost daily, less because old Than could not have provided for his small wants out of his own very slender annuity, than because the Rectory cook was clever in making such things, and had all proper appliances. Now and then he spoke of his satisfaction that he should be sailing into port under such easy weather, in his own cottage, with the vestiges of his life all about him; his crutch by the head of his bed; 'Little Peace,' as he had come latterly to call her again, always there to 'turn his pillow.' The old man spoke often of that luxury of having some one to turn his pillow.

'I can hear the knap, knap, knapping o' that crutch on the deck o' the *Narwhal* as fair as owt to-night,' he said once when he woke up.

It was about midnight. Dorigen was leaning with her head against the old high-backed, rush-seated chair in which Than had sat for so many years. Her hand was lying upon his, which seemed colder to-night and greyer. When he slept again, she made up the fire and lighted a larger lamp, that the cottage should seem more cheery when he awoke next time.

Then she sat down again, and thought till she was thought-sick, but she could see nothing except that her life was done—all her real life, the life she had cared for, fought for, suffered for. It was over as completely as that life which old Than was so peacefully laying down.

There was no peace in her own heart. There might be quiet, but it was the quiet of utter desperateness.

It was a year now since she had passed through that night of strife and temptation consequent upon Lancelot Wilderslowe's offer of marriage. She had never regretted the decision she had made then; on the contrary, even in the midst of her sorest trials, she had rejoiced in it, and had congratulated herself on being at least free, at least mistress of her own life, her own thought, her own powers. And even to-night she did not regret that resolute decision.

But nevertheless some of that long-past night's

experience came back upon her now. She had doubted then whether she would have been wholly justified in making sacrifice of a life to which she had been so strongly and manifestly drawn by no will or wish of her own. . . . *Now* the sacrifice was demanded.

And it was a complete sacrifice that was required. There was no tempting alternative awaiting her now.

She must find for herself a home where she could live, and work such work as she could do, and receive such wages as her work might deserve. She had no very definite ideas, and the vagueness of the prospect was an additional terror. Changes were taking place at St. Dunstan's. Bertie had a tutor; Colonel Wilderslowe was coming home, or rather it was arranged that Lady Anna was to meet him in Paris. The very remembrance of St. Dunstan's, and of the fair and bright life she had lived there, awoke in Dorigen's heart the fear that the next experience would in all probability make her acquainted with wide reverses. She could not help shivering as she sat trying to look into that dark, chill future that was before her. Her keen vision did but help to deepen the gloom of it. Mean as was the shelter of Tenter's Close, and full of all pain and humiliation as her life

there might be, she yet shrank from the only change that was open to her now. But all the same, she knew that the time for change had come.

Everything was changing. Her whole life had been full of changes; and she could hardly help going back over the past as she sat there, but perhaps the words that old Than was murmuring from time to time helped as much to give colour to her thought as her own grief did. It seemed that once again she was a little child, drinking in eagerly the old tales of the land of ice and snow of which she had never been weary.

'They like the thin bay ice, them whales,' the old man murmured. 'Then they can break it easy, an' come up to breathe. Eh, I'd like thee to see a whale crackin' a sheet of ice wi' the crown of his head, an' comin' up to the surface. . . . I'd like thee to see it all, honey, but thee'd be despert frightened. . . . It's all so strange i' them Greenland seas; an' it's cold, despert cold.'

The whole world was seeming strange and cold to her as she sat there; and life seemed full of that perplexity which comes upon us all when our best efforts are thwarted, our most genuine labour fruitless, our highest hopes denied, our most earnest purpose turned to failure and to shame.

Musing, grieving, praying, resolving, she sat

there by the dying man. And the night went on; and she knew that she was living through a crisis which had had none like unto it in her life since that life began.

This last keen agonizing sacrifice made, she would have nothing left wherewith to make any other sacrifice. The rest of her life she might live passively, not caring how the years went, so that each one brought her nearer the end.

'I think I could have borne it all, if I might have *seen*,' she said to herself. 'If I might have had some vision, if I might have discerned some gain to be won out of all this loss. It is the uselessness, the waste of it all, the waste of life, of suffering. What good can there be in a sacrifice that is demanded, that one would have escaped if one could?'

Then in the silence there was answer made. Was not this very ignorance, this very blindness, the secret of the bitterness of most earthly sorrows? To have knowledge would be to have no bitterness.

'What I do thou knowest not now!'

'*What I do*,' said One, knowing always what He does, and asking with beseeching Voice for simple acquiescence, simple submission, simple renunciation.

So to accept a sorrow sent by God is assuredly

'to make God's deed ours.' This light at least we have.

Waste! No; in all this wide dark suffering world, wherein millions in all ages have lived but to suffer, and have known no end of suffering until the end that death has brought; wherein millions upon millions yet groan, and curse, and sin, and pray, and trust, and bear in silence—in all this there is no waste, no, not so much as a wasted sigh.

By sorrow, by that utmost sorrow of the Cross, was the redemption of humanity wrought well-nigh nineteen hundred years ago. By sorrow, by utmost sorrow alone, can we take our apportioned share in that redemption.

'It is in losses that we cannot escape; pains that God calls upon us to bear, bafflings from which no effort can set us free, no uprightness deliver; or in that part of it wherein the voice of duty bids us incur loss or pain, or leave unacted the deeds that would delight us most. These things are the best in life; for these are God using us, these are His taking our poor services.'[o]

To see this, or even to believe, *not* fully seeing, is to look with newer eyes upon human life.

For a long while Dorigen sat there, penetrated as it were with new light, new strength. It seemed as if she had made her moan for nothing.

[o] James Hinton.

And by-and-by there came slowly the feeling that she might yet be glad for this opportunity; that she might yet let into her heart 'the joy that is the joy of love, and finds its necessary food in sacrifice.'

Though she might not discern her sorrow's end or meaning, she could rest in the thought that He who required it knew. He knew it all. He saw her as she sat there making efforts to pass beyond the testing of the moment to that clearer region of the soul's life where endurance of earthly ill might pass on, if not to rapture, yet to perfect peace.

Already it seemed as if the old life was behind that night, the new before; and a deed became possible without further strife that would have seemed as if it could but end in madness a few hours earlier.

And yet it could hardly be said that there was no pang in it. Leaving old Than sleeping quietly, she went into the outer room and took up in her hand the written poem into which she had condensed so much of her own life's inner experience. She held it only for one sad, passionate, prayerful moment.

Then, with reluctant hands, and throbbing heart, and determined spirit, she laid it sheet by sheet upon the fire, till not a word remained

save such as remained written for ever in her own memory. These should never again be written elsewhere.

'Some one else will write it,' she said half audibly. 'Some one else will write that "Idyll of Saint Hild," but I shall not know it. I foretell it; but I shall never see it.'

Then she sat down again, feeling a great emptiness in the room—nay, in the world, in life, in all things. The peace which she had expected, and, indeed, had half tasted, was not perfected. Nay, for awhile it had gone out of reach again.

The night was almost at an end now. Old Than was murmuring in his sleep again; and it seemed to the watcher by his bed that a change had come over his face during the past half-hour, that change which is so indescribable and yet so unmistakable. She had no fear; yet she knew that it would be well that she should not be quite alone when the end came. She had promised to call one of the neighbours if there should be need.

'Shall I ask Mrs. Rydale to come in, Uncle Than?' she whispered, putting the question mainly by way of ascertaining how far the old man was conscious. He opened his eyes, and looked up with a faint smile.

'Ay, honey, thee can tell her,' he said feebly, and seeming to understand for the moment. But Dorigen's hand was in his, and she could not easily withdraw it. 'Ay, thee can tell her, Little Peace,' he went on murmuring. 'But I'd not go yet a bit. . . . No, I'd not go while this snow-fog's so despert thick. Eh, but it is thick ! . . . I can't see across the deck.'

There was another pause, a brief one, so it seemed in that strong mingling of life's strongest emotions. .The dawn-light was struggling in through the closed blinds, the sparrows were chirping in the old apple-tree at the door, which this year, for the first time, had had no bud or bloom. Then suddenly—very suddenly, the old man half raised himself on his pillow, and a great glad light came into his eyes and passed upon his face.

'Eh ! at last ! at last !' he said in slow tones, tremulous with gladness. 'At last ! at last, there's the oppen water ! . . . Ay, it's yonder, the clear blue oppen water ; shinin' again' the glitterin' ice ; an' surgin' up upon the edges o' the floe ! . . . Eh, but I've looked a lang time for the sight o' that ! It's dolin' to be closed in i' the thick ice so long, an' at last ! at last ! I'm fain to reach yon blue water. Eh, I'm fain to see yon shinin' oppen water !'

CHAPTER VII.

'LIKE ONE WHO ONCE HAD WINGS.'

'At first I felt in uttermost despair,
And said, "O Lord, this cross I cannot bear,"
But I have borne it, *and I bear it now*,
Only, oh only, do not ask me how.'

After HEINE.

IT is strange how sometimes a life that will seem to onlookers to be uneventful to a most monotonous degree, yet appears to the person living it to be full of event. The cataclysms of fate do not always take such form as would be acceptable to the newspaper; and a man may pass through a series of crises, every one of which he shall hide successfully from his nearest neighbour if he will to do so. And the greater the sorrows and disappointments of life, the greater the need of living it so far to one's self.

To Dorigen Gower life had never seemed flat or empty; rather had it appeared to be full of all storms and changes, of sins and sorrows, of hopes, mistakes, disappointments. It was not otherwise now; and yet people looking on wondered that she could live a life so dreary and tedious, so unbrightened and unrelieved. No one save Michael Salvain knew that the thing she craved above all others was a time of absolute peace.

Though three months had gone by since that night when old Than had found the open water, and when Dorigen had with such keen strife and pain laid down the one great hope of her life, she was still living in Tenter's Close, and still enduring much the same existence as before—the same, yet with a difference that was wider, and went deeper, than anybody knew. Not even Michael Salvain could gauge it wholly.

Of course he knew how things were going with her on the surface—nay, below the surface. He came and went frequently, inventing such small pleasures and surprises as he might do, and having the satisfaction of feeling that his mere coming was always a pleasure to one he cared greatly to please. Sometimes his wife came with him, and more often she sent flowers and fruit, and books and magazines. Was it mere kindli-

ness that moved her? Was there aught behind?

Yes. Michael knew all about the little hoard of money that Than Rountree had left for Dorigen—his own savings and Miss Rountree's for many, many years. The old man had put the money into Mr. Salvain's hands some weeks before his death.

'Keep it for her, sir,' he said. 'An' please try so as she'll hev it for herself. We saved it sixpence by sixpence, Leenock an' me; an' we allus meant her to have it. . . . It's nought, so to speak; an' yet it would do her a bit o' good, mebbe, i' some strait; an' I'm feared she's like to ha' plenty o' them. . . . But say nought till I'm under the mould, sir. Please say nought on it till then.'

And of course Michael kept the old man's wish. He did not speak of the gift till some days after that funeral in the old churchyard, when a coffin had been borne to a grave with a rude wooden crutch lying upon the lid—that same crutch which had washed up by the side of a drowning man when the *Narwhal* was wrecked upon the rocks at Northscaur.

'You are sure you have not been reading "Aurora Leigh" lately?' Dorigen said, when Michael told her. She spoke with a quick flush

of surprise and emotion. 'You remember how Romney tried to make Aurora believe in a deed of gift?'

'I remember very well, for I *have* read the book lately, and with a purpose, I confess. But for certain things said there, I had doubtless tried some such deception as Romney tried.'

There was no doubting Michael Salvain's sincerity; but small as the sum was, it was yet of force enough to move backward, at least for a time, that heavy wheel of fate which had crushed her life's purpose out from her life, and left her standing as a tree for awhile might stand, with its root cut out from the earth beneath.

They were walking up and down the lane near Tenter's Close as they spoke. The hedges were turning to russet and brown; a daisy or two yet studded the scrap of green waste by the roadside; women were spreading clothes to dry on the stunted bushes. Over the harbour and the town there was a sunny, glittering mist that added a special beauty to the old red gables, the dark wharves and dockyards, and all the signs of life that were about the river-side. The clatter from the shipyards absorbed all other sounds save the lowing of cattle in the Abbey fields.

'Was there any condition attached to the gift?' Dorigen asked, after a long silence, during

which her whole heart and soul had seemed to revive within her.

'No,' said Michael. 'But it was the old man's earnest wish that it should be for your own use and benefit. Pardon me for saying that I think you should respect that wish.'

It was not easy to respect it; and yet it may be that old Than himself would have been satisfied to know of the great, glad relief that came by the lifting of burdens that had been almost too heavy to be borne. And even when this was done, there remained still enough to enable Dorigen to hope that she might take up life again almost where she had broken it off on that sad night. . . . Almost; not quite. She could write no other 'Idyll of Saint Hild.'

No; she would take Mr. Harvey Taunton's advice at last—driven to take it, as he had prophesied she would be, by the strong force of circumstance alone.

She would write no more poetry.

This decision was only arrived at after another struggle, almost as fierce and painful as the last; but the very fierceness of it attested the fact that the decision, once made, would be irrevocable. There should be no turning aside when once the new path was really chosen. But it might not be chosen without cost. On

the face of it, it might seem but a small thing that a writer of poetry should be constrained to write poems in prose rather than in verse; but it could only seem small to one who had no special bent toward either.

That 'Unknown Painter' was not moved to lay aside his brushes and palette altogether. He might go on painting, but since he might not obey the inspiration that came to him, he was fain to confess the sinking of his heart as he covered the cloister walls with the monotonous series, 'Virgin, Babe, and Saint.' He who had so longed to be the messenger of heaven, the steward of spiritual mysteries, could never contentedly give of the mere mechanical invention of his own brain. It is a far-reaching, much-aspiring soul that vibrates through the words:

> 'How my soul springs up! No bar
> Stayed me—ah, thought which saddens while it soothes!
> —Never did fate forbid me star by star
> To outburst on your night with all my gift
> Of fires from God.'

But his cup was spilt, his sweet treasure wasted by human blindness, human shortsightedness. Life had no more to offer to him.

No; such decisions are not made without cost; and to Dorigen Gower, as the days went on, the cost did not seem less, but rather more.

If ever success should come in this new way, it would not be the success she had hoped for. It was as if life were set to a lower key, and the music of it written with incomplete chords, broken harmonies, to which no execution could give the full power and resonant sweetness of the music she had hoped to know.

But these winter days, though lower in their kind, were yet days of comparative peace. They passed on to spring, the spring to summer; and when Lancelot Wilderslowe came to Hild's Haven again, as he did in July, he saw that some change had come over Dorigen's face—a change that was toward a greater quiet, and yet did not seem to him for the better.

'I don't know what it is,' he said to Gladwyn Thesiger one day at the Rectory. Thyra was there, and Juliet, the irrepressible; and he had been inviting them to drive over to his new lodging at Lodbrok Bay, where he was painting a picture which he was unwise enough to say he intended for the Royal Academy.

'I should like you to see it,' he said, speaking more especially to Gladwyn. 'Couldn't you drive over—you and Miss Gower, and as many of your sisters as the pony-carriage would hold?'

'I should like it immensely,' said Gladwyn,

with eagerness; 'but I doubt whether Dorna would go. She doesn't go anywhere now.'

It was then that Lancelot wondered aloud what change had come over the face he had recently watched with some surprise, some disappointment. And Gladwyn was quick enough to feel the significance of the fact that he was able to speak critically of one whom only two years before he had hardly cared to speak of at all, except in rare moments of confidence. But she was loyal, and admitted no touch of disparagement.

'I don't know what it is,' Lancelot had said; 'but certainly Miss Gower has changed. She looks older, thinner, and some indefinite charm that she had is gone from her manner altogether.'

'It is only that she is weary,' Gladwyn replied loyally; 'and it is not only her work that worries her; she has other things. And her life has no happiness in it, no tenderness, no beauty. How can you expect a woman to go on looking well out of whose life all that a woman most cares for has gone? All that you say you miss in her would come back in six weeks if it had the chance.'

'But we will try to persuade her to come to Lodbrok Bay,' said Juliet. 'When shall we come, Mr. Wilderslowe?'

'The first fine day you *can* come.'

'Then we will come to-morrow, if we can have the carriage,' she said quickly. 'Are we to come to luncheon?'

'To luncheon!' said Lancelot gravely, and looking suddenly serious. 'Are you particularly fond of the dried heads of codfish? Because there isn't anything else at Lodbrok Bay. They bring them round in a cart. A dreadful woman in man's clothes stands in the middle of the cart, and holds up salted fish-heads strung on a string. I thought at first—I did really—that they were the scalps of her enemies; and all the while she was uttering something that sounded like an incantation in a foreign tongue. She goes on uttering this for a while, then she begins a denunciation, and then you go out and buy. They are eighteen for a shilling.'

'I say! How cheap!'

'They are very cheap. If you like, I will have a shilling's worth cooked for you to-morrow.'

'Very well,' said Juliet. 'Any potatoes?'

'I don't know about potatoes,' said Lancelot, with a new accession of gravity. 'I fancy you eat seaweed with salted cod-fish—at least, I think it was seaweed that was in the tureen to-day. But you can never tell at Lodbrok Bay; the place has a flavour of its own, and everything tastes of that.

It is a very strong flavour, and somewhat peculiar. It is not exactly sea-wrack, and it is not exactly salt-fish, nor is it exactly oilskin clothing; I should say it was a rather careless combination of the three. But come to-morrow and taste it for yourself. You begin to taste about half-way down the bank.'

'Oh, we know the Bay Bank!' said Juliet; 'and I know why the place was called Lodbrok Bay. It was because the sons of Ragnar Lodbrok landed there when they came over to avenge the death of their father. You know about Ragnar Lodbrok?'

'Well, yes; but I'm afraid I couldn't stand an examination.'

'Couldn't you? Well, then, I'll tell you. He was a Danish sea-king—a Viking: and he built two ships, larger than any that had ever been built in the north before—they were so big, indeed, that he couldn't manage them, and he was shipwrecked on the coast of Yorkshire. It was called Deira then, and Ella was the king of it; and when Ragnar Lodbrok was shipwrecked, instead of helping him and his crews, Ella took him prisoner and put him into a dungeon full of vipers that stung him to death, and he never once uttered a groan; they say, indeed, that he laughed, but I never feel quite sure about that.

And then his sons, Ivar and Hubba and Halfdene, came over to take revenge, and they landed at Lodbrok Bay and set up their standard on Ravenhill—that is the high point of land at the south end of the bay. It was a magic banner; Ragnar Lodbrok's wife, Aslauga, and her daughters wove it in one noon; and it had a raven on it, and the raven used to seem as if it were flying when the Danes were going to be victorious.'

'How *very* interesting! I am sorry I haven't my note-book.'

'Never mind; I will tell it to you all over again to-morrow.'

But, unfortunately, when the morrow came it was a wet day, and the day after that a thick, damp sea-fret was on the coast, so that it was not till the afternoon of the Monday following that the Rectory pony-carriage stopped at the lower edge of Tenter's Close.

Dorigen was quite ready, waiting there in the warm sunshine that was upon the tiny scrap of front garden, where nothing grew generously save marigolds and chickweed.

'Ah! There you are!' exclaimed Gladwyn, in her cheery and rather boisterous fashion. 'Come along; you're going to drive, you know, and I'm going to sit beside you and chatter; and Mavis

is to feed us with grapes as we go; and Juliet's basket is full of gingerbread nuts. I am glad it's a fine day! We're going to have the jolliest drive we've had this year!'

And, in truth, it was a pleasant drive. Nearly six miles had to be overpassed before they came to the top of the steep road that leads down into Lodbrok Bay. The quaint fishing-town lies nestling in the hollows made by the irregularities of the cliffs, where they divide to let the little beck come gurgling down from the wide, green upland that rises above the bay. Some of the houses stand in the 'Bank' by the roadside; some are perched on little rocky plateaus; some stray quite down to the edge of the sea.

The wide bay has a sweep of at least three miles; and when the tide is out it is the dreariest, weariest, most fascinatingly picturesque bay that an artist could come upon—picturesque, that is, as Tennyson's Lincolnshire fens are picturesque, 'With level waste, and rounding grey.' No huge boulders break the line, as on the scaur at Hild's Haven; no tall, dark, rugged rocks stand out with bold, fractured angles. In the centre of the sweep of the bay the cliff slopes backward and upward gently, the stunted grass and the various wild things creep downward to the edge of the shingly beach; but at

each end of the bay the cliffs rise again and stand out with a grandeur all their own. To see 'the Bay' and the Bay town from the top of the Bank is to be well rewarded for your trouble in going there.

With a thoughtfulness hardly to have been expected, Lancelot had come half-way up the steep hillside to meet the carriage, bringing with him a boy, who took out the pony and conveyed it safely to a stable belonging to one of the small inns down in the town.

'Knowing how enterprising you are, I was afraid you might be attempting to drive all the way down,' he said, handing the four ladies out, and turning downward with a certain feeling of gratification.

Even at Lodbrok Bay it pleased him to have visitors, three of whom at least satisfied his artistic instinct for colour and brightness. Gladwyn's dress of creamy lawn, with ribbons of subdued carnation red, touched him like a piece of soft exhilarating music. He was drawn to her side, as he had been drawn to Dorigen's side at the Musical Festival at Kirk-Leighton, hardly knowing what it was that drew him, and finding a curiously fresh pleasure in watching the winning blue eyes, over which the long lashes seemed to droop as they had never drooped

before, and the rich tint on the sunburnt and sea-tanned face, which seemed every moment to be growing richer.

Gladwyn's brown, rippling hair looked prettier than ever under the broad-brimmed hat of drawn cream-tinted silk. There were some carnations among the trimming of ivory lace, and a cream-coloured parasol, lined with pure, low-toned red to match the flowers, gave a pretty finishing-touch to her costume—a costume which had required more study than Gladwyn was in the habit of giving. Juliet quite understood.

Mavis, with her pretty blue-and-white cotton frock, and Juliet with her pale pink, were walking with Dorigen down the hill, one on either side of the white, weary-looking woman dressed in shabby black, who could not even then forget her weariness or her hidden pain, but who made successful efforts to seem forgetful. Juliet clung to her, and put her pretty pink-and-white wrist within her arm, and tried all day to make the time a pleasant time for one whose pleasant days were so few.

And her effort was not unnoticed.

'It's all a mistake,' Juliet said once to Mavis, when Dorigen had joined Gladwyn for a few moments as they entered the small, unsavoury town. 'It's all a mistake. I'm sure Dorna

doesn't care for him, and I'm sure Gladwyn does; and I believe he's going to care for Gladwyn. Why, he's never spoken to either of us, and I don't think he knows we're here. I shall remind him presently.'

They went onward through the town, down by the narrow street where the small shops displayed their miscellaneous wares to such doubtful advantage; then, quite suddenly, the street ended in boats, and sand, and wrack-strewn beach, and sea.

'Are we going into the German Ocean?' asked Juliet in her little, high-pitched voice, and with a childishly coquettish glance.

'Not exactly *into it*,' replied Lancelot, with his usual exceeding gravity. 'For a little way —half a mile or so—we must walk along the edge of it; then we turn upward into a small ravine, called Burtree Beck. My rooms are at Burtree Beck, and my landlady's name is Jean Laverock. I shall have pleasure in introducing you to Mrs. Laverock.'

CHAPTER VIII.

MARGERY LAVEROCK.

'Her tree of life drooped from the root,
She said not one word in her heart's sore ache;
But peering through the dimness, nought discerning,
Trudged home, her pitcher dripping all the way;
So crept to bed, and lay.'

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

'JEAN LAVEROCK! It must be the Jean I used to know,' Dorigen said musingly, yet audibly. She and Juliet were walking first, slipping upon the wet shingly beach, where the long tangle was lying in rich brown heaps that glittered in the sun. There was a portion of a wreck in one hollow by the cliff, and a group of little children were pretending to do lessons among the black timbers, leaning their slates upon the splintered ribs of the bulwarks. They stopped to stare as the prettily-dressed ladies went by with the gentleman who

was living at Jean Laverock's, and who gave them pennies; and one girl among them wondered as they passed if Margery Laverock were at home. Dorigen heard the question.

'Of course it's the same Jean,' she said to Juliet. 'I used to know them quite well—indeed, Margery was the only child-friend I had. I knew they had come to live at Lodbrok Bay, but I fear that I had forgotten them of late. Margery will be grown up—quite a woman. She was such a pretty little thing when she was a child, and so good, so winning. She was lame then, and suffered a good deal, but she used to endure with touching patience. I heard afterwards that she had outgrown her lameness a little, and that the doctor said she would probably outgrow it altogether. I shall be very glad to see her again.'

Gladwyn and Lancelot had sauntered so much that they had to be waited for at the turn of the brown cliff where Burtree Beck was trickling down to the beach. There was a rude wooden bridge above, and beyond that a watermill, with a miller's cottage. The other cottage stood much higher, and was perched upon a barren rocky slope of the opposite cliff, a slope that was strewn with oars, masts, fragments of net, old ropes, and lobster-pots.

'That will be Peter Laverock's cottage,' Dorigen said, and just afterward Lancelot and Gladwyn came up, looking too much preoccupied to care about the wildness, or the shadowiness, or the picturesque rudeness of the little hollow between the rocks. Juliet was standing on the edge of the beck that was gurgling among the stones.

'What are we to do now?' she said, in a tone of pretended fretfulness, which the laughter in her large dark eyes quite contradicted. '*Don't* say we've got to walk through the water, Mr. Wilderslowe!'

'You can cross by the bridge,' said Lancelot languidly.

'But how are we to get to the bridge?'

'Oh, you walk up the stream till you come to it.'

'And then climb up that steep bank to get on to it?'

'Precisely!'

'Thanks. You *are* cool!'

It was not really a difficult matter, crossing by the big stones that were strewn about the bed of the stream. There was a little pathway up the green rocky slope on the other side. The whitewashed cottage stood at the top in a neglected garden; tall blue monkshood straggled up

through the gooseberry bushes, great currant sprays flung themselves over the paling. A kitten was blinking in the sun, a big tortoise was crawling among the stones that were about the water-butt.

'My door is round here,' Lancelot said, leading the way by a tiny cross path to the end of the cottage. Then he half stopped, and looked, if not confused, then certainly surprised. It was a moment of surprise for everybody.

And yet it was only Margery sitting there upon the stone-seat by the cottage wall—little soft-eyed, beautiful, blushing Margery. She seemed to have been disturbed in the middle of some dream which she could not quite shake off in a moment. Were these richly-dressed ladies, and this tall, languid, kind-eyed gentleman part of it? She rose to her feet to make escape, blushing, growing pale, seeming ready to cry.

'I thought you were going to Langthorpe this afternoon, Miss Laverock?' Lancelot said.

And then a tall dark figure came forward and took the girl's hand kindly.

'Don't you remember me, Margery?' said a voice that was half strange to the girl, half familiar.

She looked up in wonder while recollection came slowly to her eyes. Was this pale, sad,

worn-looking lady the girl who had lived by Wiggoner's Wharf, and who had been so kind years and years ago ?

Margery did not know what answer to make in her surprise ; but Jean Laverock, who had been watching from the window, saw and understood at once when Dorigen took Margery's hand, and held it with a smile and a look of questioning on her face.

'Eh, but I knew it was you, Miss Gower !' Jean said, coming on to the scene with excitement in her great black flashing eyes, and a mingling of old regard and new deference on her handsome face and in her manner. 'I knew it was you, though you are so changed, and so—so different. Maybe it's the black dress, partly, an' the sorrow you've had, for there's naught takes the light from a woman's eyes an' brings the lines to her brow like sorrow. An' you've had grief upon grief, and none to take the burden from your shoulders for an hour. I've heard of you, though I've not seen you—yet over and over I've heard ; but never naught to make me glad i' the hearing. . . . But now, now I'm forgettin' myself, as is always the way wi' me. Come in, come in, ladies, all of you. Mr. Wilderslowe told me to expect a carriage full of ladies, but I'd never a thought that one o' them would

be a lady I'll be glad to see so long as I've eye-sight. . . . Come in then, come in. . . . Margery, see to the boilin' o' the kettle, and ask your father to sort out the biggest o' the shrimps, an' to get up some fresh lettuce out o' the bed. . . . I'll go myself to the hen-house to see for the eggs.'

They sat down presently in the small, neat cool room where an ample tea was already spread.

'I hope, Gladwyn, you see how we're finding Mr. Wilderslowe out,' Juliet said mischievously. 'You remember what he said the other day about salted cods' heads. Now you hear fat shrimps, fresh lettuce, new-laid eggs; now also you see jams in glass dishes, quantities of delightful-looking butter, brown bread and white, two cream cheeses, Scotch bread (a thing *I love*), cheese-cakes, cream, brown scones, and the delightfullest old china I ever saw. . . . Aren't you ashamed, Mr. Wilderslowe?'

'Of the tea-table?'

'No, of being found out. I expect we shall find you out in some other things before the day is over.'

Not only Juliet, but Dorigen and Gladwyn also, noted the quick and curious change that appeared for an instant like a flash on Lancelot's face; and one at least of the trio noticed that

immediately afterward his eye sought a large canvas which was standing upon the easel in the corner, but turned with its face to the wall.

'Is that the picture we've come to see?' Mavis asked, by way of breaking a little silence which even she felt to have in it some element of discomfort.

'Yes,' Lancelot replied; 'but we will have tea before we trouble ourselves about such unsatisfying things as pictures.'

'Why should they be unsatisfying?' Gladwyn asked, speaking in a new soft, dreamy way. She had detected the sudden loss of buoyancy in his tone.

'Everything I do is unsatisfying,' he said, turning to her as if there was relief in turning from the chance of further badinage. 'If I really complete anything—which comes to pass but seldom—there is no joy in it when it is done. As a rule, I break down about the middle, if I get so far; but it frequently happens that I get disgusted before that. And it is not only in painting: if I try to write anything longer than a sonnet, it is the same. . . . Do you suffer from such miserable unsteadfastness of purpose, Miss Gower? But I need not ask such an idle question—I am sure you don't.'

'I have not the same temptation to be changeful that you have,' she said, wondering within herself how it would be if she had. 'It is the penalty you pay for having ten talents instead of one.'

'Thanks! that *is* consoling. I will try to remember it. All the same, I think versatility is of the nature of a curse. Don't you agree with me?'

'No, assuredly no,' Dorigen said, thinking sadly of her own oft-wearied brain, and lonely resourcelessness. 'There are times when I crave passionately for the power which I see quite young and half-taught children possess—the power of sitting down to a piano and making such music as must at least be a relief, a pleasure, a distraction from care for such as are old enough to be care-burdened; while if I had the gift of painting or drawing, I think I could never know a weary hour. . . . And, apart from the refreshing, there must be such teaching, such culture, such training for eye and hand in these things. They must tend to round and widen the whole nature. . . . Remember, *it was the man who had only one talent who went and hid it in the earth!*'

'And are you going to hide yours in the earth?' asked careless, thoughtless little Juliet, knowing nothing, suspecting nothing, but re-

membering that she had heard her father wondering over Miss Gower's long silence. Yet, child as she was, she perceived the quick flush of pain that came to the worn face, and everybody was glad to see Jean Laverock come bustling into the room with her best cap on, and her big, bright copper tea-kettle in her hand. Jean's red ribbons were fluttering, the kettle was steaming and hissing; there was a little vibration as of anger in the draught from the open door.

'Excuse me, ladies,' said Jean half breathlessly; 'the tea should have been in sooner, but that spoilt child of mine has failed me altogether this afternoon. I don't know what's come to her. She's so good, so obedient as a rule, an' now she wouldn't even bring in the eggs, or the lettuces, or the plate o' warm cake, let me say what I would. An', worse than all, she's gone off up the cliff, an' left me to do everything alone—the wicked girl! . . . But it's my own fault; I've spoilt her, as I spoilt her elder sister, an' I'll ha' the penalty to pay now as I had then. . . . An' yet, what am I saying? The child's as dear to me as the apple o' my eye. . . . Mr. Wilderslowe, you're a scholar: tell me how it is that one can get so angered wi' the people one would shed one's heart's blood for? . . . Angered? Ay, an' bitter against them, an'

unforgivin', while all the while it's death to want the lovin' word. . . . But there now, ladies ! What else will I bring you ? Please say if there's anything I've forgot !'

Jean had been arranging the plates and tea-cups while she spoke, and Lancelot had been placing the chairs.

'This is your chair, Miss Thesiger,' he said, indicating the one he had placed before the tray. 'You make such excellent tea at the Rectory that I hope you will oblige us this afternoon !'

'But you ought to have asked Dorna,' said Juliet. 'She is older, nearly three years older.'

'And thrice three years more tired,' said Dorigen; 'tired enough to want to rest, and be waited upon by such young people as you are, for all the rest of my natural life.'

It was very pleasant, sitting there with the breeze from the sea blowing in at the open window; with bright faces and kindly words and pleasant ways to fall back upon when thought grew perplexing. Dorigen could not help wondering about Margery, and as she wondered her glance rested involuntarily upon Gladwyn and Lancelot. They looked strangely in earnest, both of them; but Dorigen could not help discerning that neither was quite happy,

quite at ease. Lancelot had not been at ease since the moment when he had come upon Margery sitting upon the stone seat by the cottage wall, and Gladwyn seemed to be studying the sudden change in him. A little she tried to find the cause of it; then she tried to win him back to be himself; but in neither effort was she quite successful.

There was a little mystery somewhere; this Gladwyn felt. And it seemed to deepen, when at last, tea being over, Lancelot was constrained by force of unanimous request to turn his half-finished picture to the light. There was a general exclamation, which on analysis might have been found to represent a curious mingling of feeling. But at least there was as much of admiration as of anything else.

'But I thought it was a picture of Lodbrok Bay we had come to see?' said Juliet, the inquiring.

'No,' said Lancelot, feeling that here exactly was the opportunity he had desired for explanation. 'Now you have another proof of the vacillation of my tutelary genius, another evidence of my inability to choose for myself. I came here on purpose to paint a view of the bay. I selected a canvas of a size and form to suit my ideas of it. I bought an easel expressly

intended for outdoor work, and a new white sketching umbrella. Then, the very morning I was going out to paint, I came upon Margery—Miss Laverock—sitting exactly as you saw her sitting this afternoon, on the rustic stone seat at the back of the cottage, with that woodbine climbing and straggling all over the fractured whitewash of the wall behind, and tall hemlocks and sword-grass growing up about her feet. The effect was irresistible.'

'And she was looking just as you have painted her?' Gladwyn asked, looking intently into the brown, soft, dreamy eyes, and wondering what might be the meaning of the gentle smile which seemed to contradict the sad, pathetic expression of the face.

'Yes; exactly like that,' Lancelot replied. 'I think that brilliant scarlet handkerchief, thrown so picturesquely over the soft, dark, mossy hair, is the most delightful bit of colouring I have ever achieved. And the whole of the dress, the earrings, the coral beads, the flowered muslin gown, is something to demand one's best efforts in the way of colouring. . . . I have given my best, and yet—and yet! at the present moment I feel as if I should never touch that canvas again.'

Dorigen looked up quickly, involuntarily.

Something in Lancelot's tone made his words seem like the history that a man discloses while he is sleeping. By-and-by he awakes, not knowing that he has spoken.

'I should like to see Margery again,' Gladwyn said, after a time, and still looking intently into the picture as she spoke.

'Oh, I dare say you will see her next time you come,' Lancelot replied, with designed carelessness. 'You will come some day soon, will you not?'

'I don't know,' Gladwyn said. 'I fear not. Mamma didn't give her consent at all readily this time. . . . No; let us go up to the cliff now. We shall be sure to find her.'

'Mr. Wilderslowe knows exactly where she is,' said Juliet, with mischief in her glance. 'Don't you, now? Hasn't she some favourite spot up in those cliff fields?'

'Do you remember, Miss Juliet, that I have only been at Lodbrok Bay about a fortnight?'

'A fortnight! Time enough for you to flirt with all the pretty girls in the place. And this one *is* pretty! She's a dear! And she looks like a little lady, too, in spite of all those tawdry things you admire so. Oh! we must see her again! I shall ask her to come to the Rectory to five o'clock tea the next time she comes to

Hild's Haven. Will you bring her, Mr. Wilderslowe?'

'Certainly, if you wish it.'

'I do wish it; but more still I wish to see her now. If you don't come and help me to find her, I shall go alone. Dorna, I know you will go with me. You always do everything I ask.'

'Do I? I wasn't aware of it. But we will all go together. There, you see, Mr. Wilderslowe is doing what you ask also.'

'Was ever anything so obliging!' said the mocking Juliet, whom everybody loved, her mockery notwithstanding.

Lancelot made no pretence. At once he led the way up the stony, dusty, narrow road to the cliff-top pasture that he knew. The blue sea was changing with the changing day to a sunny green. The lark's song and the sea-gull's scream met upon the warm, soft air. Cattle were straying about the barren-seeming hillocks; swallows darted by on swift, quiet wing.

There was silence for awhile—a placid, expectant, nature-wrought silence. The five stragglers went onward. Dorigen and the two younger girls were in front. Lancelot and Gladwyn had dropped behind. It was curious how, by common consent, this had come to be the natural way of things.

Presently, on the edge of the second field, the silence was broken. Lancelot and Gladwyn came up with the others.

'If we are to find Miss Laverock anywhere, it will be behind that hillock,' he said. 'The well is there; it is a spring, and it is enshrined in a most picturesque spot. If I had discerned it before I began my picture, I should have decided to begin it here. I may yet change for this, if I finish the painting at all.'

They were close upon the well now; and it was indeed a picturesque spot. It seemed as if the hillock had been hollowed out underneath to form a sort of natural well-house; the water trickled down through moss, and fern, and various water-weeds; all manner of creeping, and hanging, and budding, and blooming things had gathered about the place; wild roses and woodbine were there in their season, with bramble in fruit or flower. Just now the woodbine berries were beginning to redden among a few late white blossoms of the bindweed; and underneath the drooping, straggling archway was a trembling little figure, now as red as the reddest berry, now almost as white as the whitest flower. What fear was in the child's heart, that she trembled so? that she should seem so faint, so overpowered, so unhappy?

Gladwyn and Dorigen saw it all; and Lancelot saw it too, and was angry rather than unhappy. 'What a little fool!' he was saying in that incomprehensible heart of his.

And yet what a lovely little fool!

Gladwyn Thesiger saw all the loveliness, the refinement of feature and complexion, the subdued, yet evidently deep emotion. And she understood; perhaps better than anyone there she understood what was in the heart of the child who stood there by the big brown pitcher of water, plucking the changing berries from the spray of woodbine nearest her with tiny, nervous, trembling fingers, not daring to look up, not daring to speak, even in answer to a question. How should she dare, when only that morning Mr. Wilderslowe had told her that she must learn to speak English rather than North Yorkshire? He would give her lessons, he had said kindly; but the lessons had not even begun, so how could she speak before all these clever and beautiful ladies, who were chattering so easily and so very prettily about the picture, and the well, and the beauty of Lodbrok Bay, as seen from the cliff-top fields?

She half-understood that they were talking, looking away over the scene, to relieve her from embarrassment and confusion; but how could

she feel relieved when *he* was glancing at her like that—so coldly, without a smile, without any kindness in eyes that had seemed so very, very kind. Ah, the cruelty of that careless, costless kindness!

Costless! No; for the cost falls always somewhere. Even now Margery's heart was throbbing; something within her was swelling, overflowing; and just when she ventured to look up, as if appealing from her pain, her most undeserved pain, Mr. Wilderslowe was bending to look down into the beautiful blue eyes of the lady who had the lovely dress of cream-colour and carnation-red. All the afternoon it had been this one lady who came before Margery's vision when she thought of *him*. Now it seemed as if she saw everything in that glance that was passing between them, and the sight was more than the loving, susceptible, undisciplined heart of the child could bear.

Nobody was prepared. Margery's burst of wild, passionate, unrestrained tears came like a shock; and even as they came she turned and fled, flying with a pathetic unsteadiness of movement along the broken field-edge, down to a hollow where she might weep as long and as wildly as she would.

'I think I will go to her,' Dorigen said, feel-

ing much distressed and pained; but Lancelot begged her very earnestly not to go.

He spoke quite kindly.

'It will be better that you should not,' he said. 'Better for her. Mrs. Laverock told me that the child's tearfulness had been a trial to her for years, and she begged me not to be sympathetic.' . . . Then he stopped, and added in a lower tone, 'I'm afraid I haven't obeyed her as I ought to have done.'

Was this a confession?

Dorigen felt as if it were, and as if even more might have been confessed if this had been the time or the place for it.

For Lancelot, the afternoon he had so looked forward to was spoiled; utterly spoiled, he felt as they walked back to the cottage, Gladwyn and Dorigen arm-in-arm, the former evidently not desiring to walk alone with him again to-day. . . . And a little pride, a little sorrow, a little petulance kept him at a greater distance than was absolutely needful.

And for Gladwyn, too, the light was gone from the day.

'I rather envy Margery,' she said, trying to speak in her usual light and airy way; but Dorigen saw the signs that were gathering about the beautiful blue eyes. 'I rather envy her; I

should like to have been born in that class of life that cries when it wants to cry, and doesn't have to wait till bedtime. . . . It's hours and hours to bedtime yet!'

'You care so much as that?' Dorigen said gently.

'A good deal more than that. . . . I must tell you, dear; I must speak of him. I know I may. He told me two years ago that you did not care for him, that you never had cared, and never would; and I had seen for myself that it was true, or perhaps I should never have let myself love him as I did, even then. And that is my misery—that he has seen that I love him, before he knew that he had any real love for me. . . . He has not spoken—perhaps now he may never speak; but I know it all. He was growing to love me because I loved him; and now that child has come in his way, and he has won her love—unconsciously, I grant you, but not unwillingly—and it is not in him to refuse to give love in return. He is fighting against it; he is annoyed with her and with himself; but he half loves her already. Can't you see that he does? Can't you see it all? . . . Dorna! Dorna! How will it end? Say something to comfort me! How will it all end?'

CHAPTER IX.

'YET ONE MORE PASS BETWEEN THE ROCKS.'

'"But life is in our hands," she said,
In our own hands for gain or loss;
Shall not the sevenfold sacred fire
Suffice to purge our dross?"

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

IT is strange how sorrow may sometimes harden a human heart, and destroy such capacity for sympathy as it may once have had. '*I* have suffered, why shouldn't they?' is the utterance of the soul bruised and torn, and far from any spiritual healing. And as the days go on the callousness grows, and comes to be something that humane people can only wonder over in sadness and in pain.

Sorrow leaves none of us unchanged. While one soul suffers hardening, another shall come to be broken with its weight of tenderness for

woes not its own. And by no way so certainly as by the way of suffering shall you learn that apprehensiveness which alone can anticipate, and it may be avert, the stroke that threatens your neighbours.

For reasons of her own Dorigen was glad when Mrs. Thesiger's consent was given for a second drive to Lodbrok Bay. It was not given lightly, for very naturally the idea of her not too-mindful daughters going with no chaperonage save that afforded by the presence of a friend but a very few years older than Gladwyn, did not recommend itself to the mother's prudence.

'You must not ask me again,' Mrs. Thesiger said, as they drove off one mild, sunny September afternoon. There were three of them —Gladwyn, Thyra, Juliet. Juliet declared that she should like to go four times a week, so long as Mr. Wilderslowe was there.

Dorigen was not standing in the little front garden this time, when the carriage drove up to Tenter's Close. There was a figure, conspicuous by its white shirt-sleeves, among the neglected marigolds—a person with a long clay pipe and a thick gold watch-chain. Lydia Cleminshaw, in a bright blue cotton dress trimmed with lace, was leaning against the door. Thomasin came rushing out when she saw the Rector's daughter.

'Won't you come in, Miss Thesiger?' she begged in her most chirping tones. 'Please come in! I'll tell sister you're here. But let me introduce you to Mr. Sladill first—Mr. James Jasper Sladill, Miss Thesiger. Miss Thesiger, Mr. Sladill. . . . But now do come in! Mr. Sladill is the gentleman that is going to marry my sister Lydia. We're going to be married on the same day, Lyddy and me. But I dare say you've heard of it; it's all over the town. An' people are sayin' it's the sixth time we've been goin' to be married, but that isn't true. Lyddy's been engaged three times before, an' me twice.'

'Permit me to congratulate you,' said Miss Thesiger, with an amount of hauteur that few who knew her would have deemed her capable of. It was fortunate that just then Dorigen came downstairs, exhausted with more than a long morning's work. Even through her thick veil it was easy to see on her face the evidence of tears.

'Don't go without sayin' you're friends,' Thomasin said as they went out. 'I know I was in a bad temper. *Wasn't* I in a temper, Dorigen! I'm passionate, I know I am; but it's over with me directly, an' then I never think no more of it. So say you're friends. You know I shall never have to ask you for anything again when once I'm married, an' you shall have the best room in

the house if you'll come an' live with me. Isn't that kind of me? But I've a lot of kind ways about me; don't you think I have, Miss Thesiger?'

Thomasin went upstairs to practise Miss Thesiger's bow; the carriage drove away up the lane; the sun struggled through the white silvery mist that was upon the sea. Lodbrok Bay seemed to look more picturesque than ever in the soft light that was upon the old red roofs, upon the wide beach, upon the sloping cliffs. Lancelot was there to meet them; Jean Laverock was prepared to receive them; but there was a change in Jean's manner to Mr. Wilderslowe, a change which was not difficult to understand.

They all went into the little sitting-room, which was strewn with painting materials, half-finished sketches, papers on which specimens of seaside flowers and ferns had been placed ready to be pressed.

'I am increasing my collection of botanical specimens,' Lancelot said. 'There are several things here which I have never seen before. Isn't that saxifrage curious? And an old gentleman I met in the library at Hild's Haven yesterday told me that a very rare sea-spleenwort grows somewhere among the cliffs to the south of this bay. Miss Laverock tells me that she

knows exactly whereabouts, because she saw some visitors getting it last year. I mean to set out in search of it to-morrow.'

'Don't fall and get killed,' said Juliet.

'Why not?'

'Because we shouldn't like it. . . . We want you to go on staying at Mrs. Laverock's. . . . By the way, have you finished Margery's picture?'

'I have not touched it again, and I do not think that I ever shall. I am sorry I began it—very, very sorry.'

This was said so seriously that even Juliet caught a glimpse of his meaning, and Gladwyn's colour came and went rapidly as Lancelot's eyes sought hers with a beseeching, half-sorrowful look which perhaps betrayed more than he knew. Gladwyn was very willing to believe in his repentance, very glad that he should turn in his repentance to her. Hope grew rapidly this sweet September afternoon.

Dorigen had left the little room, and found her way into the kitchen, where Jean Laverock was busy baking some cakes and making other preparations for tea. Margery was not there to help her.

'She's gone up to Keld Houe,' Jean said. 'She was ready enough to go, poor child.' And

then Jean sighed, and Dorigen sat silent, not knowing how to say that word she had come on purpose to say, and yet impelled to use this opportunity.

But by-and-by she perceived that there was no need that aught should be said. Jean Laverock's own experience of life had been of a kind to make her ready enough to perceive when her child was threatened with the sorrows which had darkened her own days, and her mind was so full of the new dread and pain that she could not keep silence. Everything that she knew or feared was told in the sympathetic ear that listened.

'And after all I don't know that I blame him so much,' said Jean. 'I don't believe he's said a word to her that all the world mightn't have heard, though I do fear that he cares more for the child than he knows himself. An' since I've kept her out of his way he's never settled to nothing, an' he's been as downhearted as a man could be. An' as for Margery herself, her heart is just breakin', an' mine's fit to break to see it all. But what can I do, Miss Gower? what can I do? It would hurt me desperately to have to ask a gentleman like that to leave my house because of my daughter's folly. An' yet what can I do?'

'You must do that,' said Dorigen decisively.

'You must ask him to go, and you must do it at once, for Margery's sake. If you do not think for her, care for her, who will? Mr. Wilderslowe can get rooms anywhere. He has nothing to detain him at Lodbrok Bay.'

Jean listened, and was evidently impressed. 'I believe I'll have to do it,' she said. 'An' it is good o' you to care, Miss Gower, when you've cares o' your own to worry you, an' take the life out of you. Eh, but it makes my heart ache to see you so heavy-eyed, an' so thin an' pale, an' not even dressed as you should be dressed; though forgive me for sayin' that. It slipped from my lips because of the feelin' that's in my heart that nought that money could buy would be too good for you, so please forgive it.'

Dorigen's cares did seem to be very heavy just then. All that afternoon the sorrows of the morning, and of many mornings before, were present with her in the little house by Burtree Beck, pressing upon her brain, silencing her voice, giving to her face that look of age and weariness which Lancelot Wilderslowe had first found to be surprising and then distressing. It pained him to see an unhappy face; but it was much the same pain as he would have found in watching a very ugly face, or in sitting in a room filled with discordant colours.

Almost immediately after tea the little party set out to go back to the bay where the carriage had been left.

The tide was coming in swiftly, dashing up toward the foot of the cliff. At the point by Burtree Beck a long swift tongue of foam swept up to the rock just as they passed. There was a little shrieking, much laughing, wet boots and dresses, a sense of escape from danger where very little danger had been. As a matter of course, Juliet made the most of it.

'I see now why you wanted to keep us later,' she said with tragic horror in her tone. 'It was atrocious of you!'

'You think I wanted to drown you?'

'Not at all. You wanted to save us. Think of running such a risk as that, bringing us to a point of rock, a perfectly perpendicular wall of hard rock, with the tide running in in great waves, and no way of escape, just that you might have a chance of showing us how heroic you could be! . . . I see it all, just as you meant it. You would have saved me first, then Gladwyn, then Dorna and Thyra together. . . . How awfully disappointed you must feel! Dorna, give me a kiss. There! that's for making us come away so early.'

They went on awhile; then, quite suddenly,

Gladwyn stopped, and looked up gravely into Lancelot's face.

'What about yourself?' she asked with concern; 'you must go back at once. You can't stop at the bay till the tide turns.'

Lancelot smiled.

'You don't think I should leave you to make your way to the town alone, do you?' he asked.

'But what will you do about getting back to Burtree Beck?' persisted Gladwyn.

They were walking on before the others, turning upward toward the back of the bay, where there was space enough uncovered by water.

'Why shouldn't I come along the beach?'

'Because of the tide; it will be higher then, a great deal. . . . Oh, promise me you won't attempt to do that!'

Her voice sank and grew tremulous, as if it were beyond her control as she spoke, and for a moment Lancelot was silent. Then slowly, deliberately, he drew a little nearer to her, and said with tender tone and meaning:

'If I promise you that, will you promise me something?'

'Yes, if it is anything I may promise.'

'It is something you *must* promise. . . . I am

coming over to Hild's Haven to-morrow, to the Rectory. Will you see me alone ?'

'Yes,' she said presently. 'Yes, if you wish it.'

Then she stopped, having a natural fear of betraying more than it would be wise to betray.

Had the world changed in that one moment ? Was it suddenly full of a great glad blissfulness? The very sea as it stretched away to the north and to the south had such a shining light as the sea had never had before ; and the green upland hills seemed to round and melt for very happiness and tenderness, and all that was best and most precious in life. She felt that if she had been alone she would have knelt on the beach, and prayed in her happiness.

Of course nothing more could be said then. The little town was reached ; the carriage was awaiting them half-way up the hill, and Lancelot walked by the side of it till it came to the level land on the top. Then he said 'Good-bye,' lingering as he said it, and betraying himself and another. . . . There was no need for that whispered word which Gladwyn contrived to utter when the carriage stopped to set Dorigen down at Tenter's Close.

'Come up to the Rectory to-morrow evening,'

she said hurriedly. 'I shall have something to tell you.'

And the tremulous gladness in her tone was good, and came like sunny light shining into a dark place. Dorigen had been growing sadder and sadder as she came nearer to Tenter's Close.

It was the old story. Than Rountree's small hoard had melted quickly away in the preparation for the double wedding that was to take place in the beginning of October; and another crisis, as terrible as any Dorigen had yet passed through, was already at hand.

'I could have borne it,' she had said, speaking audibly to herself in her own room that morning after a scene with Thomasin. 'I could have borne it easily even with such help, such encouragement, such sympathy, as *they* might have given. But to stand alone in the household, three on one side, and one—one with a failing heart and a weary brain—on the other, is terrible. And what can I do? The last shilling is gone, and my work is not yet done. Let me work as hard as I may, I cannot finish it in less than three months. And I must finish it. It is only a novel, a thing I have despised; and it is not even a good novel, I know that. But I have put my soul into it; and if it were death that

threatened me, I feel as if I could not die till it were done. And yet what can I do? What can I do for ground to stand upon until it is finished?'

All day these thoughts had pressed upon her brain; but now after the drive to Lodbrok Bay, and Gladwyn's happy whisper, Dorigen felt stronger and calmer in her sadness than she had felt before; better able to recognise the fact that she must stand firmly through this latter crisis, or be content to fail utterly and for ever.

For awhile she sat in her own room, and thought, trying once more if it were possible to discover any way of deliverance; then, discerning none, her thought seemed to cease for awhile, and she sat as one waiting, listening.

She knew, as all who strive to pass by the way of the Cross through such straits of life must know, that each hour of agony has its own meaning; and the soul that tries to arrive at the special secret which underlies each special sorrow alone passes safely.

Yet that very safety may come by sharp pain —by bleeding feet that find nought save stones and thorns to tread upon, by cruel cords that bind, by cruel nails that pierce, by the faintness of spirit that comes of utter desolation.

She remembered as she sat there that years ago

—it seemed a long lifetime—she had stood on a terrace by the sea in the still twilight; and the voice of one who had himself known sore trial had spoken to her, and she had heard. It was as if even now she were hearing that voice again.

All her life long, in the deeper moments of life, in the hours that test, and prove, and give to the character its bent and colour, in all such hours she heard the words she had heard on that far-off night.

'All that is best in this life makes for sacrifice,' the voice had said. 'Some day you will see that no growth, no good, no elevation, no true joy is possible but by pain. Peace comes by pain. . . . In the smallest thing as in the greatest, sacrifice is safety, sacrifice is peace, sacrifice is life. Without sacrifice there is no true living.'

Some growth she had possibly attained out of the bitter travail of her life's experience, some strength, some humanity; but hitherto the words joy and peace had seemed to represent heights unattained—perhaps by her unattainable. Was it possible that by this present hour of darkness, and helplessness, and sordid strife yet another change was to be wrought, yet another gift given? Was this new calmness coming by the patient effort to endure?

To suffer in patience the crosses which we

cannot understand, the thwartings which seem to have no end or aim, the humiliations that do but seem to break and scatter the spiritual mood of the soul—to endure thus is to offer of the best that the soul has to give.

No light came upon the dark pathway, no way of escape seemed possible; yet distress died down, and anxiety relaxed its dreary grasp; and presently, with a prayer on her lip and in her heart she went downstairs in the twilight. Mrs. Gower sat there by the fireside, sad, untidy, broken-spirited. The two elder girls had gone out; little Matty sat working for them by the window.

'Hadn't you better have a light, Matty?' Dorigen asked, but Matty made no answer.

'There's not the means o' makin' a light in the house,' said Mrs. Gower, not speaking reproachfully; and her forbearance was worse to bear than reproach would have been.

'I came down to talk things over with you a little,' Dorigen said. 'Not that talking will do much good, perhaps; but silence at such times is apt to harden into sullenness and ill-feeling. I want you to believe that whatever you are suffering, I am suffering too.'

'I make no doubt but you feel it,' Mrs. Gower said. 'An' I fear you'll feel it more i' the

mornin' when you get up an' find 'at there isn't a mouthful o' bread in the house.'

Little Matty, sitting in the window with her sewing, began to weep softly, trying to hide her weeping by turning so as to catch the light from the lamp at the corner of the close which the man had just lighted. The rays fell across the narrow room, making the darkness seem darker.

'You see, if we could only ha' got over the next five weeks or so, all would ha' been well,' Mrs. Gower continued plaintively. 'James Sladill's determined 'at I shall go an' live with him an' Lyddy, so as to be company for her when he's not at home; an' Thomasin 'll take Matty, an' be glad to have such a handy little thing; so as you'll have no one but yourself to work for, an' nobody to harass you, an' fill the house wi' noise an' racket from mornin' till night. An' I shall say nought about the furniture, which I might do; but the girls 'ud never ha' none of it, bein' so old-fashioned, except that centre-table i' the sitting-room which I've promised Thomasin; an' the big chest o' mahogany drawers i' the front bedroom, which Lyddy must have so as no difference may be made atween 'em.'

'You can give them anything they wish for,' Dorigen said, feeling that the concession was hardly worth the making.

'Well, it's good o' you to say that,' Mrs. Gower went on. 'An' you'll do better when we're gone, an' be happier, I make no doubt, bein' so fond of being alone. But oh dear me! I do wish 'at you could ha' seen how we are to get over the next few weeks. It would be such a misery to have it known 'at we're i' such a depth o' poverty just when the girls is going to marry, an' do so well. . . . An' if their weddin' clothes are cheapish, why they're nice an' tasty. I'll not say as they aren't; but to think of us all going to bed to-night, an' not a mouthful o' bread i' the house for breakfast! . . . . But don't suppose 'at I'm blamin' you. I may ha' said hasty words sometimes, but I've been sorry for it after. You've tried to do your duty by me an' mine. An' if they'd only ha' paid you better for your writin' I make no doubt but you'd ha' made things easier i' the house.'

There was a moment's silence; then Dorigen could not help saying:

'I have never been badly paid. The difficulty has been to get good work done. But that doesn't matter now. The question is, what are we to do for our immediate wants? Can we do anything? I have thought all night and all day, until my brain has seemed to lose its power of thinking. I cannot think any more; but I feel

curiously quiet, as if no thinking of mine were necessary. I had the same feeling before, when the little legacy came. I had no ground for it then, I have none now. . . . I am hoping for nothing in particular; indeed, I do not know that I am hoping at all. But I am not despairing. . . . Can we wait a little, just a little, and see what God will do? I feel strangely certain that He will do something.'

CHAPTER X.

'SO NOW IN PATIENCE I POSSESS MY SOUL.'

'Angry?
A man deep wounded may feel too much pain
To feel much anger!'
GEORGE ELIOT: *The Spanish Gipsy.*

THOUGH there had been thunder, with heavy rains during the night, the next morning broke as a spring morning breaks, with mildness and soft, cool brightness. The grey-blue sea glittered as the sun rose higher in the quiet, grey-blue heavens; the tops of the trees in Thorsgrif Gill swayed in the light breeze from the south-west that swept over the moorland beyond. The robin's song was loud and clear, yet scarcely joyous. He seems apt to sing as one singing to keep himself from sighing; and one may discern tears as it were, and heartache, if one be in the mood for such discernment.

It was Joanna's tall, slight figure that was moving somewhat restlessly up and down the terrace so early. She could hear Zaré and Valerie as they chattered and laughed together in the room over the porch.

'I must go and dress them presently,' she said to herself; 'but I wish Michael would come. I must see him alone. He will let me do the thing I want to do, and no one else must know —not even my mother. If Ermine were to have suspicions, she could extract all about it from my mother.'

Joanna's face was the same sad, sweet face it had been for so many years. It did not look much older now than on that evening when her brother had brought into the house a half-bewildered but wholly-happy little guest, saying: 'Take care of her, Joanna.' Indeed, it seemed as if Time had dealt lightly with the inhabitants of the Alum-Master's house generally. If you had been at Thorsgrif that morning, you would have seen the elder Mrs. Salvain coming down the stairs about seven o'clock, with light step, and smiling face, and shining black hair, which looked much more like seventeen than seventy. Ermengarde came later, and more languidly; but it was a kind of graceful languor, which seemed to be almost the natural outcome of her

beauty and her stately form. Her pale golden hair was as bright, as abundant, and as picturesquely dressed as ever. She wore no cap. Her morning dress of pale grey-green cashmere clung to her tall figure as she moved. Her large, soft, unintelligible hazel eyes looked out across the sea with something that might be yearning in them, or might be mere dissatisfaction; and there was a certain fretfulness in her tone when she found that the children had not made their appearance. When they did appear, their toilette was not to her taste.

'How could you put those two blues together, Joanna?' she said, leaning back in her chair, and clasping her pretty white hands together, as if to emphasize her distaste. 'And what have you and Michael been talking about on the terrace so long and so earnestly? I am sure it was something important. . . . Michael, what was it?'

There was a curious intonation in her voice as she asked the last brief question — a certain sharpness, a certain determination, such as would have roused resentment in most men. If Michael felt any, he did not display it.

'We were arranging to go over to Hild's Haven,' he said quietly. 'Have you any commands, Ermine? I am going to drive Joanna over this morning.'

'Delightful! I have been wanting to go over this two days.' Then there came a sudden change into her voice, and she added: 'But if *I* had asked to go, I must either have driven myself, or have had Enoch. . . . It seems you can take a day when you choose.'

Michael could not explain then that there was a difference between his spirited, self-reliant wife, and his frail, timid, shrinking sister.

'Joanna so seldom asks to go that I could hardly refuse her when she did ask,' he said, hoping that the matter might end there; but it did not.

'I suppose that is a hint for me,' Ermengarde said, with rising colour, and a certain flutter of irritability in her manner. 'If I did not go over to the town occasionally, I believe I should die of sheer weariness and monotony. I dare say it never occurs to you to wonder what a life of this kind means to me. There are times when I feel as if I must go mad with the dreariness of it.'

'Don't say such things as that, Ermine,' Mrs. Salvain interposed, her voice breaking with its own tremulousness, and her eyes filling with tears. 'Don't say things like that! How *can* you say them when Michael is so good to you and to the children!'

'And what should he be but good to us?'

replied Ermengarde, rising from the table in her anger, and giving words, hot, unjust, passionate words, to the pent-up feeling within her. Joanna left the room, taking the children with her; Mrs. Salvain sat trembling and weeping; Michael stood by the fire, pale, resolutely silent, and with a look of keenest suffering on his strong, patient face. This was not the first tragic scene he had passed through since his marriage, and experience had taught him the value of silence and self-restraint.

Breakfast that morning was a mere pretence; yet for Michael's sake his mother and sister sat down to the table again, and when the meal was over he suggested that Joanna should get ready at once.

'Are you coming with us, Ermine?' he asked, trying to speak as if nothing had happened.

'No; I will be no check upon your visits to Tenter's Close, neither upon this occasion nor upon any future occasion.'

Michael Salvain made no reply, but he turned and looked into his wife's eyes, with a look that she could not fail to understand. Her memory was quick, her conscience not quite dead within her.

'I know what you are thinking,' she said, speaking with some defiance, born doubtless of

the excited mood she was in. 'I know what you would say; you would like to remind me that I told you a lie, that I did it with the deliberate purpose of preventing you from marrying Miss Gower in order that you might marry me. Well, supposing it were true! I have repented in dust and ashes, and bitterness of soul. You can tell her that if you like.'

There was silence in the room when this had been said, and Michael Salvain's thought went backward with that swift glance over the dead years with their burden of dead hopes which troubled him so often now. There was no anger in him. Such moments do not bring anger to such men as Michael Salvain.

'I am not going to Tenter's Close myself, Ermine,' he said patiently. 'Joanna has asked me not to do so. She wishes to go alone.'

'Oh, pray don't trouble yourself to make explanations!' Ermengarde replied, leaning back in her chair with her accustomed gracefulness, and speaking with musical voice and accent. 'You are quite welcome to your little mysteries. They are always in such excellent taste.'

For the first time since his marriage Michael went out without stooping to give his wife a parting kiss. The pony-carriage was at the door; Joanna was ready, Mrs. Salvain was put-

ting a basket under the seat. Michael stood a moment with the reins in his hand, then he repented and went back for the kiss.

'Let there be peace between us, Ermine,' he said. 'I cannot exist if we are to live like this!'

The poor unhappy woman burst into tears.

'It is my fault; I know it is my own fault,' she said, sobbing. 'You are too good for me, that is the truth; and I shall never, never be worthy of your goodness. I see it more plainly every day. To a better woman a home like this would be a heaven.'

'And it is a long way from being a heaven to you?'

'It is, it is a long way,' she said, still crying bitterly. 'Let me tell you the truth: the fault is in no one but myself. I want to *live*. That is what I am craving for daily and hourly; and this is not life: it is death, and worse than death, for all the while I know the world in which I might be living—living, breathing, thinking, acting, suffering, enjoying—this world is but just outside my prison gate. I might go back to it. . . . Michael, listen, and listen without being either shocked or angry. I want to go back to it. I will go back to-morrow, to-day if you will let me. I can earn my own living. I

know I could leave the children with you until I made a footing for myself. . . . Michael, let me go!'

'You are saying this in earnest?'

'In bitter earnest; and I have longed for weeks, nay, months past, to say it. . . . You will let me go?'

'Let you go, my wife!' Michael said with a great sadness shadowing his kind eyes, and thoughts in his heart that he might not utter. 'Let you go! How little you know what it is you ask! . . . But I have been thoughtless, Ermine. I have not considered as I should have done that you must be needing change of air and scene. Forgive me, dear! We will make arrangements at once, as soon as I come back from Hild's Haven; and we will go to London for a few weeks, or to Paris, if you would prefer going there. . . . Thorsgrif will look different after that. . . . Now, kiss me. I must be off. . . . Have a smile ready for me when I come back, Ermine!'

There was no smile on his own face when he went out and drove silently away. All the way to Hild's Haven he went in silence.

There was no need for speech. Joanna had told her desire, and her reason for it, while she stood with her brother on the terrace, knowing

that she could not carry out her wish without both his help and consent.

'You have those few pounds of mine yet, Michael,' she had said to him in the morning while his heart was yet light, or as light as it was ever likely to be again, and he had answered with a smile.

'They must be a good many pounds by this time, Nanna,' he said. 'We agreed that I was to pay you interest. Are you going to demand payment without notice? That would be very unbusinesslike.'

'Would it? But it won't matter to you, Michael?' Joanna asked, with a look of apprehension.

Michael laughed. 'No, thank heaven!' he said. 'I have seen the day when a sudden request for fifty pounds would have made me rather miserable. But you shall have five times fifty now, my sister, if you need them. What are you going to do? Something for somebody else, I know.'

'Yes; but you will let me do it,' Joanna replied, with a new gravity of tone and manner, and her eyes seemed all at once to be filled with a kind of awe. 'You will let me do it if it is needed, and I know it is. You will smile, perhaps, when I tell you that *I know* because of a

dream, and I shall be glad if I find that you have reason for smiling.'

Michael did not smile at all. 'What did you see in your dream?' he asked, following Joanna's eyes, which were looking out over the blue-grey distance in the east.

'I saw a sad scene,' she said. 'There was a vast desert plain, and I was wandering over it, but not aimlessly. I knew quite well that I wanted to reach a certain place, which I could not see, but which I knew to be there if I only went far enough. I seemed to have it pictured in my mind, as if I had been there before, and the picture represented a ruined tower or abbey. When I came nearer to it I saw that it was the Abbey of St. Hild; and I made greater haste than before, for a storm was coming down—a storm of wind, and rain, and great darkness, and I was very cold and tired. "I will take shelter in the Abbey," I thought; and when I came to it I found that some one else had taken shelter there, some one who seemed to have been exhausted by the storm, and who had lain down to die of exhaustion. It was a woman's figure, a slight figure in a black dress; and from the first I knew it—it was Dorna. She was lying there, white, and cold, and still. Once her lips moved, but I could hear no word. And I could give no

help; I was utterly powerless to help. I could only kneel beside her, and beg her not to die. And in that extreme of anguish, because of my powerlessness, I awoke. I did not sleep again, and I have been able to see nothing, think of nothing since, but that prostrate figure, and the white, still face. . . . You will let me go, Michael? You will let me go to Hild's Haven this morning, and you will not let me go without the oil and the twopence? You know what I mean. We have had fears enough. I think my dream has been sent to confirm the worst fears we ever had.'

The spell and influence of that strange dream were still upon Joanna when she went alone to Tenter's Close. The house was quiet—quieter far than usual. It was as if some illness or death had entered the door.

'Let me come up to your own room,' Joanna said, taking Dorigen's hand in her own, and looking into the wan, worn face with quite new intensity and present intelligence written on her own. Not for years, not since her great trouble had first crushed her with its sudden weight, had Joanna risen to any emergency as she was rising now. Certainly the compassionate find the healing power of compassion.

'I don't want you to tell me anything,' she

said, sitting down on the chair Dorigen had placed for her in the little whitewashed attic. The walls were barer than they had been; the very books were fewer. But the sunlight came, and the Abbey was there across the green sloping fields. Joanna's eyes fixed themselves for a moment or two with a curious gaze upon the towers, and arches, and broken pillars of the Abbey of St. Hild.

'I don't want you to tell me,' she said, bringing herself back by an effort of will. 'I will tell *you*. I will tell you why I am here, and you are not to smile. I have come because I have had a dream, and my dream was of you. . . . Ah, you are smiling already!'

'But I am not smiling as if I did not believe.'

'No, you are not,' Joanna said. And then she told the vision of the night in briefer words than she had used in telling it to Michael. And while she spoke the woman who listened yielded to tears and wept, and her weeping was relief.

'And this,' said Joanna, laying her hand upon the book into which she had quietly slipped a cheque, 'this is quite my own. My father gave it to me *then*—this and a good deal more—to buy my trousseau. I had spent part of it, but I would never spend the other part. I made Michael keep it for me for some special occasion.

I knew that some day something would happen to make me glad I had it, and that I should have no doubt about it. I could not have put it to common uses. I believe now that I had to keep it for this; I am sure of it. So you have not even to thank me; no, indeed you have not. I have only done what I was bidden to do; I had no alternative. . . . Do you think a vision like that —for indeed it was a vision rather than a dream- could be sent for nothing?'

'And your have asked no question?' Dorigen said. 'You do not even seem to wish to know whether my extremity was so great as you feared?'

'No,' Joanna replied, speaking slowly. 'It did not seem to me that I had anything to do with that. I can see enough. It is written on your face; you need not speak of it. But things will be better for you by-and-by, won't they, dear? Is it true this time about the marriages?'

'Yes, it is true. In a few weeks I shall be alone.'

'But you will not remain here?'

'I think I shall, for a time, until I see what sort of success my book will have. Everything will depend upon that.'

'It is not done yet, is it?' Joanna asked timidly.

'No, it will be three months before it is done . . . So far as I can see, it would never have been done at all, but for you.'

'Or but for my dream,' Joanna replied gravely. Then she changed the subject, and after awhile she went away. A little later the household in Tenter's Close began to recover from that terrible stillness which had fallen upon it, and Dorigen went back to her desk in a mood which was as deeply charged with quiet wonder as with gratitude. She did not imagine that before the day was over her pen was to be arrested by yet another mystery of fate.

CHAPTER XI.

ABOVE THE SOUND OF THE SEA.

'Perhaps some saints in glory guess the truth,
Perhaps some angels read it as they move,
And cry one to another, full of ruth,—
Her heart is breaking for a little love.'

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

IT is quite possible that when Lancelot Wilderslowe left Burtree Beck with his guests that afternoon, he had no very definite intention as to the request he had subsequently made of Gladwyn Thesiger. He would make it some time, probably very soon; so far, at least, he had decided. And he had no misgivings. The daughter of the Rector of Hild's Haven was a handsome and fascinating woman; and moreover he knew that at last he loved well one who loved well in return. This was enough to rest upon.

It was just that little tremulousness in her soft

musical voice, that glance of timid affectionateness in her appeal when she besought him not to run into any danger, which crystallized his intention on the instant. And on the instant he was glad that he had spoken. Though he had said so little, that little had been received as he had hoped. Lancelot went back through the town calm, quietly elate, and with some natural pride in his gladness. Neither with himself nor with his fate was he dissatisfied.

The evening was calm also, but less pleasant than the day had been. Heavy grey clouds were darkening the sky; the genial warmth had turned to closeness and sultriness. 'It looks and feels like thunder,' Lancelot said to himself, as he went up the narrow steps in the cliff-side which led to Burtree Beck by a field pathway. At the last moment he had told Gladwyn of that cliff-top pathway, and she had smiled her relief in a way that satisfied him wholly. He was thinking of her smile as he went, unaware of the responsiveness that played about his own handsome and sensitive mouth. His eyes were cast downward, so that he did not see a tiny figure sauntering by the hedge-side, brushing the seeds from the dead tall hemlocks as she passed.

It was Margaret Laverock returning from Keld Houe, and going sadly, heavily, as she had too

often gone of late. The brightening, the relaxation which stole unconsciously over her own small, sweet face came there in answer to the look she saw in Lancelot's face; and from the same source she drew temerity to keep on her way, instead of hiding herself under the hawthorns, as she might have done. The pathway by which she was coming from Keld Houe merged itself at the stile into the path by which Lancelot was going to Burtree Beck. They must meet there if Margery kept on her way, and although her foolish little heart palpitated at every step, she did not draw back. 'He looks as if he would be kind to me,' she said to herself, as she went onward. But when Lancelot heard her light step and lifted his face, there was more of surprise than of kindness in his glance. And it was not a pleased surprise.

'Is this the nearest way from Keld Houe?' he asked, speaking absently rather than with studied ungeniality.

Margery blushed, and looked up with timid deprecation.

'It's the way I always come,' she said gently and shyly. The brightness, the gleam of hope, died from her eyes as the sun dies from the hills when the sudden cloud comes up, and for awhile they went on silently.

It never occurred to Margery that there could be any reason why, since they were going to the same house, she should not walk by Mr. Wilderslowe's side. It was not the first time she had sauntered by the cliff-top ways with him, as the gossips of Lodbrok Bay were aware. Now, this evening, the miller passed with a curt greeting, and a little farther on they met a woman going to the bay, with butter and eggs in her basket, and sharp comment on her tongue. Lancelot was newly sensitive to his position, but he saw that Margery was not thinking about it. Her small, downcast face seemed to be full of wonder, and sadness, and pain, as it was but too often nowadays, and he could not see it afresh untroubled. Regret might be idle, and self-reproach useless, but these feelings were his, and not to be put away; not certainly to be put away with Margery there by his side looking to him, as he knew intuitively, for a kind glance, waiting upon his silent lip for a kind word.

And it was harder for him in that his heart was full of kindness toward the child. She had given him 'her fine care,' doing her best to please him in everything, from the boiling of his eggs for breakfast to the cleaning of his brushes and palette. Then she had sat for him by the hour together while he painted that unlucky

picture, sitting with a stillness so wonderful that she seemed hardly to breathe; and when she changed her position—as now and then, in his consideration, he had compelled her to do—she had displayed a facility for slipping back into the desired pose which many a professional model might have envied. More than once he had told himself that he would not have been human if the child's spaniel-like devotedness had left him untouched, unmoved; but he had not been so careful in the expression of his appreciation as he might have been. This he knew, and this he remembered, but not as he was to know and remember later.

Perhaps it might be the deepening twilight, perhaps some more imperative thing, that lent Margery courage to speak as they entered the last field which had to be crossed before descending to Burtree Beck. She spoke timidly, hesitatingly.

'Are they gone, Miss Gower and the ôther ladies?' she asked, knowing well enough that Lancelot must have been to the bay to see them start.

'Yes, they are gone,' he replied. Then a little sigh escaped him. Was it quite free from all touch of hypocrisy?

'They will be comin' again?' Margery said, by

way of comfort, answering the sigh rather than the spoken word.

'They may; it is not very probable though, not now,' Lancelot said half musingly.

A sudden idea had come to him, and he was pondering it in all good faith. Would it not be better, wiser, to tell Margery how it was with him and his hope? Would it not spare her, help her from herself? Would it not seem to her as a little compensation if he should take her into his confidence as he might have taken a sister? As he thought of it, it seemed the only expression of his regret, of his kindly feeling, left to him, and no chance would be better than this afforded him now in the descending twilight, nor was it likely that he would again be moved to speak as he was moved at this present moment.

'I have something to tell you, Margery,' he said presently, stopping by the last stile, and turning so as to face the girl, who stood before him in her simple straw hat, and with hands lightly crossed upon her pale pink gown. She lifted her face at once, discerning the new seriousness in Lancelot's voice; and her heart began to beat throbbingly.

'What is it?' she said in faint response.

'It is something I could not tell to everyone, not yet,' he said, trying to speak in his usual

half-languid, half-decisive tone, but not wholly succeeding. 'I could only tell it to a person in whom I had confidence, and who would be likely to have some sympathy with me in my hope. . . . You would like to know that I was happy, Margery?'

The child was silent a moment, then she said, 'Yes,' saying it falteringly, as one might admit a truth but half perceived.

'I am sure you would,' Lancelot said, speaking as if he were urged to speak the more impressively for her lack of fervour. 'But, as I said, I am telling you quite in confidence, because it is not settled yet. I only hope, and I shall not be surprised to find that you already know in what direction I am hoping. . . . You have suspected it, Margery? You know which of the ladies who were here this afternoon I am hoping will be my wife?'

Again Margery did not speak—for the very beating of her heart she did not speak.

She stood there, holding by the stile, pressing her tiny hand into the angle of the wood so that it should hurt to the highest point of endurance. Still she did not speak.

Lancelot felt the silence, the depth of it, the meaning of it—he felt these things to the full. Yet he would not seem to feel, not yet.

'Can't you guess, Margery?' he said with assumed deliberateness.

Another minute elapsed before Margery spoke.

'I don't guess,' she said in tones that seemed to strike tremulously, and vibrate upon the growing darkness. 'I don't guess which of them it is. *I know!* It is the one with the beautiful colour and beautiful dresses—Miss Thesiger!'

Because of the strength of her emotion, the child paused for a moment. She began speaking again almost immediately.

'Why do you love *her?*' she asked, in wild, resolute, passionate tones. 'How can you care for *her?* She is proud and she is hard; how *can* you love her? . . . She will not be your servant, as I would have been. You will have to be her servant! She will make you do things for her, and she will hardly even thank you! . . . And—and I would have done everything for you—everything; and I would never have troubled you—no, I'd never have troubled you! And I'd have learnt everything; and I'd never have spoken a saucy word—no, never one. . . . And I *did* love you! . . . I do love you! Oh, nobody in all the world will ever love you as I'd have done!'

And in the darkness, while the sobs went on,

Lancelot felt Margery's small, warm hand laid tremblingly upon his. He trembled himself to the passion of this passionate betrayal.

'Listen to me, Margery,' he said, speaking as calmly as he might. 'I have not been kind to you. Simply by being kinder than I should have been, I have done the unkindest thing I could. . . . Don't you understand? If I find I have made you unhappy, it will take all the gladness out of the new life I hope to live. I could never be happy if I knew that I had left you here, suffering because I had made you suffer! Don't you perceive, Margery?'

The child was making an effort to perceive—a strong, unselfish effort. She did not know how high a point she was touching. Is it the highest a woman may reach?

To renounce all that might have made life good and happy, to renounce all hope of it, all dream of it; to be asked to look upon the prospect of another woman having at her feet all that you had been led to hope was yours, if you would have it so, and to do all this silently, cheerfully, bravely—this is not low.

Margery would be brave by-and-by. But now a fresh burst of subdued yet passionate

weeping broke upon the still air; and twice a hot tear fell upon the hand that yet lay under hers upon the stile.

'What can I say?' she asked presently in broken tones. 'What is it you want me to say?'

'I want you to say that you will both forgive me and forget me.'

'I'll never forget you—no, never; not so long as I live.'

'Are you saying that to make me more unhappy than I was before?'

'No;' Margery said, more passionately than relentingly. 'I don't believe you'll be unhappy. You've nothing to make you unhappy. You care for her; and you're happy—both of you. And I'm nothing; no, I'm nothing at all; and I've no right to think of being happy.'

Lancelot felt the touch of race and nature through the girl's gentleness and effort after magnanimity, but he tried to ignore the effect upon himself.

'You will in all probability have a happier life than I shall have,' he said sadly.

He was really saddened now, impressed by the sorrow that was so near to him, and might be laid so largely to his charge.

Doubtless Margery's love was as Elaine's love,

but Lancelot Wilderslowe was aware that he had less excuse for his error than the knightly Lancelot of the Round Table had had for his, and his error had been greater.

There was no one to ask him to use—

> 'Some rough discourtesy
> To blunt or break her passion.'

And if there had been, such discourtesy had been as much 'against him' as against his greater namesake; yet he could not leave the child there in this mood of anguish without some effort to lessen it. But the arguments he used were not new, nor wholly true. He concluded them by saying:

'And you are only a child, Margery, and this is merely a fancy. Let me confess that I have had dozens such since I was your age. Some day you will laugh at yourself, and perhaps at me, too. But, all the same, it makes me very miserable now to see you like this, so miserable that I must leave this place at once and go back to Hild's Haven. I will go to-morrow, and then, perhaps, you will be less unhappy. You will be as you were before I came. How I *do* wish that I had never come at all!'

There was a moment's silence; Margery's

sobbing ceased, and her voice had a sort of subdued terror in it when she spoke.

'You will not do that!' she said, grasping his hand again as a passionate child might have done. 'Oh, don't do that, don't go away yet—not just yet. . . . I will be good, quite good. I will do everything for you, and I won't forget your coffee after dinner any more, and I will never speak again as I have spoken to-night. . . . Oh, please, sir, don't go away from Burtree Beck!'

'If I were to remain a little, would you try to look less unhappy, Margery?'

'I would never look unhappy any more!'

'And you will not cry, nor steal away out of the house and stay away for hours at a time?'

'No; I will be quite good, and help mother, and do everything you want. . . . Only *say* you won't go—not yet awhile. Please say it!'

'Very well, Margery. . . . And now you had better go home. It's getting late, and it's going to rain. And, there! that's lightning! Run at once!'

'But you're not going to stay out?'

'Only a little while. I want to watch the storm.'

He was trying gently to release his hand from

Margery's grasp, but she still held it, still stood there by the stile between the hawthorn trees. Suddenly in the semi-darkness she lifted her warm little face, and said in a tremulous beseeching whisper:

'Will you kiss me? I will never ask you any more. I will never vex you any more.'

Lancelot took the fragile tiny figure in his arms, and kissed the small face which he knew was so beautiful, so wistful, so loving. But he uttered no word, and no sound broke that silence save a solitary heartrending sob, which broke from the child as she fled down the sloping field in the darkness, and alone.

For many a year afterward that sob came back upon the ear and upon the heart of Lancelot Wilderslowe.

CHAPTER XII.

COMING HOME.

'Sweet is true love though given in vain, in vain ;
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain ;
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.'

TENNYSON.

IT is not often that a man finds himself in sympathy with Nature in her wilder moods. The thunderstorm breaks when he would write a sonnet to his mistress's eyebrow ; shipwreck, with disaster by land and sea, occurs while he sits placidly painting a snowdrop. Yet now and then there is coincidence.

Lancelot Wilderslowe, standing there on the cliff-top above the dark waters of the Northern Sea, was almost glad for the gathering, threatening storm that was above upon the moorland height behind him.

The half-hour during which Margery had stood by his side had not been to him, as it would have been to many men, a brief episode, to be half-enjoyed at the time, smiled over afterwards, and then wholly forgotten. It is but due to him to say that he was distressed—distressed painfully. Almost it seemed as if each successive lightning-flash disclosed to him some new lowness of the lower side of his life, some lapse from the ideal height he had once tried to keep before him. For a long time past he had been conscious of declension, of ease, of the absence of that fine peacefulness which belongs to him whose daily life is made up of small negations. It occupied him while the distant thunder was rolling nearer to trace the source of his present dismay. As befalls most men, he found it in that carelessness, that unwatchfulness, which is the natural result of a continued and unfearful worldly prosperity.

Life had seemed so good; why should he not accept its seeming? He had not asked himself the question; he had asked it in his living.

He was not comforted by recognition of the fact that his present trouble was evidence enough that his soul had not fallen into that deadly asphyxia which is the normal condition of some

who apparently live and thrive. He did not seek for comfort, and he did not find it.

He remained there where Margery had left him for longer than it was prudent. When he turned his face towards Peter Laverock's cottage the lightning was flashing about him everywhere, the thunder was rolling overhead, the rain was descending in torrents. The tiny beck was already giving evidence of increased force.

Lancelot went round to his own room. A fire had been lighted, a lamp was burning on the table among his books and papers, and by-and-by Jean Laverock came, bringing a tray with a jar of olives, a plate of biscuits, and a wineglass. Jean had not the heart that stormy night to tell the young man that her roof must shelter him no longer. She would tell him certainly when the morning came.

But when that following morning broke, breaking after a night of such storm, such disaster as had never been known in the neighbourhood of Hild's Haven within the memory of man, Jean's resolution had changed.

It had been late when Lancelot went to bed. All through the worst of the storm he had remained in the little sitting-room which had doubtless in some bygone day formed part of a separate cottage. It had its own entrance, its own

staircase leading to the bedroom above, and the only door of communication being in the narrow passage, he was seldom aware of what was going on under the other half of the roof. But to-night he had heard Pete Laverock praying in the upper room next his own, and he knew that Margery and her mother had remained below in anxious conversation, which every now and then had ceased for awhile when the thunder was at its loudest, the lightning most vivid, the heavy dashing rain most violent in its descent. Then—it might be two o'clock in the morning, perhaps—there came a lightning-flash which could almost be heard, as a sudden heavy breath of wind is heard. The thunder-crash which came simultaneously seemed as the rending of a world, and then immediately a strange impressive silence followed.

Was the storm at an end? Lancelot went out into the garden. The great dark clouds were scattered and flying to the sea; the lurid light was gone; the moon was high in the heavens; here and there a silver star shone out between the rifts. Behind, over the moorland, there was a long line of clear sky, above it the dark, ragged cloud-fringe was rising rapidly. For a time, at least, there would be better weather when this sombre canopy was overpast.

Jean Laverock and Margery had gone to bed

by the time Lancelot went indoors again. He sat a little longer, thinking, regretting, dreaming, wondering. Afterward he remembered that his thought had been at least as much of Margery as of Gladwyn Thesiger, and he was not sorry to remember it.

Naturally, when at last sleep was his, he slept somewhat more soundly than usual; but his awakening was in anxiety and confusion, and a vague, nameless dread which he could not put away.

He hardly knew whether it was Jean Laverock's voice which had awakened him from sleep, or whether it was the sound of the wild rushing of water, which seemed as if the heavens had burst and were descending upon the land and sea that were there below.

It was daylight, or should have been, being half-past six; but the thick, dusky, yellow light which seemed to be outside the windows, yet not to enter the room, was a very different thing from the common light of a common day. There was a separate terror in that strange light.

'It is a cloud that has burst,' Jean Laverock was saying in greater affright of tone and manner than seemed justified. She had brought Lancelot's hot water and set it down within the door

as usual; but she had not retired, as she usually did. She stood there, twining her hands one over the other in a nervous, purposeless way that was painful to see, and her voice was full of a new distress.

'It is the burstin' of a cloud, sir—a waterspout, as my husband calls it—an' he's had to go out to seek that child o' mine, my Margery. Oh, Mr. Wilderslowe, what will I do if aught has happened to my Margery!'

'You don't mean to say she's out of doors!' Lancelot exclaimed, sufficiently concerned to satisfy even the mother's need of sympathy.

'Yes, sir, that's what I was sayin'. It was fine enough an hour agone; an' I heard her get up an' go downstairs quietly, an' I said to myself, "She's goin' to be as good as her word, and begin to be a better girl this mornin', as she said last night." An' I lay still, dozin' between whiles; and then all at once the mornin' darkened, an' then, with no warnin' but a flash of lightnin' and a peal of thunder that was not so near, the water came burstin' upon us like a sea. I jumped up then an' ran downstairs, an' to my dismay I found no fire lighted, an' Margery gone, an' the little white straw hat wi' the daisies she'd on yesterday. . . . What can ha' come to her? My heart sinks wi' the wonderin' what can ha'

come to her! Ye'll not be knowing at all what was i' the heart o' the child, Mr. Wilderslowe?'

'I know nothing. But I'll be out in five minutes, Mrs. Laverock.'

And in less than five minutes Lancelot was out upon the cliff. For a time he could hardly stand under that terrible downpour, though he was by no means in the thick of it. And, indeed, on that cliff-side there was no place where a man might stand safely. The uprooted whins and hawthorn-trees were coming down from the cliff-top hedgerows; stakes of wood, masses of rock and earth were following. The scene in the valley below was as if the day of another deluge had come.

The little wooden bridge below the mill had been torn away; the miller's cottage was half wrecked. Everywhere there was devastation—everywhere that deep roll and thunder of rushing water filled the ear and deadened the brain with its terrible might. For two long, dread hours there was no cessation.

And during those hours, and others that followed, Lancelot Wilderslowe never stayed from his desperate searching. Once, in a hollow of the cliffs to the north, he came across Pete Laverock, an old man with white hair and a grave, noble profile that would instantly have

arrested the attention of any artist who might have been wishing to find a model who could sit to him for a St. Peter. The man was graver than usual, and though he was not unperceptive, no resentment beset him. He touched his sou'-wester respectfully as Lancelot ascended with difficulty the wet, clayey cliff to the point upon which he stood; and, with a fine sense of courtesy, he waited for the younger man to break the silence.

'Have you *no* idea where the child can be?' Lancelot asked, with very real anguish in his tone. 'I have been as far as the Red Bight, and I have not seen her. . . . Tell me what you think; this is terrible!'

'It's bad to beär, sir!' said the old man calmly. 'Me an' her mother'll know that.'

'For heaven's sake, don't speak so! Surely she may have gone to the bay, or to Keld Houe!'

'I've been to both places, sir. Margery hasn't been there since she left last night. . . . I'm thinkin' you saw her as she came homeward? There's folks that say they met you i' the fields.'

'Certainly I saw her. I stood near the stile with her for half an hour.'

'An' you parted friends, Mr. Wilderslowe?'

'Yes; in a friendlier way than ever before,' said Lancelot, remembering that long, last kiss, which was also the first, and remembering with pain.

There was a minute's silence, which Lancelot broke.

'If you have any suspicion, I beseech you to speak of it,' he said, looking with steadfast eyes into the face of Margery's father. 'It will be better for you, better for me, if you will speak of it. . . . I cannot bear to think that you may have some thought which you cannot utter.'

'I don't know as I'd call it suspicion,' the old man replied, with calm deliberation. 'But a trouble of this kind makes one go back upon the past; an' when I saw you comin' on the sand just now, it sort o' reminded me 'at a few days agone — mebbe now 'twas only yesterday — I heärd Margery speakin' o' the plant 'at you was needin'; an' she asked me as to the safest way o' getting up to the Crainie's Ledge. In course I told her there weren't no safe way, neither for her nor for none such. But there was a strain o' wilfulness i' the child, sir; she was a good bairn, an' lovin', but there was allus a strain o' wilfulness in her nature. An' it sort o' came to me 'at if she thought she'd vexed you in any way, she'd be bringin' you that sea-plant by way o'

makkin' friends again. That was all, sir. But I'd not call it that—not a suspicion—noä, sir. . . . An' when I saw you comin', I was on my waäy to yon ledge.'

For a moment, one weighty moment, the two men looked into each other's eyes; and the face of the younger man grew white and rigid.

'We will go together,' the latter said hoarsely. And for nearly an hour he said no more.

The Crainie's Ledge—a bold, rugged point of rock beyond the southern angle of the bay—was at a greater distance than it seemed to be. The weather was rapidly changing for the better. The rain had ceased; the clouds were breaking to let the flashes of sunshine through; but yet it was not an easy matter to walk by the sodden cliff-side ways over which old Pete went with such resolute determination. Sometimes he led the way over the cliff-top, sometimes by paths below the top; but everywhere the depth of the strong, wet clay, the loosened masses of stone, the swept look of the scant grasses, gave evidence of the wildness of the night that had passed. Would it be remembered by more than its wildness?

Speech seemed impossible; silence grew terrible. The screaming of the gulls close at hand added to Lancelot's foreboding of coming ill, and

the monotonous rise and fall of the receding waves came with the rhythmical beat of a slow sad dirge. He felt as if his brain were beginning to be dulled with the mere weight of dread, of impending calamity. Once it seemed to him as if he could go no farther; but the figure of the old man before him, striding upward and onward with the forceful resolution of one who knows that his journey can only end in pain, precluded the possibility of failure on Lancelot's part. He must keep on, though the want of hope, the growing sense of certainty that he was on his way to meet some transcendently painful hour of his life, left him strangely strengthless. If he had been alone, he had waited for power to meet the moment that was so near.

What was it, that small white thing, that two strong men should stand in silence beside it, growing paler, growing more silently stricken as they gazed across the narrow, wet chasm between two rocks?'

It was only a straw hat, a little straw hat with drooping daisies upon the brim.

The cruel rains had beaten upon it; the wet clay had soiled it. A piece of rock had fallen upon it, and kept it there to give testimony. There was nothing beside, nothing but the small straw hat.

It was old Pete who stepped across the rift between the rocks, and tenderly took it up from the wet earth.

'Take it, sir ; take it to her mother,' the old man said with ashen lips, and tearless sunken eyes. 'Take it with you. . . . There'll be no need of speech.'

It was on Lancelot's lips to say, 'I cannot do that ; ask anything of me but that.' But the words would not come. He took the hat, and held it with hands that trembled pitifully.

'You will search farther?' he asked hoarsely of the old man.

And by way of answer Pete Laverock pointed downward to the almost perpendicular wall of rock which at that point was all that was between them and the sea.

'Will I search there?' he said presently. Then he clasped his brown withered hands, and turned away his face, and again there was silence.

Presently the old man looked up, beckoning to his companion to follow him.

Not more than a dozen steps away there was a kind of plateau upon the rocks, a green space where a solitary whin-bush grew, and a few fronds of bracken, with here and there a spike of faded rest-harrow. Below, fringing a tuft or two

of scant grass, there was the beautiful little sea-spleenwort.

Old Pete sat down upon the edge of that tiny plateau, and leaned his head upon his hand. His eyes fixed themselves instinctively upon the grey-green water that was tossing its white, crested waves to the foot of the cliffs below.

And Lancelot Wilderslowe stood beside him.

If Margery had come to her death by some actual deed of his own hand he could hardly have felt a keener, a more awful, a more unspeakable remorse. It was altogether unspeakable. Not even in that hour, to that old man who was her father, could he utter the passionate grief, the passionate desire to recall but one day of his past life which overpowered him as he stood there.

'You will come back with me?' he asked of the fisherman; but the old man shook his head.

'Noä, sir, noä. I'd fain be alone a bit, if so be as you'd leave me.'

There was no alternative.

Some plaintive touch or tone in the old man's voice broke into Lancelot's aching heart, and forced the tears to his eyes. But they were not of the tears that fall; they were too hot and scant for falling. Almost it seemed as if they were stayed by that oppressive dread which

filled his soul, the dread of the task yet before him.

But it was a task which had to be fulfilled. And Jean Laverock's cry, the one bitter piercing cry which she uttered as she fell to the floor, rings through Lancelot Wilderslowe's brain to this hour, when his nights are sleepless, or his days solitary and sad. Almost her unconsciousness was a relief to him, and her return to consciousness a moment to be anticipated with dread.

There is no need to write the words that the bereaved mother uttered in the first hour of her bereavement. As it has been said, Jean was a woman acquainted with grief, grief of many and varied kinds; but nothing had really subdued the strong, stormy passion of her nature. As soon as strength was hers, she rose to her feet; and, standing in the middle of her cottage floor, she poured out a torrent of words—words of natural anguish, of wild reproach, of fierce rebellion against the ways of God and man; and Lancelot Wilderslowe, standing before her in the silence of a deep remorse, uttered no word in extenuation of his own sin. It seemed to him that such words could but aggravate his wrongdoing.

If by any reticence, by any painful silence, by any sharp endurance, he could buy back a little peace, a little self-toleration, he would have been very glad to buy it. So it was that in the least deserved of Jean Laverock's reproaches he found some satisfaction.

He had thought that he would be glad to be alone again; but the loneness of a stricken conscience is surely a terrible thing. Everything in the little room seemed changed; there was nothing in it that he could bear to look upon. The picture, standing there with its face to the wall, had a power to torture that surely no painted canvas had ever had before. He groaned aloud as he forced himself, for Jean's sake, to touch it, to put it out of sight.

He had instantly and certainly felt the force of Pete Laverock's suggestion as to Margery's desire to do something to propitiate him. He could neither tell to the old man nor to Jean all that had passed at the stile at the top of the field; but going over that hour in his own mind, he felt but too surely how the child's mind would be full of him and his fancies. He knew how his threat to leave the place had moved her; he remembered how she had instantly promised all that he desired. Doubtless in her own heart her

resolve had gone beyond any desire he could have entertained.

He tried to picture it all in his own mind—the fair sunrise after the night of storm; the girl creeping silently down the stair in the dawn, and speeding with swift step away over the rocky paths. And then, what had happened then? How had it been with the child when that sudden change had come sweeping up over the morning sky? Had the mere force of the water as it fell from the heavens beaten her from her standing-ground upon the narrow shelving rock? Had her foot slipped? Had faintness come? These questions could never be answered. From the first he had had no hope; and it seemed to him that his mere hopelessness attested the worst.

By noon the news was everywhere. Neighbours came and went, sympathizing with Jean, conjecturing, wondering, pitying. The girl had been a favourite with the people in the bay. Her prettiness, her gentleness, her refinement, the very frailness of her health, had made them look with kindly eyes upon the child of Pete Laverock's old age; and in the whispering caused by the stranger's presence in the cottage at Burtree Beck there had been more than one whisper as to whether or no so dainty a form

and face might not outbalance the mean birth, and help in the bringing about of yet another romance. There had been more than one such romance in the neighbourhood of Lodbrok Bay.

And now it was all ended, and there was mystery in the ending. Everyone seemed to feel that there was more than either Jean or old Pete could or would explain.

When the tide was low half the population of the bay went forward in little groups across the beach. Some went up the rocks to where the hat had been found, and some kept close down by the edge of the sea, and stood there watching silently.

And one who was there had need to go to Hild's Haven in the afternoon. He took the news of the morning with him, and Thomasin Cleminshaw being in the street heard it. So it was that the tidings reached that attic in Tenter's Close, and were wept over in sorrowful amaze, though only the bare outline of the truth was known. Later the outline was filled up by one who gave the details with unsparing self-condemnation.

Thus went the day on which Lancelot Wilderslowe was to have gone over to the Rectory at Hild's Haven. Gladwyn would be waiting in the

house all day in a very tremor of expectation. And the night would come, and she would know that she had waited vainly.

Of course Lancelot thought of her. It seemed to him as if that day were long enough for thought of everything, past, present, and future. But at last it came to an end. Old Pete came back to the cottage in the twilight, paler, more silent, more stricken than when Lancelot had left him on the Crainie's Ledge in the morning. He uttered no reproach, no complaint, and even Jean ceased from making her passionate moan when the day was gone.

'You're not goin' out, Mr. Wilderslowe?' she said, with some concern, when she saw Lancelot putting on his coat and hat. It was nearly nine o'clock, and Jean had lighted his fire, and had done all she could to mitigate the sorrow she saw in him. 'You're not goin' out, sir?' she said, with surprise. 'It's late, an' cold, an' though the moon's getting up, the night doesn't look over-settled. . . . Where can you be thinkin' o' goin', sir?'

'I hardly know where I am going,' he said. 'Probably not very far; but I cannot stay indoors any longer.'

Jean watched him go with a sigh that turned to tears and heartache. If he was wounded and

restless, what might she be? And a little while she sat in the chair he had left, rocking herself to and fro, and weeping silently. Upstairs, her husband knelt by his bed and prayed, fervidly he prayed, and his strong desire was that at least he might look on his child's dead face.

As Jean had said, it was not a settled night. Great dark clouds, with edges of gold and shades of grey, swept slantwise across the heavens. The moon was rising over the moor, throwing a clear bright light at intervals into the ravine, through which the beck ran its impetuous course, meeting the incoming tide at the mouth of the grif, and making, so it seemed, considerable resistance before it could be prevailed upon to mingle its foaming and turbid waters with the mightier waters of the outer sea. The roaring and stirring, the tossing and lashing was as the turbulence of a storm, and yet outside the sea was comparatively calm. A few fishing boats were out upon it. In the far distance there was the light of a passing ship.

Lancelot hardly knew how long he had stood there with his face buried in his hands, his whole soul merged in repentance, in regret, in passionate pain. What did it matter that he was resolved to live his life on a new level, to hold every hour of the time that remained to him as

if that hour were a special loan from God—a loan of time to be invested for eternal uses—what did it matter, this high resolve, this deep remorse? No mood, no lasting determination of his, no lifelong contrition, could undo what his thoughtless self-pleasing had done. And he *had* been pleased; he had been amused and contented. He had found gratification in the child's beauty, in her way of lingering near him, in every sign of her too-evident affection. . . . And this was the end—the end: a home fireside silenced, a mother's heart bereaved, an aged father stricken, a wide, wide sea, and somewhere beneath it—what? . . .

'Oh, Margery, Margery! what have I done? What *have* I done, in my selfish folly?'

He expected no answer; but presently an answer came.

The moon had been obscured for a few moments, and now suddenly the clouds were swept from the face of it again. The tide was at its highest, its dashing and tossing at their strongest. The little hillside pathway was half covered with the sweeping tongues of cream-white foam, the tide being higher than even the highest tide that Lancelot had seen before at Burtree Beck.

He was standing but just underneath the little

cottage where Margery had lived so much of her simple life. He knew that a light was burning in the window to guide him if he wandered far. Was the old man yet praying? Was the mother yet weeping?

Lancelot's eyes had been fixed for awhile upon the far-off light at sea. But when the light of the moon shone out fuller, clearer than before, his gaze unconsciously travelled onward to where the curving, crested waves were breaking upon the outward rush of the water of the beck, and making there a scene so wild and grand. Then something, some strange thing like the influence which moves us to turn when another is watching us closely, moved Lancelot Wilderslowe to turn, to look downward to his feet.

A large wave, which had struck higher and more heavily than the rest, was slowly receding; it was leaving something that had not been there before.

At a glance he saw and understood.

The childlike figure in its pale, wet dress, was lying upon its side; the small rounded cheek was upon the stony pathway. The eyes were closed. The impression was of one resting—resting sweetly.

There was no terror in the moment.

Lancelot took the slight form in his arms

gently, and laid it upon the bank among the whitening grasses. Then he spoke softly, with lips that trembled, in a voice that was the voice of one speaking out of a broken heart.

'Margery,' he said, knowing that there could be no more any hearing or any answer—'Margery, what have I done? Tell me, *what have I done?*'

And it seemed to him that on the wind from the moorland there came a voice that was soft and gentle. It came like a sob or a cry, and it said pleadingly:

'I will never ask you anything any more! . . . I will never vex you any more. . . . Kiss me! . . . I will never vex you any more!'

Late that night, when Jean Laverock unfastened the child's dress, a tiny book, which the Vicar of Keld Houe had given her, fell out from between the bodice of her gown and its lining. Among the pages of the book were some newly-gathered fronds of the small sea-spleenwort.

Was this an answer to any question that had been asked? Some will say 'No;' some 'Yes.'

Lancelot Wilderslowe said nothing; but later he asked of Jean Laverock the little book that

was wet with the salt sea-water. Jean gave it to him silently, and silently he took it. But where it lies to-day there seems ever a whispering, a soft, sad voice, saying:

'Kiss me! . . . I will never vex you any more!'

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TURN OF FORTUNE'S WHEEL.

'But I am sad :
I cannot thoroughly love a work of mine,
Since none seems worthy of my thought and hope.'

MRS. BROWNING.

THAT grand double marriage of the two Miss Cleminshaws had taken place one day in the autumn. Lydia had gone with Mr. Sladill to live at Otterwell, while Mr. and Mrs. Feaster were living at Hild's Haven—on the west side of the town, of course. For a few days Mrs. Gower had remained at Tenter's Close, and then she, too, had gone northward to the seaport where her second daughter was settled in a bright, newly-furnished house. Little Matty was to remain in the old house for awhile—much to her own satisfaction.

So they were living—Dorigen and her small step-sister—when, one morning in the early

spring, a parcel came with some copies of a new book. It was in three volumes, volumes with uncut leaves, and crisp bindings of pale, soft, willowy green, and that general air of daintiness which a well-got-up book always has. Matty understood, and smiled radiantly; but there was no smile on Dorigen's face. Her hand trembled as she lifted the volumes out one by one, and her thoughts went swiftly to the old churchyard. If only *he*, her father, might have been there, just to take them in his hand, just to look gratified, pleased! But he was gone; and Mr. Kenningham, who had foretold it all, was gone, and there was none left to care whose caring could make her glad—not very glad; or if there was one, it was one upon whose caring she might not dwell with any joy just then. By-and-by the books were left lying on the table in the sitting-room, and in a dim way Matty knew how it was that she was left alone for awhile.

The next step was to write a brief inscription on the fly-leaf of some of the copies. One was to be sent to Lady Anna; one to the elder Mrs. Salvain; one to Gladwyn Thesiger, whose engagement was now a settled and happy thing. Perhaps the letters which came by way of acknowledgment were not the least part of the

worker's reward. Lady Anna wrote with an exceeding gladness of appreciation.

'I was just going out for a drive when the book came,' she wrote; 'but I put off my cloak, and sent the carriage away instantly. Before I went to bed I had read every word, and could almost have dropped a tear because there was no more to be read. Dorna dear, it is not your book, but *you*. . . . Are you not satisfied, nay glad, that you put aside your poet vision? You could never have had the wide audience you will have now; you could never have helped so many, cheered so many, as you will by such writing of parables as this. You will never know the help you may be to some—some who have troubles, perhaps secret troubles, which always seem to grow as one gazes at them, and yet one cannot help gazing if no distraction is possible. And a good novel is help and distraction in one. One can have it at one's own fireside; one can take it up and put it down as one chooses, and go back to life with a fresher eye for the change. And there is so much to be learnt by means of fiction. One finds out how "the poor, the tried, the suffering," really live, and bear their life, and conditions of existence are brought home to one which had never been dreamed of before. And then again the scenery, the beauties of nature,

the little beauties which one had passed by a thousand times without once seeing them, one learns to see by reading a well-written description. It is like the opening of a door into a new world, and I for one feel grateful always to the man or woman who opens another door, and leaves it open for my future good. . . There, dear! That is only half of what I want to say, But Lance is waiting for me to go into Grancester with him to choose some furniture. You shall have the other half in a day or two. And then, when I am quieted down, and have read your book again, so that I may be fully equal to the task of criticism, I shall insist upon you coming to St. Dunstan's to be criticized. You cannot decline my invitations on the old grounds now, and I do not think you will want to invent new ones. . . . Say that you will come!'

And then Gladwyn Thesiger wrote a note, to which a postscript was added by the Rector, and that little postscript was a precious thing for any earnest brain-worker to have in memory. It came one sunny April morning; and in the afternoon Mrs. Salvain's tremulously-written letter arrived. It was Mr. Salvain who brought the letter. He had not been to Tenter's Close since the first week of the year.

'I don't know what my mother has said,' he

remarked, as Dorigen folded up the letter after reading it. There was a pleased smile on her face—a face which, as Michael saw, was as thin, and pale, and worn as ever, but yet had a look of coming peace.

'Mrs. Salvain has not said much,' was the reply. 'But the little she has said is like herself—overflowing with kindness.'

'I suppose the world in general wears a kindly face to you now?'

'I don't know about the world in general. Friends are kind, neighbours are kind, and even critics are kind. . . . Look there! Seven reviews already, and only one severe one!'

'I shall not read the severe one.'

'But I should wish you to read it. It is amusing as well as severe. The charges brought against me are three. Firstly, I don't know anything of the dialect; secondly, I have spoken of "the hot, tremulous summer air," and the reviewer wishes to know if I ever saw it tremble! Poor man! Fancy the life he must have lived if he has never seen the vibration of the air above the meadows and cornfields on a July afternoon. Thirdly, I am charged with making the sun set over the sea on the coast of Yorkshire.'

'Which it does, of course.'

'For some five or six weeks at midsummer.

But one couldn't expect a stranger to the coast to know that. The amusing thing is that he has made so much of it. Listen!

'"When we were young we were taught that the sun set in the west, but it seems that things are altered since that distant day. Or it may be merely the geographical position of Yorkshire that is altered, and that it now has a western seaboard as well as an eastern one." So he goes on, growing funnier and funnier over this "absurd mistake."'

'And that is the worst?'

'The worst so far. The others are all of them fair, and free from anything like spitefulness. Two of them are generous in the extreme.'

Michael paused a minute or two, turning over the reviews as he did so. He looked up presently.

'So you are going to be popular?' he said quietly.

'That I cannot tell. The odd thing is that if I were, I should probably not know much about it.'

'Nor care much?'

'Not for mere popularity. But it may mean more than that. I think I have reason for hoping that it will.'

'Could you tell me what you hope?' he asked,

lifting his face with deep interest in the expression of it.

'For the one good thing my work can bring me—the friendship of people whose friendship is worth having.'

She spoke eagerly enough, yet Michael thought certainly that he detected an undertone of sadness in her words—a tone which found an echo but too readily within himself. He was silent a moment or two.

'But you are not going to remain in Tenter's Close!' he asked, waiting somewhat eagerly for her reply.

'No, I am not going to remain here,' she said, speaking with a certain sadness or weariness, as of a subject too much thought about. 'Matty is going to her sister's next week, and the week after I am going to Burtree Beck. I have taken Jean Laverock's rooms for awhile—the two rooms that Mr. Wilderslowe had.'

Michael Salvain looked at her in astonishment, and his broad white forehead seemed to lift itself into wrinkles by sheer force of perplexity.

'Is that a wise step?' he asked.

'I don't know about the wisdom of it,' was the reply. 'I have tried to weigh it well, and I can see nothing to balance my strong wish. Lady Anna wishes me to take some rooms she

knows of close to St. Dunstan's, and Gladwyn Thesiger has tried to persuade me to find or to make for myself a home near the place where her own future home is to be. It is delightful to find so many people caring; but I have a curious feeling about the matter. It seems to me that though I have now no special tie to this neighbourhood, the tie of birth is yet a strong and sufficient tie. I did not choose to be born in Hild's Haven, and I would not choose to leave it without due reason.'

'Most people in your position would consider a very natural desire for professional furtherance a sufficient reason.'

'Probably. I am aware of the disadvantages of Hild's Haven in that respect. But I shall never again have the same affection for any other place; I shall never feel any place so sacred as I feel this to be. I never lose sight of the idea that I owe much to having opened my eyes upon the same wild and rugged scenes as the eyes of Cædmon looked upon daily, to having breathed the same air, to living within sight and sound of the same sea; and if in this world I am ever to be so free from earthly care and pressure as to have a soul fit to receive the same light from heaven which Cædmon received, I feel strongly that I must be here to receive it.

That is my present conviction. Change may come. I may hear a voice saying, "Get thee out from thy country!" and if I hear I shall obey. That is all I know about my future.'

Michael Salvain listened intently, and yet with a sinking of heart which he could neither explain nor wholly understand. It was as if he saw another and a higher life, another and a purer world—a world with which he might have no concern, and for which he yet had capacity if by any means he might have reached it or touched its border.

There was anguish for him in the sense of constraint to a lower mood, a lower level of life and thought, a kind of anguish which could only be understood by a man of high spiritual and intellectual standing, able to imagine himself doomed for evermore to endure his earthly existence with a lower environment; to strive for his soul's life with a spiritual poverty amounting to want and destitution. It seemed to him as he sat there that no human being could ever be grateful enough, if the boon were his, to live his life in such society and companionship as should stimulate his soul's growth instead of dwarfing and hindering it. None could have felt the chilling, the narrowing, the deadening of his spiritual existence more keenly than Michael

Salvain felt it. In his daily life he might try to ignore all he was enduring; but now and then moments like this would come, moments in which the future rose up before him, a long and dreary and ever-darkening future, unpenetrated by any light, or any warmth, or any true spiritual good that he could discern. Already he was conscious of declension, of hours of half-content, of days when that inner strife seemed useless and resistance impossible; and across those times there came always the vision of what might have been. . . . Now again that vision came as he sat there, and for awhile he dared not trust himself to speak. Presently he began to feel as if even his silence were betraying him.

'I don't think I like the idea of your going to Burtree Beck,' he said at last.

'Have you been thinking of it all this time?' Dorigen asked with a smile.

There was no responsive smile on Michael Salvain's lips.

'No,' he said, with a sudden force and fervour. 'No; I was not thinking of that at all, but of far greater things—things of which I cannot speak.'

'Not even to me?'

'Not even to you. Nay, rather to anyone

than you. . . . And I must go,' he said abruptly, rising to his feet. 'I must go at once; and I have said nothing of all the things I came to say. I have not even congratulated you.'

'Why should you congratulate me?'

'Because of your book; because of a purpose achieved. A something done—and done successfully.'

'Thank you,' she said; but she spoke sadly rather than gladly: and he understood how success might not have the taste of success, how it might be as sad as any failure. If it were so with her, what remained?

Something on his face betrayed his inward questioning.

'It is all well,' she said. 'There is yet something to hope for, something to wish for. Wish it for me.'

'What shall I wish you?' he said eagerly.

'Wish for me *peace*—perfect peace of mind, and heart, and soul.'

'Is that your highest desire?'

'The very highest.'

Michael Salvain understood. The very longing of another for a life that could have no peace in it enabled him to understand. Yet he asked a question.

'Could you tell me what it is that stands

between you and peace at the present moment?' he asked.

'What it is?' she said, lifting her eyes to his face in weary surprise. 'It is everything! It is all my life! Think of my life from the beginning! Try to enter into it, and you will not wonder that I feel as if my very soul were untuned, and untuned for ever for peacefulness. It has been all strife, and storm, and change, and amazement. Except for that breathing-time at St. Dunstan's, I have never known any calm. And I have paid the full price for that since my return. Do you not think so?'

Michael was silent a moment.

'I think it seems as if compensation were at hand,' he said, trying to soothe the spirit he had evoked.

'I am unfitted to receive it,' she replied with emotion. 'It has come too late. What is the worth of it all now, when there is none to see, none to be glad, none to take any pride or pleasure, none to say "Well done!"—that is, none whose praise would have repaid me tenfold for all that I have undergone?'

'Don't say that!' Michael exclaimed with agitation. 'I cannot bear that you should say that! . . . Is it *nothing* to you that I care? . . . Is it nothing that I watch your every step, wait

impatiently for every word you write, delight in every word that is said concerning the things you have written ? Am I nothing to you ? Is my friendship nothing ? And, let me say it—I say it as in the very hearing of Heaven—is my love nothing ? my heart's best, and purest, and highest love, is it *nothing?* . . . I know what I am saying ; I know that you will not misunderstand. But give me an answer. Is my life nothing to your life ?'

Dorigen turned so as to look full into his face. She was trembling, but she made a strong effort to speak calmly.

'That you are my friend has many a time been the one earthly thing between me and despair,' she said. 'I ought not to have spoken now so despondently as I have done ; not to you, at any rate, who have done so much. . . . If you were to fail me, I think I could scarcely care to live.'

'Will you believe that I shall not fail you ?'

'I have always believed it.'

'Then continue to believe it. Have faith in me when I do not seem to deserve it, and do not measure the strength of the tie that is between your soul and mine by present visible results.'

'I have never done that,' she said. 'The

best results of a true friendship are seldom visible or tangible except by moments at a time. They are too high, too wide to be grasped by the narrowed vision that serves for the uses of the day.'

'So far that is true. . . . And now, "Good-bye." Will you write if you want me to come to Burtree Beck for any reason?'

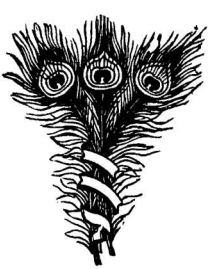
'Perhaps I may. Something will bring me the happiness of seeing you when I need you. If not, I can wait. . . . If I have learnt nothing else, I have learnt how to wait.'

Michael uttered his 'good-bye' and turned away abruptly.

'Your mere waiting is an easy thing,' he said half audibly, as he went down into the dull narrow street where the sunshine was not, and where every face he saw seemed to be a marred or worn face, or one crushed with the weight of years of sorrowful living. All the way as he went homeward he went in heaviness of heart, and with that dread reluctance which surely has nothing like unto it, the reluctance a man may have to enter his own home. Ah! that bitter distaste, that most pathetic and sad unwillingness!

'Anywhere, anywhere in the wide world but *there!*' he said, when the gables of his house

came in sight, and the ancient chimneys. He forced himself onward, having no alternative; yet all the while his heart was crying out, 'Let me have rest! Let me go anywhere, anywhere but *there!*'



CHAPTER XIV.

'THE PANSY AT MY FEET.'

'Man, thou hast not well said ; a fool thou art.
Not all fair gifts to all doth God divide,
Eloquence, beauty, and a noble heart.
One seems in mien poor, but his feeble part
God crowns with language, that men learn to love
The form, so feelingly the sweet words dart
Within them.'

WORSLEY'S *Odyssey*.

THE year went onward, as the best or the worst year will. For Michael Salvain was it the worst? For Dorigen was it the best? Afterwards it seemed surely as if each had that year touched a certain or uncertain limit.

That visit to St. Dunstan's was made, as Lady Anna Wilderslowe had desired; and the time was full of all good, all pleasure, all delight. Dr. Wilderslowe's deference to one toward whose

life's fulfilment he had done so much was touching almost to the verge of pain; and nothing seemed to gratify the good old man so much as to sit for awhile intellectually at the feet of one whose acquaintance with the literature of the day was, as he imagined, something very wonderful, and yet in itself a thing to be deplored. How was it possible for any human being to spend precious hours on a book published but yesterday, when the classics of all ages and all countries remained on the shelves unread?

'But some of those who are writing to-day will become classics in their turn, Dr. Wilderslowe,' said Dorigen one day. It was a July afternoon, and these two with Lady Anna sat on the terrace in the shade of the trellised veranda that was all overhung with roses and clematis and starry jessamine. The birds were still, and the bees hummed among the tall, white foxgloves, and dived into the chalices of the Madonna lilies; butterflies hovered everywhere in the hot still sunshine.

Dr. Wilderslowe heard, or half-heard the remark that Dorigen had made, in perplexed silence.

'I beg pardon, madam,' the old man said in his courteous way, 'perhaps I did not quite understand?'

Dorigen smiled, and repeated what she had said, adding :

'Don't you think there are giants on the earth in these days? Don't you think we have poets and prose writers among us now as great as any but the very greatest who have lived?'

'I had certainly not thought *that*,' said the Doctor, with the air of one who was being greatly enlightened. 'No; I had not discerned that. Would you, madam, kindly mention the names of a few of these great men?'

This was, to say the least of it, discomfiting to one whose judgment was mainly her own, and whose natural shrinking from all assertion or contention was very great. She began to think in some trepidation of mind, and Lady Anna turned to hide a smile of mischievous delight.

'Well, there is Robert Browning,' Dorigen said with quite uncalled-for timidity.

'Ma'am?'

'I mentioned the name of Mr. Robert Browning as one man of note.'

'Mr. Robert Browning. Yes! May I ask what he has written or done?'

This was too much for Lady Anna's gravity, but she came to the rescue, and soon a very fair list of the master's chief poems was given. The Doctor made little pencil memoranda in his note-

book, and then begged with extreme humility to be further enlightened. It was as impossible to doubt his good faith as to deny his request, and the conversation became certainly very amusing.

'Prose writers!' Dorigen repeated once, by way of beginning her reply to a question of the old man's. 'It seems to me that there can never have been four more perfect writers of English prose living at one time than four who are living among us now. There are others, but I speak now only of these four—Cardinal Newman, Professor Ruskin, Professor Seeley, and Mr. Matthew Arnold. I can read any of these for their perfect music alone.'

'Indeed, madam! But this is surprising!'

'Have you ever heard any of these names, grandpapa?' asked Lady Anna.

'Yes, my dear, yes. I have some of Newman's earlier sermons. And I feel sure that I have seen the name of the last gentleman Miss Gower mentioned, Mr. Matthew Arnold. . . . I —I think I saw it in a periodical!'

On other days the old drives were taken, the old places and people visited: and it seemed that here and there some light had gone from the scenes, some charm had vanished. Dorigen knew well enough that the change was in herself.

The fading of things into the light of common day is inevitable, and in no case can you see so certainly all that such fading means as when you return to a place long loved, long dreamed of, long desired.

Yet it was a pleasant time to have in remembrance, and Dorigen returned to her desk in the narrow room at Burtree Beck with new strength, and with at least the beginnings of that inward peace she had so earnestly desired. And the hour was not without its satisfactions. Jean Laverock's warm welcome was not a thing to be despised, and Gladwyn Thesiger, having found previous remonstrance with Dorigen useless, had with the help of her sisters done all that might be done to make Jean's two rooms as beautiful as they were capable of being made. The walls had been re-papered with a real Morrisian paper, somewhat aggressive, but beyond all doubt pleasant to look upon; pretty rugs had been sent to hide the unbeautiful new carpet Jean had bought out of sheer goodwill; drawings hung about in profusion, with embroideries wherever embroidery could be. Indeed, the place had been so changed that Dorigen felt as if she were entering upon a new home. And it was really homelike.

'I can think of you now with some pleasure,'

Gladwyn said, coming over on the following day to see how far her efforts had been successful. 'You are always to sit in this easy-chair by the fire when you write. I had this low writing-table made on purpose. And I hung all the prettiest things on the opposite wall, so that your eye might rest upon them every time you looked up. . . . Isn't that etching of Ruskin beautiful? That was Juliet's choice. And those little water-colours of the Abbey and the town, mamma did them on purpose for you. And there are all our photographs, even papa's, who never gives one to anybody, and Thyra chose those pretty bits of still life. But I am going to get you some more photographs of people while we are in London, distinguished people, so that you may never feel lonely, but have good company about you always. But you never are lonely—are you?'

'No; not now.'

'Were you ever?'

'Once or twice in my life I have had paroxysms of loneliness. They lasted about an hour each time. I think if they had lasted longer I should have gone mad.'

'You seem to have had every sort of experience,' said Gladwyn. 'I suppose it was needful for the work you have to do.'

Then she glanced at the desk where the scat-

tered papers were lying, the quill pens not yet dry, the much-used blotting-paper.

'I believe I have walked into the middle of a chapter?' she said interrogatively.

'You have,' was the reply. 'And since you are so good about asking questions, or rather *not* asking them, I will tell you a bit of good news. You have shared my bad news oft enough. And the good concerns this book I am writing. It is a novel, and I sent part of it, the first volume, to the editor of the *Grosvenor Magazine*. If the two other volumes are as good as the first it is to be accepted.'

'And that is good news.'

'Eminently good, for me.'

'Then I hope you will get more money this time.'

'Much more. I have been making a list of the books I mean to buy. I will let you look at it; it is a rapture only to look at it.'

Gladwyn glanced over the list.

'There is no rapture in it for me,' she said. 'But tell me a little more about your books and yourself. I *am* good, as you say, but it costs me an effort to be good.'

'But there is nothing more I can tell you.'

'Not even the title?'

'Not even the title. Last time only one title

was possible; this time three or four different ones are running in my brain, and in all probability I shall leave the decision to the editor in the end. That is the awkwardness of questions concerning an author's work. There are so few that one *can* answer, and protestations of ignorance are very naturally received with incredulousness.'

'But at least you can tell me when the first instalment is to appear?'

'It is to appear in November, if at all; but I am anxious that the last word shall be written before the first is given to the world. So, you see, I have no time to lose.'

'That means I am not to come again.'

'Quite the contrary: it means that you are to come whenever you can, in the afternoon, and stay as long as you can, and distract my attention all you can.'

'The twentieth of next month will be a little distraction for you,' said Gladwyn rather shyly.

'Is that the wedding-day? Lady Anna was not quite sure,' Dorigen said. 'I hope it will be a fine day—it is sure to be a happy one. I shall think of you, you may be sure.'

'Think of me!' Gladwyn exclaimed. 'You are to be my bridesmaid. I thought that was

all settled before you went away; and, indeed, we have ordered your locket and bracelet.'

'They will do for the lady who will take my place,' Dorigen said, speaking sadly enough. 'Gladwyn dear, don't press this. The character of bridesmaid is not in my repertoire. I could not act it successfully.'

In her own heart there was another thought—a remembrance, almost a fear.

'If I were to stand there,' she said to herself—'if I were to stand in that chancel that day I should certainly see Gladwyn and Lancelot

'"One and one with a shadowy third."

And Margery would be as present to me as they would be. I could not bear it; I could not do it.'

And in addition there was a feeling which could hardly be put into thoughts, much less into words—a feeling of separation, of shrinking from contact with that outer world which makes such demands not only upon time, but upon strength, vitality, life itself.

'It is not for me, that social world,' she said to herself. 'And I am not for it. I have passed through the fire, and I have come out too much scorched to care for contact with people upon whose garments there is not even the smell of burning.'

But of all these things she said nothing. She only tried a little to soften her refusal.

'No, dear,' she said; 'you will have to be married without me, but not without my good wishes. I shall be able to think of you more, and more warmly than if I were trying to eat your wedding-breakfast.'

'*There* at any rate you would fail,' said Gladwyn, still having disappointment in her tone.

'Probably; therefore excuse me from making the experiment.'

'But you will promise, then, to come and stay with us at Adwalton as soon as we come back?'

'As soon as I can after you come back. . . . Remember, I have my daily bread to earn.'

'Which couldn't, I should think, be a difficult matter, comparing your appetite with a sixpenny loaf.'

'Don't be impertinent; I shall go and ask Mrs. Laverock to bring in such a tea as will convince you that I am not in the habit of starving myself. . . . But kiss me, Gladwyn, and be friends: the salt of life is in its friendships.'

CHAPTER XV.

OUT OF THE MIST.

'SEPHARDO. Have you a shapen purpose, or mere will
That sees the end alone, and not the means?
Resolve will melt no rocks.
DON SILVA. But it can scale them.'
GEORGE ELIOT: *The Spanish Gipsy.*

BREEZY and fresh and beautiful as Thorsgrif might be in ordinary weather, it must yet be confessed that it was a dull place to be in on a dull November day. The thick white mists hung low upon land and sea; the muffled, mournful sound of the fog-horns came up the ravine all day and all night; not a bird-note broke upon the ear; not a breeze stirred the tree-tops in the gill; the outer world was silent, formless, colourless. The inner world was—what you made it. With a November fog creeping in at window and door, one needs to draw upon one's resources to

their last limit; and the bankrupt soul is surely much to be pitied.

Michael Salvain and his mother and sister had lived through so many Novembers in Thorsgrif Gill, and their demands as to the pleasurableness of life were so moderate and reasonable, that this particular November day had in it for them nothing that was intolerable. Michael went to and fro across the furzy waste that was between his own house and the Alum Works at Thorsgrif Ness, or now and then he went over to Hild's Haven; and he was nowhere conscious of being sadder or more depressed than was usual with him in those days of ceaseless yet most patient endurance.

His mother sat in her cosy sitting-room, heaping on coal and wood, stirring the fire into a perpetual blaze; choosing the brightest and lightest-coloured wools for the stockings she was knitting for the two children, who, in her estimation, did so much to keep the house cheerful, and noisy, and busy, and pleasant. More than once she paused in her knitting to listen to the music lesson Joanna was giving to Zaré. The little fingers moved over the keys, and 'Home, sweet Home' came slowly, note by note. 'One, two, three, four,' counted Joanna. 'Dere's no place lite home,' sang Valerie, who was sitting on

the rug, looking up into Mrs. Salvain's eyes, with a smile on her own little pink-and-white face. The contents of an ancient Noah's Ark—it had been Joanna's—were spread out upon the floor, and the animals were going two by two across the blue roses and the crimson scrolls which were the principal features of the carpet.

'One, two, three, four,' counted Joanna again. 'Be it ever so humble, dere's no place lite home,' repeated Valerie, in good time and tune ; whilst overhead Valerie's mother was clasping her hands, and lifting a strained face in a very agony of despair because of that home's utter intolerableness.

One word, which she had said months ago—it seemed years ago—lingered strangely on her husband's ear. 'If you will let me go, I can earn my bread,' she had declared ; and the declaration was one he might never forget.

She had not expected that he would divine the nature of the dream which haunted her by night and by day. But Michael Salvain was not quite the fool his wife deemed him to be.

Immediately he had said to himself : 'Ermine would go on the stage if her way were plain ;' and even as he said it there came to him the discernment to acknowledge that on the night she trod the boards she would find her true vocation.

Her whole nature, her whole personality, her whole talent—which was not small—would there find a fitting scene for its highest and fullest outcome. Michael Salvain could imagine his wife appearing not only upon the stage of England, but of Europe, and being received as a second Rachel. To his appreciation it seemed as if there were in her something of that same fervid and glowing genius, with infinitely greater advantages in the way of personal beauty. He knew it had been said that Rachel, even in her most transcendent moments, was a plain-looking woman, but none could ever say the same of Ermengarde Salvain. Her great beauty would be the half of her charm, the half of her influence.

Inevitably Michael Salvain dwelt upon the idea so forcibly presented to him; inevitably it filled him with apprehension, with pain, with a great and overpowering disquietude.

Latterly it had grown upon him—why or wherefore he could not have said. But he was conscious of it, and his wife knew that he was conscious, and was very glad. It would make the development of her plans easier.

All this while she had been maturing her plans; her purpose had been growing and strengthening within her; she had devoted her

whole time to such studies as she knew how to pursue, and her knowledge in these matters was not small.

In that former life of hers, which seemed so far away, she had more than once taken a prominent part in amateur representations; and she, with others who had acted with her, had had the advantage of some excellent training from a lady whose position on the stage is yet unchallenged. To this lady she would appeal when the time came; and it was coming quickly. And yet there were many intolerable days to be endured by the way; this gloomy November day was one of them—one of many; and as it wore on to noon, bringing no change, no hope, no relief from the terrible monotony, Ermengarde felt as if she could endure it no longer. 'How *can* I bear it?' she asked again and again, half-aloud, lifting her beautiful, tragic face, and tossing wide her white, finely-moulded arms in a very agony of appeal, and having all the while a certain under-current of consciousness that this despairing mood afforded excellent opportunities for study and practice. Thus it was that, instead of checking her desperation, she encouraged it, fed it by all means, and gave herself credit for fulfilling a professional duty.

It might be this same sense of use which was

moving in her when her husband came back from Hild's Haven. It was but three o'clock in the afternoon, and yet the twilight was descending through the thick, yellow fog. Ermengarde was still upstairs in her own room when he came. She had had a fire lighted there. The 'Winter's Tale' was open on the sofa, and she was standing with clasped hands and set, marble-like face in a recess near the window. She did not see the quiet smile on her husband's face, the pleased look in his eyes, or the thick, grey-covered magazine which he was offering to her for her acceptance.

'It is the *Grosvenor*, Ermine,' he said; 'the November number, and it contains the first instalment of "Thorwaldsthorne." I had a little time to wait, but I didn't cut the pages. I know you like to do that for yourself, and I wouldn't spoil your pleasure.'

'My *pleasure!*' she said, having a great scorn in her beautiful voice. 'My *pleasure!* There may be pleasure for you in reading a novel of Miss Gower's, or of anyone else's; but I confess my emotions require some stronger incentive before they can be greatly moved to pleasure.'

'I expect this will be a stronger book than the last,' he said, putting the magazine down with a certain disappointment in his act and tone.

'But even the last took its place with competent judges, and the notices I have seen of the first instalment of this are full of high anticipation.'

'Probably. But the subject has no interest for me—not one particle. What is a novel when it is written, and printed, and published? It is a thing that people borrow from a library, glance through in a couple of hours, and never see again—never dream of wishing to see again. I pity Dorigen Gower, that such a mind as hers should have no fuller and greater and grander outlet for its power, than that! If she were to write a drama, *that* I could understand, there I could have sympathy with her. But if I might have selected my gifts for myself, I would never have chosen that my soul should trickle out through the point of a pen. Where can be the good of it? Where the joy? To sit alone, to brood over your own thought alone, to sit down and express it alone—where can be the satisfaction?'

'There must be the satisfaction of knowing that your mind is brought into contact with other minds.'

'No—pardon me—there cannot be even that, not as a rule. A writer may dream, may hope that it is so; but he cannot know. What will Miss Gower know at Burtree Beck? . . . Oh, I

should go mad if I had to live her life for a month. *This* is intolerable; that would be maddening. I should be thinking always night and day of the life that might be mine, that *will* be mine, that *must* be mine, if I am to live my life at all. . . . No; don't interrupt me, Michael. I had meant to say it. I don't want to leave your house like a thief in the night; but I will do that, if you drive me to it. . . . You must let me go. Don't think mine is a girl's fancy—the usual fancy of the stage-struck young lady. I have always known that the power was mine—the power to move an audience, to win its sympathy, to carry it with me through a drama from first to last; and I can conceive no higher joy, no higher glory, than to find one's self face to face with a crowd of sympathetic listeners, people who have come there to yield themselves heart and soul to your soul, to feel the flash as your passion strikes upon the passion in them, the electric thrill of emotion as you give adequate utterance to some forceful human truth which is recognised instantly to be the concentrated expression of some forceful human experience!

> '"The life of a long life distilled to a mere drop,
> Falling upon the world's cold cheek to make it burn."

You may call all this enthusiasm, you may call

it sickness of the brain, you may call it what you will; but you must face the fact, my husband, that I, Ermengarde Salvain, must follow my life's vocation—or cease to live! I tell you plainly, strongly, surely, for me there is no alternative!'

Michael Salvain stood quite silently there, his hand resting on his wife's dressing-table, her trinkets strewn about before his eyes, herself in the recess by the window, tall and beautiful, and white and cold with the intensity of her own emotion.

'I have tried to prepare myself for this, Ermine,' he said, with quiet strength in his voice, yet with pain written on every feature of his face. 'But you find me unprepared. . . . I only know that it is impossible that I should ever consent to your leaving your home. As I have told you, I was fully aware of the sacrifice you made in accepting such a home. But I hoped you had counted the cost, as I tried to count it for you.'

'I do not blame you, Michael—not in anything. I was glad of your offer, as you know. I condescended to scheme for it; but I am sufficiently punished. . . . Oh, how mad, how deluded I must have been! But for my own folly I might have been free now—free as

air! . . . . But, Michael, you will set me free?'

'Never, Ermine.'

'That is final?'

'It is quite final. I will never release you from the vow you made in the sight of Heaven, and I will never consent to your becoming an actress. But I will do anything else you wish me to do. If you wish it I will make arrangements for leaving Thorsgrif altogether. And we will live where you wish to live.'

'You would live in London?'

'Yes, or anywhere else where you could be happy. But let me remind you that we should have to live in a very moderate way. I should have to put a man in my place here, and pay him adequately for doing the work I do myself.'

Ermine stood silently for awhile, looking out of the window into the blank yellow mist, tapping her foot impatiently upon the carpet. There was for her no good, no gladness in the prospect held out to her.

'I should have no more freedom than I have now,' she said presently, but speaking more as if she spoke to herself than to her husband.

But he heard, and he asked in sadness, 'Could any wife have more freedom than you have, Ermine?'

'That is going back, arguing in a circle,' she said, having irritation in her tone. Then, after a moment's silence, she added, 'Leave me, Michael; leave me now, and don't take any steps toward change till I tell you. I will think things over once more, though heaven knows I am weary of thinking. . . . And don't take the *Grosvenor* away. I will look over "Thorwaldsthorne."' Then she added, in a tone that was half contemptuous, half strangely wistful, 'Perhaps it will move me to say my prayers to-night. . . . It is a long while since I have said any prayers.'

CHAPTER XVI.

'ONE LAST KISS UPON THE LIVING SHORE.'

'But if some god amid the wine-dark flood
With doom pursue me, and my vessel mar,
Then will I bear it as a brave man should.
Not the first time I suffer. Wave and war
Deep in my life have graven many a scar.'

WORSLEY'S *Odyssey*.

IN almost every hamlet of Yorkshire, however small, you will find at least one man who has the doubtful reputation of being 'a character.'

It might be difficult at times to say what the character has done to earn for himself this distinction. Sometimes it would seem as if a power of saying rude or disagreeable things were enough; at other times you suspect that a high degree of social incompatibility must lead to eminence; and there are villages where the quarrelsome seem certainly to maintain a position

of authority of which the more peaceful must be secretly envious. A long course of observation has led to the conclusion that it is seldom the amiable, the unselfish, the quietly-disposed, who acquire that peculiar kind of reputation which entitles a man to be considered in his own locality as 'a character.' And yet there are, there must be, exceptions.

Adam Farah, for instance, Enoch's father, was really on the whole a well-disposed old man, but his good disposition had not precluded his acquiring a certain prominence among his fellows, though it might be difficult to define either the cause of his prominence or the nature of it. His position at the Alum Works might have had something to do with it. He was wont to boast a little that he had been 'head-cooper' at the works for nearly forty years, and of late he had been employed to assist in the alum-making itself. This had added something to the dignity of his standing, and, perhaps, something of conceit to the piquancy of his ordinary speech. Be this as it might, it may fairly be said that old Adam was, in a mild way, a 'character' in the hamlet of Thorsgrif.

His house was one of seven or eight which stood on the broad ledge of shale half-way down the cliff-side, and not very far from the

sheds and cisterns. It was a somewhat larger cottage than the rest, and old Adam, having no wife, had willingly agreed that his house should continue to be the home of his son Enoch when the latter married. That was about two years before this wild wet winter set in, and they had been very happy years for Enoch and Rizpah; happier of late for the presence of a fine baby boy. The next, it was hoped, would be a girl, and on the 17th of December this hope was granted. Rizpah's new baby was three days old on the morning of Tuesday, the 20th.

It was a dull, grey, and bitterly cold morning, but the rain, which had poured down ceaselessly for nearly a week past, had ceased to pour. The becks were swollen and noisy, the sea was rough, and it almost seemed as if that were swollen too, and there was hardly a sail in sight anywhere. The single bare mast of a sloop was in the offing, not far from Thorsgrif Ness; indeed, it had come there with coal for the Alum Works, and was waiting for low water to discharge its cargo. The name could be seen quite distinctly; it was the *Aslauga*, of Hild's Haven. Her captain's name was James Applebie.

It was about nine o'clock in the morning when Mr. Salvain went down the wet winding road that led to the office in the cliff. Enoch

was in the stable, the foreman was out among the cisterns, old Adam was stirring the office-fire, and he went on stirring it, not troubling himself to turn or touch his battered fur cap in answer to his master's greeting. He prided himself a little on his disregard of ceremony.

Michael Salvain knew the old man's way, and made no attempt to reform it. In fact, as a rule he did not notice it. But presently it became evident that Adam was about to claim a little notice this morning. Crossing the floor of the office in a somewhat impressive manner, he closed the door, turned the key in the lock, and came back to the desk. There he stopped, rested his hand upon the little railing that ran round the top of the table, and sighed heavily.

'Adam, you are not well this morning,' exclaimed Mr. Salvain with concern, and looking keenly into the old man's solemn face and dark, intent-looking eyes. 'What is it? You must go home, and Enoch shall go for a doctor.'

'Doctor me na doctors,' said the old man, with a groan. 'It's noän doctors as is wanted here.'

'Then what is it? What is troubling you?' asked Michael, patiently enough. He was being trained to extremes of patience.

Old Adam was silent a moment, then he put

his hand on his side and evidently began to prepare for a long communication. Michael watched with interest.

'Ah'm an oäd man, maister,' he began impressively. 'Ah've lived above my threescore years and ten, an' Ah've lived 'em all i' Thorsgrif. Niver in his life hes Adam Farah slept a neet oot o' Thorsgrif.'

'Indeed! And you are not tired of it?'

'Tired on it! Naäy, maister. A man 'at tires of his naätive counthry 'd tire o' the globe itself, give him tahme anuff. But t'warnt o' that 'at Ah com to speäk, 'twarnt for that 'at Ah started to tell ya 'at man an' boy Ah'd lived my life amang these rocks, an' cliffs, an' floods, an' wrecks, an' landslips. Wheä *sud* knaw 'em if not me? Ah, it's been a straänge spot, this coäst hes, for disaster! Ya'll have heerd tell o' Hunswyke village disappearin' all i' one neet—ivery hoose in it but one where there was a corpse lyin'. An' Ah've heerd my gran'-father tell mony a tahme hoo there was warnin' anuff, if only the folks would ha' ta'en it, rum'lins i' the e'th, an' such like, for daäys and daäys afore. Noo Ah don't want to give noä false alarms—Ah don't indeed, sir. Ya've niver know'd ma give noä false alarms?'

'No, certainly not. I have never known you

do anything that a faithful servant ought not to have done.'

'Thank ya, sir! thank ya! That's handsome, that is. An' Ah wouldn't be actin' faithful by you, nor by nobody i' the plaäce, if I didn't saäy the thing I hev to saäy noo. An' mebbe ya'll think it isn't much when it is said. But it seems plenty ta me 'at knaws the spot sa well. . . . Mr. Salvain, the stones, an' the e'th, an' the shale hesn't come droppin' doon upon the roofs o' these sheds three nights runnin' for nothin'. Porritt knows on it as well as me, an' we both on us heerd that rummlin', an crackin', an' rendin', an' rivin' that was goin' on i' the booels o' the e'th last neet, an' Ah made up my mind 'at Ah'd tell ya on it this mornin', an' then the burden of it all 'ud lie on my head na longer.'

The old man had been watching his master intently, and he had perceived quickly enough the growing whiteness, the growing rigidness that came upon the face of the younger man. Then their eyes met, and each man betrayed the depth of his apprehension.

'But you have heard these sounds before?' Michael asked.

'I hev, sir, mony a tahme; but niver hauf sa lood, or sa lang-continying. . . . But there, Ah've said my saäy, an' Ah'd rether saäy na

more, so as you be willin', sir. Ah'd not like to taäke no responsibility.'

For a long time Michael Salvain sat there alone with his responsibility and himself; then he went out and looked up at the face of the rugged, immovable rocks, which seemed to him to look back upon him with that same calm sternness, that same inscrutable and mysterious grandeur with which they had given him back his glance for all the years of his later youth and middle life. The scene seemed part of himself, part of his every hope, his every error, his every disappointment, his every period of suffering. And through it all no change had happened there; for a thousand years, or twice a thousand, no change had happened at Thorsgrif Ness. As Michael stood there looking upon the firm, barren rock, he had almost smiled at the old man's foreboding.

But it was noticed that the master did not go home in the middle of the day, as he had usually done. Instead, he sent a note to his wife, saying simply that business matters would detain him till nightfall.

Before nightfall he had quietly persuaded more than half of his men to leave the cottages by the works, and to take with them their wives and families. They could find shelter in the neigh-

bourhood, and he would recoup any extra expense to which they might be put.

But there were some who were not to be persuaded. He could not prevail upon Enoch Farah to attempt to remove his wife and three-days-old baby. The little lad was sent away 'to please the master,' but it was easy to see that Enoch did not share his father's fears. Rather did he incline to listen to Jacob Porritt, who was as old a man, and who had as great experience of the ways of nature by the wild North Sea as Adam Farah had had. Jacob had laughed at Adam's fearfulness, and his laughter had made a great impression in the little community. In fact, during the day the people had divided themselves into two parties, one following the views of each old man. By the time the night had set in none of Adam's adherents remained on the ledge of alum shale. Adam himself remained. 'He would see the end,' he said.

Michael Salvain heard the words, and once more he smiled, but gravely.

'How many people are there down here now altogether?' he asked, speaking as much to himself as to Adam.

'There's me an' Jacob an' Bulmer, sir. 'Twas oor first shift te-neet; but Ah reckon we'll ha' te make it first an' last. There isn't anuther able-

bodied man left on the spot but Enoch. There's oäd Scaife, but he's nowther use nor orniment, an' nowt 'ud persuade him to get his beänes oot o' t' spot. . . . Hoo mony dis that mak—favhe? Why, then there's nobbut them an' Rizpah an' t' bairn. That's seven sowls altegether, sir; eight wi' you.'

'Too many if anything should happen,' Michael said; 'but I trust nothing will. Doubtless the rain has loosened the earth a good deal; that would account for the dropping of the soil and stones. To-day there has been no rain.'

'Trew, sir.'

'And all has been still enough for some hours now. I have not seen more than a few handfuls of earth dropping downward since I came this morning.'

'Trew, sir.'

'Have you as much dread as you had in the forenoon, Adam?'

'Ivery bit as much, sir. Mebbe rather more. Things mostly happens at night.'

'Well, I can only repeat that I hope nothing will happen. I can do no more unless I insist that every human being shall leave the place. I shall certainly do that so soon as I see sufficient grounds for doing it.'

'But you'll nut be stayin' here durin' the night, sir ?'

'Yes, I shall. I am going home now for an hour or two. Send instantly if there is any further sign. And tell Enoch that I think he had better take the horse and trap up to Orde's stable ; it is no use going across to the gill with it this dark night.'

The night was very dark, and Michael Salvain's mother was beginning to be apprehensive. Somehow a word had reached her of the threatened danger at the Ness ; but she had kept the matter faithfully to herself all day, and now she would not worry him. He had enough of worry, she thought, as she watched the paleness of his face, and the sad, overburdened look about his eyes and mouth. Ermengarde was as if she saw nothing.

Michael Salvain's wife had never looked more beautiful than she looked as she sat there by the tea-table, in a pretty demi-toilette of some dark gauzy stuff, relieved by silvered ribbons and white lace. Her golden hair shone in the lamplight, her dreamy eyes looked more dreamy than ever, and there was a most unusual flush of colour on her exquisitely rounded cheek. Moreover, there was something in the expression of her face which even Michael, absorbed and

harassed as he was, could not but perceive and wonder at. He did not remember ever to have seen the same look on his wife's countenance before. At intervals a half-smile played about her lip, but it was not a pleased smile. She was surely thinking of something, dreaming of something which perplexed her as much as it gratified her. Whatever it was, it seemed to have drawn her soul from its present environment.

Many a time of late he had seen her depressed, silent, absent-minded, and he had divined the cause of these things. Now he was aware of the presence of a new element, and it could not be but that he should feel concern.

Nearly five weeks had passed since that November day on which he had offered to leave Thorsgrif, to permit her to decide where they might make another home ; and since that day no more had been said. Ermengarde had declined to discuss the matter.

Yet she had not forgotten it, this he knew. She had not relinquished her hope, this he knew also. What fresh turn had her purpose taken ?

He could ask no question with his mother and sister in the room ; but presently Joanna went upstairs to put the children to bed, and Michael

took the opportunity to announce his intention with regard to the coming night.

'I wish you would make me a sandwich or two with your own hands, my mother,' he said. 'Susan's sandwiches are not appetizing.'

'But you don't wish to have them made over-night, Michael?' the little woman asked in surprise.

'Yes, please. I may want them for use during the night.'

Michael was speaking to his mother, but he watched his wife as he spoke. He was not prepared for the change he saw on her face. Every particle of colour died from her lip and cheek; her eyes seemed to fix themselves on the carpet with resoluteness. Over her whole frame there came a certain tremulous fluttering of apprehension which another might have supposed to arise out of fear for her husband's safety. Michael Salvain did not so deceive himself.

Naturally there came from his mother a torrent of questions, surprises, distresses, entreaties. What if the whole concern at the Ness were to go into the sea; what then? Let her son go down again, order every living being away from the spot, and then come back to his home, and leave the rest to Providence.

Ermengarde, trying to recover herself, laughed,

with a strange nervous trembling in her laugh. Michael almost shuddered to hear it.

'It has seemed to me for some time past that Providence has no special need of alum,' she said. 'By how many thousand tons did you say the demand had fallen off last year?'

Michael named the number, and his mother with tearful glances toward her son and her sister's daughter, went out, leaving them together for a moment. They stood silently.

'Ermine, what is the matter to-night?' Michael said, crossing the rug, and laying a gentle hand upon her shoulder. 'I must leave you; but the idea of leaving you like this is misery to me.'

'Like what?'

'I am not good at description,' he said; 'but you must know that you are not yourself. . . . You are not afraid for me?'

'No; really I am not.'

There was something pathetic even in her estimation in the way the dark colour swept over her husband's pained face to the roots of his hair.

She watched him critically.

'You are intending to stay down at the works all night?' she asked presently.

'Yes.'

'You will not be alone!'

'Not by any means alone. There will be six or seven human beings there besides myself.'

'Is Enoch remaining?'

'Yes; he cannot leave his wife and newborn child. I am more concerned for them than for anyone else.'

Again Ermengarde stood silent for awhile, a long while it seemed to her husband, who had yet acquired no clue to what almost amounted to a mystery. He was not likely to acquire any unless his wife chose that he should do so; this he knew.

'Ermine!' he said, bending over her, and drawing her face to his; 'Ermine, I am in trouble to-night. The weight of apprehension, of responsibility, of foreboding that I have is almost more than one can bear alone. Say something to me before I go; say but a single word that I can remember for my comfort, for my consolation, if the worst should come that I dread. Apart from the loss of human life there would be nothing that I could not endure if you were helping me to endure, enduring with me.'

There was a moment's silence.

'Michael, you knew before you married me

that the *rôle* of "dutiful helpmeet" could never be mine,' Ermengarde said with distinct and musical intonation. 'I might pretend; I have pretended. But to-night I will not.'

'At least, tell me what it is that has come to you to-night?'

'Nothing has come to me. Nothing could ever come to me in Thorsgrif Gill.'

Then, as if involuntarily, but with evident anxiousness, she turned to look at the clock. It pointed to nearly nine. Michael's eyes, following hers, discerned the same unpleasant truth.

'I did not think it had been so late,' he said. 'I must go. . . . And I feel curiously reluctant. My wife, what is it? What is it?'

'It is the dread that you will find your pots and pans gone into the sea,' she said, with another nervous little laugh. Presently she added, 'I suppose everything will be in confusion down there to-night?'

'I fear so.'

'Well, it will pass; everything passes if only one has patience, and pluck. That is not a nice word for a lady to use, but it is eminently expressive.'

'Don't let it be your last word to me to-night.'

'To-night! to-night! Why are you harping so much upon to-night?' she asked fretfully, forgetting that she herself had but just used the word.

'I don't know why,' Michael replied, half wondering at himself. 'I suppose I am rather overwrought.'

'Probably. . . . Try to take care of yourself down at the works. Have a good fire in your office, enjoy your sandwiches, and go to sleep. You will come back more at one with yourself in the morning.'

'Shall I?'

'Assuredly.'

'And you?'

'And I? . . . I shall be more at one with myself also.'

'I wish I could think that, Ermine!'

'Be sure of it; quite sure. . . . I am going to begin a new life to-night, Michael. I am going to shake off all the old miserable unrest to-night.'

'Is *that* the meaning of the hour?'

'That, and that only. . . . And promise me one thing; only one. You will not remember my old errors against me, against my children? You will forget the past? you will have none but kindly thoughts of me in the

days to be? You will not remember my old sins?'

'They have hardly been sins, dear!' Michael said, remembering at her word the things he had suffered; yet, half-bewildered by this sudden change, this unlooked-for opening in his clouded prospect. 'Oh, Ermine! you have made me very happy!' he continued. 'It was hard to go before; it is harder now: decidedly it is harder to leave happiness. . . . But no, I shall take it with me. I must leave you; but I shall take the happiness. . . . Kiss me once more, my wife! Kiss me once more!'

And with her last fervid kiss upon his lips he turned away, not knowing, not dreaming how and where they were to meet again.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FALL OF THORSGRIF NESS.

'Did Adam love his Eve from first to last?
I think so; as we love who works us ill,
And wounds us to the quick.'

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

THAT confusion which Ermengarde had anticipated was not particularly obvious as Michael went down by the sodden, clayey cliffs to his office among the alum sheds. Here and there a light was burning; once or twice the sound of human voices came up the barren slope, and once or twice the thud of stones dropping from a great height to the rocks below arrested his attention. The latter sound struck him as the dropping of earth upon a coffin-lid.

He was prepared for the desperate apprehension written on Adam Farah's face, and he listened attentively to the old man's words.

'It's overed, sir! It's all overed!' Adam said, entering the little office a moment after his master, and standing so that his folded arms seemed to have despair in the very fold of them.

'What makes you say that, Adam?' Mr. Salvain asked calmly.

The old man paused a moment, and his answer evidently required effort.

'It's the liquor, sir! . . . IT'S COMIN' BLUNDERED!'

This reply, which would have meant so little to a stranger, meant the worst to Michael Salvain. His knowledge, informing his imagination, enabled him to realize the truth too well.

The liquid alum, which, as a rule, ran clear as glass, was beginning to come thickened and muddy—*blundered*, as Adam said in his expressive phraseology—betokening that the sediment at the bottom of the cisterns was being disturbed by the action of the earth.

Michael only hesitated a moment.

'Your son's wife must be removed at once,' he said, leaving his desk as he spoke. 'Joseph Bulmer must help Enoch to carry her up to Orde's. She can be carried on her bed; and I will——'

The Alum Master did not finish his sentence.

His words were arrested on his lips by a sound which resembled the thunder which breaks among the hills. There was the roll, the crash, the echo, and again the roll; the ground quivered beneath the feet of the two men fearfully; and then there came a dull riving and rending close at hand, and less muffled than the first sounds had been.

By this time they stood at the office door, listening to the slow, heavy falling of the rocks at the back of the works. Nothing could be seen. There was a light in Enoch's window, and one in the window of Bulmer's cottage. Jacob Porritt, half-dressed, came running across to the office, and the light from the door showed his aged face white and stricken with fear. To add to the horror of the moment, the rain began to fall heavily.

'Something must be done for Rizpah,' Michael Salvain said, fancying that he heard a woman's faint cry as the earth once more gave a slow onward wave toward the sea, and then seemed to recoil and shudder for a second or two.

In another moment he had lighted a couple of lanterns, and, with two of the men, he set out to cross the road to Adam's cottage. They soon discovered that the worn and ancient pathway had disappeared; indeed, the aspect of the place had

so changed that, but for the lights in the cottage window, they could hardly have been certain as to their exact whereabouts. There was still that other light burning feebly in the distance—the light on board the sloop *Aslauga*.

It was all but impossible to proceed. Huge stones were thrown down; wide fissures yawned; even as they went onward the earth slipped, and moved in a slow, sickening way that was very terrible to feel. Just as they reached the door of Adam's cottage, the next cottage, which was detached and empty, went down with a crash, falling seaward.

While the stones of which it had been built were yet grinding and sinking in the darkness, Adam's door was suddenly opened, and Rizpah came shrieking out, only half-dressed, and with her three-days-old baby in her arms.

'Oh, Mr. Michael! Mr. Michael! save me! save my bairn!' she cried.

Then her voice failed, and she sank back fainting against the palings of the little garden. In another minute she was lying in old Adam's armchair, wrapped in blankets from her bed; and Mr. Salvain stood beside her in the cottage with her baby safe in his arms. Enoch, it seemed, had left the house but a few minutes before the first crash had been heard; the woman

who had been nursing Rizpah had gone before dark, promising to come back early in the morning.

As they stood there in the little cottage, anxious and perplexed for the fainting mother, Enoch came running back, fear-stricken, and pallid beyond all the rest.

'There's no road up, sir, none! The face o' the cliff's disappeared altogether, an' there's no way out o' this. Heaven help us!'

'Keep quiet, Enoch,' Michael Salvain said. 'And light the largest bonfire you can light as a danger signal! Do this immediately! Captain Applebie will send a boat, and your wife and child can be taken on board the *Aslauga*.'

This was the work of an hour or more; but it was effectively done. The poor fear-exhausted mother and her little one were carried as gently as might be to the beach; her bed was placed in the boat; and then she was rowed safely over the dark rough waves that were between the shore and the ship. By Mr. Salvain's order Enoch remained with her; and on the following morning the sloop went round with the passengers to the quay-side at Hild's Haven. Rizpah never forgot that night.

In his anxiety for the woman and child Michael had at first forgotten that there was

another aged man on the spot, the same Isaiah Scaife of whom brief mention has been made. The old man was alone in a tiny cottage at the very end of the plateau; and Jacob Porritt, going at Mr. Salvain's request to rouse him, found him curiously unwilling to leave his house or even his bed.

'Naäy, naäy!' said the old man, turning sleepily on his side. 'Goä thy waäys, Jacob; go thy waäys. Thoo's oäd aneäf te knaw bether than disturb a body, an' hinder him of his neet's rest i' this waäy for nowt!'

'For nowt? Lissen tiv him!' said the poor panic-stricken Jacob. 'Hearken for thysel' then!' he cried as another burst of rolling thunder was heard in the rocks but just behind the cottage; indeed, the stones came rattling upon the tiled roof furiously. These sounds were followed by the same riving and rending, and cracking and crushing as before. Surely not one stone could long be left upon another in that hamlet by the sea!

The bed on which the old man was lying was rocking visibly when Mr. Salvain went in and by sheer force drew him from his unsteady pillow.

'Are you mad, Isaiah?' he asked. 'Make haste down to the beach—that is the only safe

place. And go you there too, Jacob. I have sent the others down. Be cautious ; and make your way up the gill to my house, if you can. If not, try to cross the bay to Hunswyke.'

'An' what be ya' goin' te do yoursel', maister?' asked old Scaife, sitting on the edge of his bed, and pausing in the act of drawing on an enormous pair of woollen stockings.

'I shall follow the advice I have given you, presently,' Mr. Salvain said. 'Once let me know that everyone is out of danger, and I shall take care of myself.'

But it was not until near three o'clock in the morning that Michael knew himself to be perfectly alone at Thorsgrif Ness. There was a time of silence, of strained, almost unearthly silence.

The rain had ceased to fall; the tide was receding; the waves rose and fell, and murmured hoarsely. The darkness was intense, and unrelieved by the light of the smallest star.

Michael was growing accustomed to the darkness. The lanterns had gone out long ago; and he had sauntered in the still depth of the night to the outer point of rock. Then he sat down and thought. For nearly an hour he sat there: there were many things to stimulate his thinking power. That scene which had passed between himself and his wife came back upon him with

all its burden of pain, of apprehensiveness. These sensations were more present with him now than the gleam of happiness which had broken upon him at the last moment. He remembered the gleam as one remembers last summer's sun, not feeling the warmth of it. Still he was glad to have it in his memory.

It struck him presently with a mingled sense of pain and amusement, that he should sit there among the ruins of Thorsgrif Ness thinking, not of what the ruin might mean to him, but of how he might prevent a worse ruin. He would do what he could, he said to himself. That change which he had proposed would be almost inevitable now. The Alum Works at Thorsgrif would never be rebuilt; of this he was aware certainly.

Still he sat thinking; but presently his thought was broken in upon in a way he had not dreamed. It had never occurred to him that the crisis of that night had not yet come.

It was coming now. Was the world itself rocking to its final doom? Involuntarily he looked upward to the black, broken heavens for some sign, but no sign was given there.

The thunder was of the earth only, but it was louder, more terrific, more appalling than it had been before; and it was continuing longer. It

seemed as if every rock along the coast were being riven asunder, and every cliff-top height thrown from its ancient place.

'Surely they will hear this at Hild's Haven!' Michael said to himself. And he was not mistaken; the sounds were heard distinctly.

Of course he knew that in his own house, and in the hamlet above the works, there would be alarm and consternation. With the first dawn of day he would hasten homeward, or perhaps sooner. It might be that he could make his way up the gill, as he hoped the others had done. The danger would be in attempting to reach the shore.

So he stood, thinking more of his home, and the anxiety there, than of his own present position, or of any peril he might be in. And even as he stood alone, wrought upon by strange experiences, filled by strange fears and apprehensions, there came a sound that startled him, and drove him from himself more than all the dread sounds of that night had done.

It was a human cry—a woman's cry; not loud or shrill, but with sudden terror in it, and pitiful appeal. Michael shouted aloud in answer to it instantly, rushing onward as he cried over earth and stones and fallen rock, toward the place whence the sound had seemed to come.

He went on desperately through that great darkness, knowing that any moment he might be rushing to his own destruction. But no thought of his own life stayed him. There had been that in the cry he heard that told him certainly another life was in danger—a life dear to him, precious to him, as a human life may be that all the while is fretting one's own life's happiness away in wilful disregard.

Ah! the misery of knowing that you love, and must love greatly, one who daily and hourly strains your affection to the uttermost; who sets a heedless foot upon your most deathless instincts; who returns you thoughtless ill for your most thoughtful good; who has no care for you; who affords you no rest, no help, no companionship; who is to you a stone for the bread you need, and who yet—yet can draw from you an affection that thrills with constant fear lest loss or harm should come to this one so painfully beloved. Is there any love quite like to this, which has no return but great and ceaseless pain?

Had Michael Salvain's wife been to him the tenderest, most devoted, most spiritually congenial wife that was ever given to man, he had not climbed the face of that wet, changed, falling cliff with a greater dread in his brain, with a

keener, or more passionate, or more yearning anxiety in his heart than that which possessed him as he went onward, onward and upward, yet, despite his effort, making but little way. It might have been some unknown and untrodden land over which he travelled, for any knowledge of the place he had. Where pathways had been, fractured peaks of rock stood for his surprise. Wide mounds of wet earth and clay had to be crept over in the darkness. He had only knowledge of the fact that he was striving to climb upward. That terrible cry had seemed to come downward to him as he stood on the point of the Ness.

Again and again he paused in that drear ascent, again and again he shouted aloud in the still darkness, for all was silent again now—appallingly silent.

'Ermine! Ermine! speak to me!' he cried. But there was no answer; not even a dropping stone or handful of earth made answer.

Some hours must have passed while Michael Salvain was creeping and climbing up from the scene of the worst disaster to the safety of the cliff-top. When at last he knew himself to stand on firm earth, the day was coming up out of the sea.

For awhile he stood there exhausted, bewil-

dered, beginning to feel it possible that, after all, his ears had deceived him as to any voice he might have heard. Almost he had smiled as he thought of it. But the temptation to smile left him as he turned to look downward.

The impression he received as he stood there was that the hamlet and the works had not fallen, but had been *thrust out to sea.*

Almost the first thing he saw distinctly in the grey, spreading light was that the sea-wall, or staith, which years ago he had built to face the ocean, and defend the side of the rock on which the Alum Works stood, had been forced outwards across the beach for nearly fifty yards. It was there, partly standing, partly broken down, but it was fifty yards below its original foundation. All the rest had followed.

The peculiarly shaped point of rock which had towered above the works still retained its original outline, but it crossed the sunrise some two hundred feet below its normal altitude.

The sheds were still partly standing—they are partly standing to-day—but they were utterly wrecked. Not a red-tiled roof remained in sight. The last stone of the office had been removed from its place.

And not a single cottage was left standing upon the ledge of alum shale.

It was a scene to bring tears to the eyes of a man whose life had been bound up with Thorsgrif Ness as Michael Salvain's had been. And yet, no; the calamity was above and beyond tears. And more than this, there was in him the fear that he might not yet have sounded the full depth of the ill that night had wrought. Once again there came upon his ear the echo of that piercing cry, and with it the first fear, the first certainty returned. For a moment he stood listening, thinking rapidly, scanning with his eye the scene of ruin and disaster spread out before him and below him. Then, with what strength was left to him, he sped across the waste to his own home.

It was almost a surprise to him that it stood there unhurt. He was prepared to find the windows alight, fires burning, evidences of watching and unrest. It was his mother who met him at the door, having heard his step upon the path. Her hands were outstretched, her face was pale in the grey dawn, her voice tremulous and low, and full of tears.

'Michael! It is you, my son?' she said. 'And you are not hurt?'

'No, mother, not a hair of my head is hurt,' he said, stooping to kiss her fear away, yet dreading to verify that strange fear of his own.

His question came with difficulty. 'Has Ermine been much disturbed?' he asked.

'No, Michael,' she said. 'It is curious how she has slept. Adam Farah and old Porritt came up this way, making noise enough to awaken the soundest sleeper that ever was, and then those terrible thunderings and rumblings have been going on all night. . . . Michael, what has happened? I thought it was the end of the world!'

'I will tell you all about it after, mother. So far as I know, no one is hurt. . . . I must let Ermine know at once that I am safe.'

He went up the broad stone stairs, slowly, heavily, not even removing his clay-laden boots or taking any heed of his soiled clothing. He felt his face grow rigid as he went.

A small lamp was burning on the landing-table, struggling with the feeble daylight. He took it in his hand, and went into the heavily-curtained room. There was no sign of any change, of any disorder. The fire had not burnt itself quite out. Ermine's old dressing-gown of rose-red flannel was thrown across a chair, a pair of tiny pink slippers were near the wardrobe. But at a glance, at one swift glance, he saw the thing he feared to see. The bed had not been slept in. . . . He stood for a moment chilled,

stricken, feeling the beating of his heart in his tortured brain. Then he turned, and passed through his own small dressing-room to the room beyond, where the children slept. They were there, and asleep — Valerie's golden head on Zaré's arm; and Valerie was smiling.

He did not stay to watch them. Going back to his own room, he saw a note, or rather a letter, lying on the table by the window. He expected to find it addressed to himself, and in his wife's handwriting, and his expectation was fulfilled. He tried to read the letter, but he gathered the contents without actual reading. Hardly a word reached his brain distinctly, and yet he knew that his wife had carried out the threat she had made but a few weeks before. She had left his house, she had started that night for London, and her sole entreaty was that she might be left to work out a career for herself unhindered, unregretted. A postscript was added, explaining that Enoch was in nowise to blame for having consented to drive her over to Hild's Haven so late at night. She had invented a plausible reason for requiring his services, and also for requesting his secrecy in the matter.

Mrs. Salvain was standing in the hall when her son went downstairs again, and in a few quiet words he explained to her what had happened.

She was too much stunned to reply, or to attempt to hinder him from leaving the house again instantly. He had said nothing of his intention, nothing of that cry which again was ringing in his ears as he went rapidly over the heath to Thorsgrif Ness.

It was daylight now, and the people in the cliff-top village were all alert, moving about with pale, wonder-stricken faces, speaking in subdued voices. Most of the refugees from the wrecked hamlet below were there, congratulating each other that there had been no loss of life, and pitying poor Rizpah as they watched the grey sail of the *Aslauga* moving slowly away against the morning sky.

'She could niver ha' been got up t' cliff,' young Jacob Porritt was saying. 'If yon vessel hadn't ha' been i' the bay, Rizpah ud' ha' died o' cold an' fright. It is a marcy things is as they are!'

'It 'ud be a bigger marcy if thou could find me my pinshers an' my lanshes,* Jacob,' said Scaife, who had held the proud position of local dentist for more years than he knew, and who knew that his occupation was gone indeed with the fearful instruments, the loss of which he was bewailing. 'Find me my little box o' tools,

* Pincers and lancets.

Jacob, an' Ah'll draw thy teeth free gratis for nothing as long as Ah live!'

'Whisht! whisht!' said a feminine voice, interrupting before this magnificent offer could be accepted. 'Whisht, wi' thee! Here's the master comin' back. An' eh! but he leuks doon i' th' countenance. An' no wonder! no wonder! What'll he be after noo, Isaiah? . . . Eh? He's comin' here!'

Looking sadly downward upon the appalling scene of ruin which was between the whin-covered waste and the grey, sullen sea, Michael Salvain came swiftly onward to where the nearest group of men were whispering together.

'Jacob,' he said, speaking to the younger Porritt; 'my trap is at Orde's—I sent it there last night. Drive over to Hild's Haven, find Enoch Farah, and bring him here without delay.'

Then he turned and glanced round upon the men, choosing out three to follow him by such ways as they could make or find for themselves to the spot below where the hamlet had stood. They were to go separately.

'John! you go down the gill, and make your way upward from the beach. Burrell! go a little to the east and try to get to where the office stood. Samson! can you get down from here-

abouts, do you think? I will meet you there, by the office.'

He gave them no further instructions; there was no need of any. If they should come upon any such thing as he feared, they would know what to do. And—he himself would not be far away.

He waited till the three men had started, watching the two who were to descend from the cliff-top as they went down the scarred, fractured, distorted hollow. Burrell had snatched a crab-hook from his cottage-door to help him as he went. Samson clung with his hands to the wet clay, and went creeping like some dexterous creature of the wilder regions of the world.

Then Michael Salvain turned and began to descend himself. He was weary, and he was cramped and chilled by the clay-stiffened garments that he wore. And the pain and dread at his heart were growing now with every moment that went by. For some minutes he went on, slipping, climbing, dropping downward. Into every shadow between the rocks he stopped to look, behind every peak or mound of wet clay he crept to search, under every mass of fallen stone he glanced fearfully.

He had chosen for his own exploration the spot whence, as nearly as he could tell, that

one clear, shrill, agonizing cry had come. All the while as he went he heard yet again the echo of that cry. And all the while as he went he saw a face before him, leading him onward, looking to him wistfully, sorrowfully. And all the while as he went there were words in his ear; silver-toned, most musically spoken words:

'*I am going to begin a new life to-night, Michael. I am going to shake off all the old unrest to-night.*'

Still he went onward; more onward than downward; onward with his face to the eastern sky. And at last, suddenly it seemed, there came upon his sight something he had feared to see. But now he had no fear. There could be no need for any fear. The woman who was lying in the riven cliff-side lay quite peacefully.

There was almost a smile on Michael's face as he drew nearer; so near that he could see the braiding of her dark travelling-dress of navy-blue serge, the dark-blue felt hat with its small feather lying near, the golden hair, shading the pale, perfect, sleeping face of his wife.

'Ermine!' he said, coming yet nearer, but slowly, as one a little aggrieved. 'Ermine! How could you do this?'

But then he said no more. Instead of speaking he fell on his knees, and he knelt there in a

strong, silent agony; for a long time he knelt, and wrestled with his anguish, his remorse, and he was overcome.

* * * * *

When Enoch Farah returned from Hild's Haven he made the matter plain to Michael Salvain's mother—that is, as plain as it ever might be made.

His instructions had been to meet Mrs. Michael Salvain at Whinyats, a small farm beyond Thorsgrif. He was to have the trap by the farmyard gate at ten o'clock on that night which later had proved to be so eventful.

It had not interfered with this plan that Mr. Salvain had, for safety's sake, ordered the trap to be taken to the stable of a farmhouse near Thorsgrif. But when the time came, it seemed as if Nature with all her darkest forces had interfered. Enoch had in vain attempted to re-ascend the cliff.

He could only suppose, as everyone else supposed, that Michael Salvain's wife had, in her determination, and in her ignorance of the worst, been trying to reach Enoch's cottage. She had missed the way; indeed, the way was not there to be missed. And it seemed but too certain that she had wandered about in the darkness of

that dread night, not knowing in which direction to turn for safety until the end had come.

Michael Salvain knew that it must have come at the time when he heard that fearful cry.

It was strange that no disfigurement had marred the great beauty which had been to Ermengarde Salvain as a hurt and an unblessing. She was lying upon her side, her head compressed in a crevice of the rock, another stone was upon her feet; her white hands were simply crossed upon the folds of her dark dress.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT EVENTIDE.

'Youth gone, and beauty gone, if ever there
Dwelt beauty in so poor a face as this.
Youth gone, and beauty, what remains of bliss?
* * * * *
A silent heart whose silence loves and longs,
The silence of a heart that sang its songs
While youth and beauty made a summer morn,
Silence of love that cannot sing again.'

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

'WHAT shall I wish you?' had been asked one summer's day, in all seriousness, and with some touch of curiosity; and Dorigen had answered—

'Peace; wish me perfect peace.'

That was nearly a year ago, and it seemed now as if the wish were being fulfilled.

The days of the new spring had a quietness that no spring had had for her before. Even hope seemed to lie still and silent within her.

Old regrets were dead, old sufferings remembered only when confessing the sin of having borne them ill.

Dorigen was still at Burtree Beck, still in the narrow room which the Thesigers had made so bright and pretty and homelike. The latest addition to its comforts was an old-fashioned sofa, which Jean Laverock had bought and placed by the window, once when Dorigen had gone for a few days to the Rectory at Hild's Haven.

'She looks sae weary, she walks sae weary, an' she sits at that desk sae weary, that I can bear no longer to see her,' Jean said to her husband; and the old man shook his head silently. In his heart there was a feeling that the weariness of which his wife spoke was of a kind not to be cured by a sofa, even though its cover was of the brightest and warmest-toned crimson chintz to be procured in all Hild's Haven.

But it did Jean good in those spring days to see how her thoughtfulness was appreciated. Dorigen sat there by the window, with her writing materials on a little table by her side, and she wondered that she had not discerned before how good it was to be where she had only to lift her face and see the blue, placid waters of the North Sea gleaming and rippling in the April sunshine, catching the shadows of the April

rain-clouds. The sea was soothing beyond all other soothing things, suggestive beyond all other sources of suggestion, mystic beyond all other mysteries. Her first inspiration had come to her when she had stood upon the cliffs, with the sea-wind in her face, and the sound of the sea-waves rising and falling upon her ear; and it was her hope that to the last she might be where she could listen to the voices that came with such deep and varied meanings from the wide world of waters. There was nothing now to hinder her peaceful listening.

And yet it could not be but that she should remember through all the calm of those spring days that the influence of the sea had been upon her own life, and upon the lives near to hers, as an instrument and cause of seeming ill as well as of good. And not only the sea itself, but the sea's bold and rocky margin, was in her remembrance of disaster and pain.

Her thought hesitated and faltered, as if struck by a sudden powerlessness, each time that later disaster, that strange earth-throe, with its most pitiful consequences, came to her mind. Even yet, though months had passed by, she shrank from contemplating the details of that dreadful night's sufferings, details which Jean Laverock had been the first to pour into her pained and

shrinking ear. Subsequently all that Jean had said had been confirmed by Mrs. Salvain, who had, naturally, much more to tell than Jean had known, and who evidently found some satisfaction in unburdening her mind of its twofold sorrow to one so likely to understand. And, indeed, it was easy to understand how deep that shadow must be that was yet lying upon the house in Thorsgrif Gill.

It was not possible to have even a passing thought of it, and to prevent that thought passing on into sympathy, the sympathy into pain. And though Dorigen and Michael Salvain had not met, each knew that each had thought for the other.

One day Joanna had come over to Burtree Beck, Enoch Farah driving her and the two children in the dog-cart; and, notwithstanding all Dorigen's constant realization of the things that had happened at Thorsgrif, it was yet a shock to her to see that the little party was dressed in mourning of the deepest kind. Zaré and Valerie, in crape-trimmed hats and dresses, were barely recognisable at the first moment. It seemed but yesterday that Dorigen had heard their mother declaring that their quaint velvet frocks and feather-trimmed hats of sienna brown could not be seen to advantage except in a room

with an orange-tinted dado. And now! ah, how horror-stricken Ermine would have been to see them now, with their ill-made little frocks and hideously shaped crape hats! The children themselves seemed conscious and changed. Valerie was the least silent of the two.

'Papa is coming over to see you some day,' she said, putting her warm little hand into Dorigen's worn and chill one. 'He said so last night to Miss Wharram, who came to see grandmamma, and stayed to tea. They were talking about you ever so long, and about the books you write. Miss Wharram said they would be nice books if they weren't so sad. She said she wondered why you didn't write some cheerful stories, because everybody likes cheerful things. And papa smiled, and he said perhaps you would write a brighter book some day. Do you think you will? And will you let me read it? I was reading about Waldemar Daa and his daughters this morning. That isn't cheerful.'

So the child ran on awhile, and then Joanna sent the two little ones out to the garden to play; and old Peter Laverock took them up to the hollow to gather primroses and sweet violets, while Joanna sat and talked quietly with more meaning in her words, and a more intent presence of herself in her manner, than had been there

when Dorigen first knew her. But that was long ago.

'It seems to me like a long lifetime,' Dorigen said. 'People speak of the shortness of life; I am always struck by the length of it when I look back. I seem to have lived three or four different lives, and none of them my own. I have never had any chance of living my own life till now. And now. . . .'

'Now it is not satisfactory?' Joanna asked gently.

'It is not satisfying, for the simple reason that I feel as if some spring within me were broken. If I could have been free to live this same life ten, even five years ago, it would have been supremely satisfying.'

Joanna was not wholly sorry to hear this confession. It lent possibility to a certain hope that she was trying to repress for a little while longer. And yet something in the word that had been said saddened her; her sympathy went deeper than her understanding. She seemed to feel that she stood in the presence of one who had suffered losses which she could only partly comprehend. Dorigen herself hardly comprehended them. It is difficult to take one's life into one's hands, and examine it dispassionately.

She felt, as she had said, that the main-spring

of her life was broken; but she hardly understood how the quiet, strong, electric energy which had been hers in the depths of her strife and humiliation should have been so overstrained that it might never revive in its old integrity. This sacrifice also had been demanded of her, and she had made it unknowingly rather than unwillingly. But now she was finding it. That fervour of life, that eagerness of spirit, which had been as it were the very essence of her nature, was subdued, lowered; the tone had gone out of it. She was calm, but even from perfect calmness something may be missed.

That you can accept this flavourless tranquillity,

'This wide vacuity of hope and heart,'

and live in it, and neither strive nor cry, does but attest the roughness of your passage through the world's ways, does but witness to the fact that its hardness and oppression have bruised and crushed you effectually. Yet it is by this same crushing and bruising that one comes to a true appreciation of peace, even of that lower peace which is not in any sense of the spirit.

But this lower quiet is good. Not in the great and strong wind which rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; not in the earthquake; not in the fire that

followed upon the terrible throes of the earth, but in the calm that came after, was the voice of God heard by the wearied and despairing prophet, renewing his hope, deepening his faith, inspiring him once more with that force and fervour of spirit which alone can make life greatly desirable. Which things are an allegory, and contain the secret of many a life not understood, of many an experience that baffles the insight even of him who endures.

When Michael Salvain at last went over to Burtree Beck he felt for awhile as if his insight into that other life which he had watched so long, so tenderly, so self-sacrificingly, were certainly at fault. He knew something of the haunting fears which had of late been half-whispered between his mother and sister, but he said to himself now that those fears were groundless. The changes which he saw on Dorigen's face were to him changes for the better. The premature wrinkles were smoothed out, the dark hair looked more abundant, and had more life in the set of it, the sadness had gone from the sea-blue eyes, and the expression of anxiety, of apprehension, from the whole countenance.

'You are certainly looking better,' he said, uttering the commonplace phrase with an almost tremulous emotion as he took her hand; and his

words brought a rush of rose-pink colour to her face, which made her seem to him for the moment to be the blushing girl of ten years before.

'I am quite well,' she said; and then they turned and went sauntering by the cliff-top ways as they had done of old: and that June day seemed the sweetest and gentlest and most perfect day that had ever been upon sea or land.

Presently they sat down in a green hollow on the cliff's very margin—a sheltered hollow facing the Northern Sea, upon the sapphire surface of which the sun was shining and sparkling as if the whole were turning to liquid diamonds that flashed for a second and disappeared. Not a sail was in sight, not a sea-bird to break that sweet silence with his boding scream.

Michael Salvain broke it presently.

'I am beginning to think you did well in coming to Burtree Beck,' he said, turning to look into the face beside him.

Dorigen raised her eyes to his.

'It is generous of you to admit it,' she replied briefly and quietly.

'It is your own opinion?'

'On the whole, yes.'

'I can imagine there may be drawbacks,' he

said, feeling that her reply had qualifications behind it. 'For instance, you can know so little of the kind things that your townspeople are saying about you—about your new book, "Thorwaldsthorne."'

'I don't *know*,' she said, with a half-smile of pleasure. 'But it is curious, *I seem to feel it;* as if their appreciation and goodwill came to me on the wind. And it does me good—more good, I think, than it would do if it were put into words. Words might chafe or irritate one; the unspoken praise is soothing. . . . But, on second thoughts, doesn't that seem like vanity?'

'Not to me,' said Michael.

A little silence followed. Again it was Michael who interrupted it.

'Would it irritate you if I were to ask you what you are doing now?' he said hesitatingly. 'It is not curiosity that makes me ask. It is the old desire, the desire to enter into your life, into every day of it, every hour. . . . And lately, for long, I have thirsted and hungered for knowledge of you; and my thirst and hunger have been painful. All that I have had to satisfy me has been a few printed pages. . . . They were valuable to me, and they were of yourself; but they were not you.'

'They are better than I am,' she said half

sadly. 'They are not, as you said, of me; they only come through me.'

'Then why through you more than through another?'

'That I cannot tell. . . . Why was Cædmon, the cliff-top herdsman, chosen to be the father of English poetry?'

'Because his soul was of the kind that is open to receive inspiration.'

'Yes. I think that is true.'

'But you have not answered my question as to your present work, which is, I know, always your present life. Don't answer me, not by one word, if you would prefer not to speak of it.'

'There is no reason why I should not speak of it to you; indeed, I think it may be a relief, since, so far as it is concerned, I am not myself as I was of old. . . . You will not think it an overweening appreciation of my own powers if I tell you that I believe my thought has never been so quick, so luminous, so keenly perceptive before. I am moved to a thousand things; but I do nothing, develop nothing, create nothing. . . . And it is no misery to me, except when I think that I may come to want bread again. The days glide on smoothly, quietly. No hindrance comes; imagination flows through me,

but as water flows through a sieve; there is no result. . . . Now and then I awake as to an agony of fear because of that old need of bread. . . . Is it not a strange experience?'

For a long while Michael did not speak. He sat on the slope of the grim cliff-hollow; and the sapphires and diamonds of the summer sea glittered before him; and the one woman he loved supremely sat quietly, musingly, yieldingly beside him. He was not unhappy.

Presently he turned, and his hand sought hers, and held it; and his eyes sought hers and caught the glance of them for one sweet and powerful moment.

'I think I understand,' he said, speaking in his lowest and tenderest tone. 'It is you who have taught me to understand. You have opened out for me a whole higher human world; you did it long ago—gave me, as it were, the *entrée* of that spiritual city on the borders of which I am, and always have been, fain to dwell. It is through you that I see your needs; it is through you that I perceive my mistake concerning you, your own mistake concerning yourself. . . . It is this seclusion that is disastrous, it is this sheer isolation that is working your undoing.'

By way of reply Dorigen again lifted her calm face to his. In her eyes there was scepticism; there was more scepticism in her smile. He understood.

'You may smile,' he said, 'you may smile all your unbelief, and, pardon me, all your non-comprehension; but, all the same, listen to the word I have to say. Years ago, I hardly know how many years, there was a great Prince, whom few people knew to be great. He had come to England with. little *prestige* and less riches, and it was hardly to be expected of wealthy England that she should appreciate him, or greatly care to listen to him, or greatly desire to believe in aught he said. Nevertheless, he said some things that will be remembered by such as have need, and are glad to remember. *I* remember them because of my thought of you.

'Among other things was this—he spoke the words one night at a dinner given by the artistic people of the land. And one feels how straight from his heart they must have come, and how earnestly he must have thought upon the things he touched so briefly, how keenly he must have felt them, and with what fervid insight in his feeling.

'"Gentlemen," he said, "the production of all works in art or poetry requires in their con-

ception and execution not only an exercise of the intellect, skill, and patience, but particularly a concurrent warmth of feeling, and a free flow of imagination. This renders them most tender plants, which will only thrive in an atmosphere calculated to maintain that warmth—*and that atmosphere is one of kindness*, kindness toward the artist personally, as well as toward his productions. An unkind word of criticism passes like a cold blast over their tender shoots, and shrivels them up, checking the flow of the sap which was rising to produce perhaps multitudes of fruits and flowers."

'This is what that clear-sighted Prince said, and I, who have learnt to perceive, can now discern that he spoke truly, and with an infinite closeness of sympathy. It is in that fineness of geniality, that generous warmth of the surrounding atmosphere, that alone any true artist or poet can fully live and breathe, and rightly unfold the life and the work vouchsafed by the gift and grace of God.

'The mute inglorious Milton is seldom to be blamed for his muteness. He has fallen upon days that are evil days for him to whom no ground has been given that he may stand in uprightness while he is singing; for whom no heart is warm in its helpful encouragement, for

whom no life is lived, towards whom no soul aspires in generous appreciation.

'To stand alone, isolated, chilled by the bleakness of the mountain-top, and yet to bear the generous fruit of warmer climes, is given to few, if indeed it be given to any.

'Are you not proving the truth of what I say? —of what others have said? You are chilled, you are lonely, you have no motive power left to move you to that full and fervid life you lived when you had hope. It might be a vague hope, it might have no tangible object. I know that it was not ambition, that it was not desire for fame, for mere worldly advancement. But yet you could hardly have defined it. Doubtless it was not necessary that you should define it, since it was made strong enough to lead you on to the point you have arrived at without definition. Now you think that hope has failed, but it is not so; you have tasted of its fruition, and found it not satisfying. But is your life to fail now for need of sufficient desire to go on living?'

'That is what I think,' she replied with solemnity.

Michael Salvain turned his face to hers again, but now there was more of reproach than of sadness in his eyes, more of wonder, of perplexity,

than of that yearning tenderness which had been there before.

'Have I been deceiving myself so utterly?' he asked, speaking as if he sat alone. Dorigen felt that no answer was demanded of her. Yet she understood; in very fear of joy's great pain, she understood.

'I did not come to-day to ask you to answer a question I years ago refrained from asking,' he said, speaking again in his gentler, kinder way. 'I meant to refrain yet a little longer, and not wholly for conventionality's sake—that at least you will believe of me. . . . But I must speak a little . . .'

'Not now! oh, not now!' Dorigen said, turning a pleading face toward him. 'Let us remain as we are! We are so happy, so very happy. Let me be happy for a little while; it will be better, believe me, it will be better.'

'Better for whom?' asked Michael, turning paler.

'Better for both of us—for you and for me.'

'Let me judge for myself,' he said. 'And since you are so much to me, let me think for you also. If I am to go back with this new weight of pain and fear which you have laid upon me to-day, which you are laying upon me now, I think I cannot live. I, who have endured

so much, can hardly endure this. . . . And as for yourself, remember the admission you have made, the confession of blankness, of weariness, of the failure of strength in your life's strong purpose. I hope I am not taking undue advantage of anything you have said, but for your own sake I would plead with you a little. . . . Dorigen, my darling, a human life is not what you think it is. You may spend your brain's last strength on a few sheets of paper, but you cannot spend your heart's emotion there. And if the heart suffer, if it be chilled, and starved, and trodden down, the whole nature suffers with it. An unloved and unloving life can never be a perfect life, never a complete life. You have tried to live it, you have failed, and you have perceived your failure.'

'Yes,' she said sadly, 'that at least is true. My life has been a failure.'

'I agree with you,' Michael Salvain replied. 'Though at this moment your words are in half the homes of England, though I believe that there lies before you a future of such distinction as few women ever touch. Yet if that future is to be lived as you are living at present, in the end you will count it failure. . . . But I am talking idly. It can never be.' Then he drew nearer to her side, and looked down into her eyes

with eyes that had the passion and fervidness of the love of years in them.

'You are making me talk folly, my darling,' he said, raising her hand to his lips. 'If you were to refuse my pleading I should take you by force. . . . That would be the end of it.'

There was a smile on the pale face beside him, and by-and-by, after a time of restful and confiding silence, Dorigen rose to go homeward. By the cliff-top ways the silence was still tender and sweet.

'I shall not go in with you,' Michael said, speaking in low loving tones, as they stood for awhile by the hedgerow above Pete Laverock's cottage. 'And, for a little while, I will not trouble you again!'

He understood the mute reproach in the glance that was raised instantly to his; he was glad to see it there.

'It will be wise,' he went on. 'You shall have a time of silence, so that you can think of, and prepare for what is to be. I will not even write, but Nannie and the little ones shall come to bring me news of you. . . . And when I come again, what shall I say, my darling?—oh, what shall I say of that day to be? The day that is to come after a whole long lifetime of suffering, and

enduring, and thwarting. And what will you say to me—tell me, my child, what you will say when I come again?'

'I will say that I am glad to see you.'

'Only that?'

'I will tell you that you have been to me the kindest and truest and most loyal friend that ever any woman had.'

'Yes; that is better.'

'And that you have made all my life, all of it since that day in Wharram's Yard, fuller and brighter and happier by a thousand-fold than it would have been if I had never known you.'

'You remember that day in Wharram's Yard?'

'I remember it perfectly.'

'And I do not forget it. One does not forget the first hour of the first and last true love of a lifetime.'

'That would be impossible.'

'Is it impossible to you? Was that the meaning of that hour for your soul as well as for mine?'

'Yes; that was its sole meaning.'

'Say, "Yes, Michael."'

With a quick warm blush, the name was said, and then, for the second time, the lips of those two met in a fervent, passionate kiss. And

Michael Salvain went homeward in an ecstasy of grateful happiness. Had his house at Thorsgrif been some Paradise towards which his face was set, he had not gone onward in a finer or keener ecstasy of gratitude.

CHAPTER XIX.

'WILL HE COME?'

'There the tears of earth are dried ;
There its hidden things are clear ;
There the work of life is tried
By a juster Judge than here.'

DURING the summer and the early autumn days which followed upon that spring-time, Michael Salvain still lived as the man lives upon whose life the last and greatest good of life has come when it had seemed to be gone beyond hoping for. As he had resolved, he kept himself in silence, in patience; and patience was hardly difficult since his hope was so exceeding firm and fair.

But the silence was completer than he had hoped it would be. One July day Mrs. Salvain had had the mischance to slip on the oaken stair, and though the lameness that ensued was not of a very serious kind, it yet left her more

dependent upon others than had been her wont. From that day Joanna went no more to Burtree Beck; and Michael chafed a little because of the absence of knowledge of one on whom his thought was so ceaselessly centred. When these troublesome affairs concerning the works were finally settled, then he would go himself. Indeed, it would be necessary for him to go. He could take no steps toward arranging for his future life and work until he had consulted the wishes and opinions of her who was to share that life, to inspire that work. Naturally, he was anxious to have things settled, to see his way with that clearness which is necessary for prudent living.

His own plan was to take a large farm—a place with a good house in a beautiful southern county—a county somewhat warmer than this to which his heart still so passionately clave. 'It would be good for *her*,' he said to himself. 'This is too wild, too bleak. I will take her to a milder climate before the winter sets in. And it shall be a quiet place, as well as beautiful, so that there shall be no hindrance if she be moved to write—no hindrance, but every incentive. I must take care that the place is very beautiful.'

So he was thinking one autumn day, trying for the hundredth time to realize the present-

ment of his ideas; an idea including stately, park-like scenery, with ancient trees, and abounding levels of green pasture-land, with slow, sedgy streams, with picturesque cattle, with blue skies over which the white cumulus would sweep on summer days, shining to the sun. The house must be large, the rooms wide and high, the gardens ample, the orchards pleasant. And as to furniture, every touch, even to the last, should be made before she entered the doors. She might make alterations to any extent to suit her finer taste, but there should be no positive need for exertion of hers. She should have rest, peace, beauty, loving care. Then she would revive; and he would watch her revival as a mother watches her child's return to life from the very grave and gate of death.

It was thus that he was dreaming that autumn noontide. Then suddenly the postman's horn came sounding into his dream, and Valerie ran to the door with delight in the prospect of bringing the letters to the father who loved her so, and spoiled her so, that the child's affection had been won for life.

'Papa, there is only one letter!' she said, bursting into his study with disappointment in her tone. 'Only one, and it feels *so* thin. If I were to go away I would write you two long

letters every day—ever such long ones they should be!'

'And what would you say in your long letters, you small fairy? Fancy a fairy writing letters!'

'I would tell you how much I loved you. Nobody will ever love you so much, dada!' And the child stood beside him, and raised his strong hand to her sensitive little mouth, and kissed it. Almost with a sob she turned away, and Michael watched her half sadly.

'You will need both *her* care and mine, little one,' he said to himself as the child went out, shutting the door with characteristic gentleness.

It was *her* letter—that he had seen, or he had not permitted his little daughter to go away uncomforted; and, as Valerie had said, the letter was 'so thin.' The words of it did not cover half the first page of note-paper. This was all that was written:

'DEAR MR. SALVAIN,

'Will you come? Will you come to Burtree Beck to-morrow; that is, the day after you receive this? I am wishing to see you again.

'Yours, with affection,

'DORIGEN.'

'To-morrow!' That were impossible. He must go to-day, this hour, this moment.

He saddled his horse himself in his haste; and it was yet but early in the afternoon when he dismounted at the Alatsonne Arms at Lodbrok Bay. He would walk over to Burtree Beck.

It was a mild day, even warm for October; and if the sunshine that was upon the sea was of a lower intensity than it had been on that day when he sat with Dorigen in the cliff-top hollow, it was not less beautiful. If the nearer sea were less sparkling the distance was in a softer mystery, and the gentle sun-white haze that was upon the moorland heights seemed to soothe the brain through the sense of sight as far faint music soothes it through the sense of hearing. Michael Salvain was in one of his happiest moods when Jean Laverock opened the cottage door to let him in.

There was no smile on Jean's face, and Michael did not miss it. He followed her into the little sitting-room, where a cheery fire was burning though the day was so warm. But Michael Salvain did not see the fire. He saw only a face, a wan, white, transfigured face, smiling a welcome to him. A thin white hand was held out to him from the sofa, and he took the hand. Before a word was spoken his heart

sank, as a sailor's heart sinks when he hears the keel of his vessel grinding upon a rock in mid-ocean.

'I knew you would come—I knew that you would come to-day,' Dorigen said in a voice that was changed, even as her face was changed.

Then he sat down on a chair that Jean had placed by the sofa, and they looked into each other's eyes, and did not weep. It was no time for weeping. It was the time for silence—for strong effort after fortitude.

By-and-by Dorigen laid her hand upon the two firm hands that Michael was keeping clasped so hardly.

'It is better,' she said; 'it is better so. I wanted you to come that I might show you that all is well.'

'All is well, and you so ill?' he said in a low stricken tone. The face he lifted was not the face of the man who had walked by the soft, rippling water's edge to Burtree Beck.

'Yes, Michael. . . . So ill that I am dying. . . . And yet—all is well!'

For nearly an hour the ticking of the clock was the sole sound that was heard in that narrow room. There was that on her face and in her voice which confirmed each word she had said. She was dying—she was glad to die.

But presently Michael Salvain's strength came back to him. The old helpful saying, 'While there is life there is hope!' struck upon his memory with some sharpness.

'Darling! my darling! you cannot die!' he said. 'You have not lived. You have only laboured and endured. You have had no human life.'

'To work and to suffer is the highest life that a human being may live,' Dorigen replied. 'I have only two regrets now; one is that my true life-work is all undone; that what I have achieved is ill-done. It was done under pressure, pressure so great that when it was taken off there was no rebound. I could not recover from the strain. Every year of my later life has been like ten.'

'There has been no time for recovery,' Michael said with an eagerness that was almost impatience. 'And you have had no chance. Let me take you away to Switzerland—to Italy.'

'Oh, hush! hush!' she said. 'Years ago I packed up all my photographs and engravings, and put them out of sight. I could not bear to see such semblances, the passion for seeing the realities being so strong upon me. . . . But now! . . . . I would not go if I could. I am too weary—far too weary.'

And for a while she said no more, and Michael kept silence, having fear that she might be talking more than was wise. And in the silence they looked out over the grey, wide waters together; and together they watched the shadow of the approaching night. It was nearly dark when Michael spoke again.

'Shall I ask for a lamp?' he said, speaking in the low changed voice which people use in sick-rooms.

'No,' Dorigen replied. 'Jean knows I like the twilight, especially the calm twilights we often have after stormy days. It seems to be my own hour in some special way.'

'Your day *has* been stormy,' he said, with anguish in his tone. 'And now it seems to me that I might have done so much more to alleviate it. Oh, my darling! stay with me but a little while that I may atone for the neglect, that I may show you my love, all my love! Only for a little while, that is all I ask now. It may be granted to such a love as mine to so enfold your life, to so defend it, to so expand it, that the old desire for living would come again, and bring with it the power to live. . . . Oh! my own! my beloved! stay with me a little while, but a little while.'

He could hardly see the sweet soft smile that

was upon the wan face in the twilight; a twilight that did not deepen, because already the light of the moon was stealing into it, sending soft silvery rays across the eastern sea.

'Michael,' she said presently, 'let me say another word or two while I can. Have you forgotten that night on the terrace so long ago when you spoke to me of pain, and sacrifice, and renunciation? . . . All my life the good, the beauty of the things you said then has been upon me as a deep and great influence.

'In my worst suffering I have yet acknowledged in my inmost soul that the life of sacrifice was the most satisfying life, the most enlightening, the most spiritually far-reaching. Sacrifice is pain, pain of many kinds. For you there is coming the pain of parting. . . . Michael, you will bear it well, more patiently than I have borne my sorrows. . . . That is my other regret, that I have endured so ill. . . . Oh, so ill! so ill! God forgive me!'

Michael made no reply. Though her patience under sorrow of the keenest had amazed him oft, he could make no answer.

And again in the silence the clock ticked away the passing moments, and outside a regal moon rose majestically among soft ethereal clouds of silver, and of gold, and of pearl. A stream of

sparkling light was upon the waters, coming, going, shadowing, brightening, as the clouds moved across the heavens.

'See!' Dorigen said, speaking in a slower and fainter way than before; 'the shadows come from above, always from above, and the sea does not know. . . . And we—we never know. Yet the shadows are always from above. That is why we mistake so. . . . Last time you were here we agreed together that my life might be counted as a failure. . . . I have thought of it often. . . . But what is failure? . . . What is success? *What is success?*'

The question came again slowly, and with effort. 'Shall I tell you, Michael? Shall I tell you what I now think success is? I think it is to have one peaceful night, one night of absolute calm, when one can lie "face to face with God," and not shrink! I think that is success!'

And again there was silence. The moon swept herself free, and left the clouds lying low upon the horizon. The silver pathway across the waters was undimmed.

'Do you see it, Michael?' she asked. 'Is it not sent to me, that vision of peace? . . . The peace of it is more than the beauty. . . . I am glad, I am very glad that you should be here to see it with me!'

And a low moan broke from the lips of the man who sat by her side. He had hoped so long, so surely, that they would see all things together, enjoy all things together, that this hour was more than he could bear. The passionate anguish of his low restrained moan was more than all words would have been.

'Michael, Michael, kiss me!' said the faltering, tender voice, in a very agony of sympathy. It was all the comfort she could give.

And yet again there was silence, yet onward and upward sped that clear light of heaven; yet inward to the shore swept the white waves that broke softly, and fell upon the beach.

'Are you happier now, Michael?'

The question came as if one spoke from afar. But Michael Salvain did not soon reply.

'Are *you* happy, my beloved?' he asked at last, speaking with an infinite tenderness in his effort.

And the far faint voice made answer,

'I do not know. . . . I am in peace. . . . Is not peace more than happiness? . . . I cannot tell. . . . No; I cannot tell. . . . *It passes understanding!*'

THE END.

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