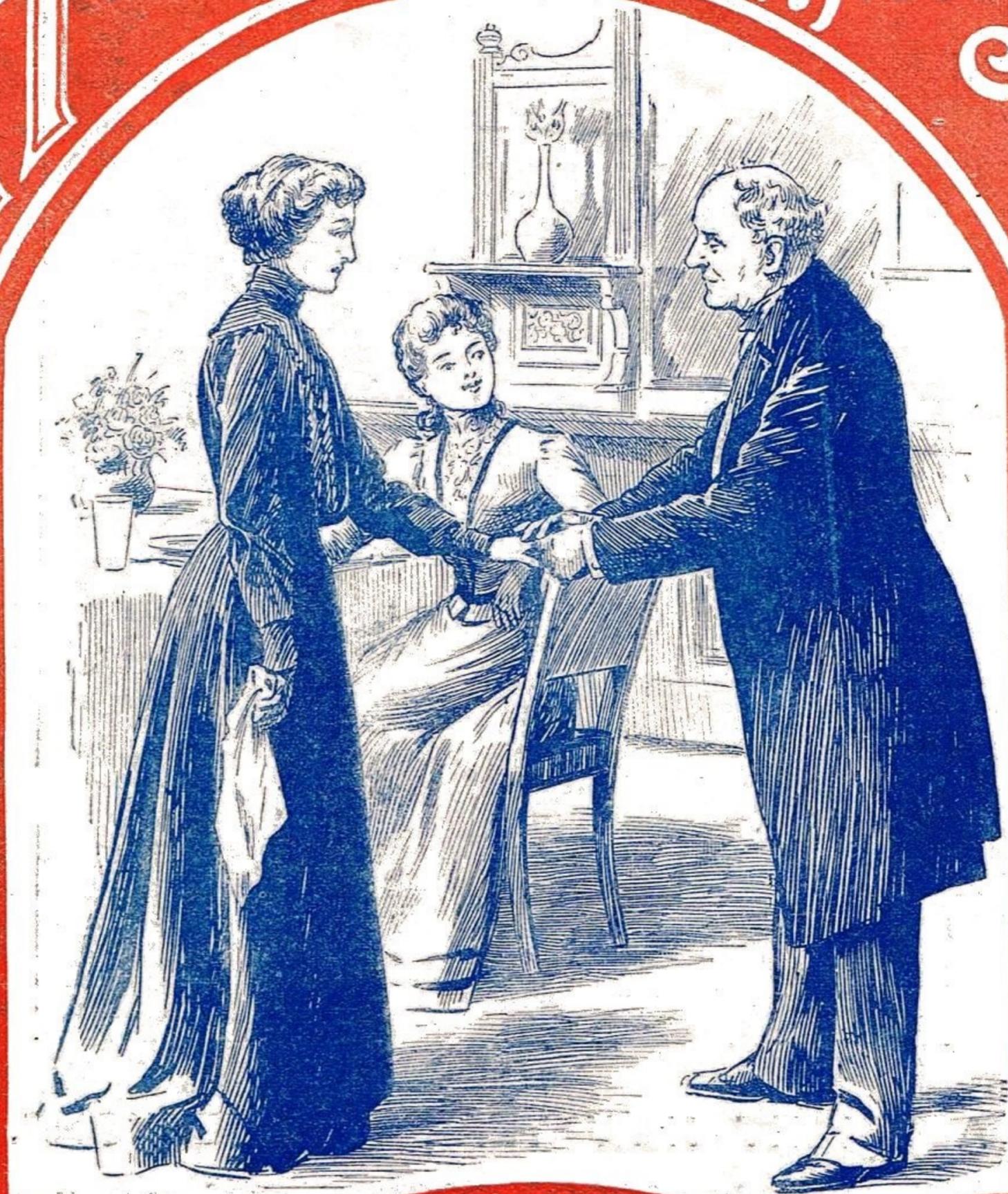


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Hugh Annesley's Love
by ANNIE M. WATSON.



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Hugh Annesley's Love.

By ANNIE M. WATSON,

Author of "A Rich Man's Poverty," "A Maid o' the Moor," &c.

CHAPTER I.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

"HERE you are, miss. Twenty-four, Grosvenor Street. We can't get right up to the door, miss, 'cos there's another cab a-waiting."

Thirza Lee looked up into the kindly face of the cabman, grateful even for the cheery ring of the commonplace speech.

"You are sure it is Dr. Sherwell's?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes, miss. The light's a-shining through his name over the door."

He held the handle of the cab-door in his hand. The

girl stepped on to the pavement; her umbrella and a small bag were in her hand, and the rest of her possessions were forgotten. There was nervousness in her manner, and a timid shrinking in her face, as she slowly approached the steps which led up to Dr. Sherwell's house.

Her hand was on the bell, when the door opened, and two ladies came out. They were in evening-dress, and cloaks of quilted satin protected them from the cold of the November night. The elder of the two looked inquiringly at the girl, who was dressed in mourning.

"Can I see Dr. Sherwell?" faltered Thirza. "I—"

"The maid will inform Dr. Sherwell that you wish to



"You must not take books from these shelves without permission, Miss Effie."

see him," said the lady; "only I'm not sure that he's in. Come, Laura; we shall be late."

She swept down the steps and into the cab, followed by her daughter.

"I really thought that girl had something to say to me," she said. "How she stared! I do wish your father would have only first-class patients. That girl was very untidy, and not over-clean, and yet she enters by the same door, and will be taken to your father's presence in exactly the same way, as his most aristocratic patients."

She drew her cloak closer round her, and leaned back.

"I have been trying all my life to make your poor father more ambitious," she went on; "but I might as well try to turn a duck into a swan. He'd think more about the honour of getting an article accepted by the 'Lancet' than of being called to prescribe for a duchess; and he would be just as happy doctoring a slum-baby as the child of a millionaire. And I'm very much afraid Dr. Annesley encourages him in his ideas."

Laura Sherwell looked up protestingly.

"Oh, mother, I don't think you ought to say anything against Dr. Annesley!" she said reproachfully. "He is quite the nicest assistant father ever had."

Mrs. Sherwell glanced sharply at her daughter.

"You are not to fall in love with him, my dear. You can do much better than that. Hugh Annesley will never rise high in his profession; he is far too fond of grubby cases for that. I believe he has actually been seen in the slums; as if the dispensary and parish medical officers were not enough for that. To go poking in the slums is to say good-bye to ambition; so if you have given a first thought to your father's assistant, you will be wise not to let a second follow it. I suppose I may take it for granted that poverty and low tastes are not what you desire in your husband?"

"You may," said the girl curtly. "Therefore we will dismiss Dr. Annesley from the conversation."

It was not much of a "conversation," seeing that Miss Sherwell had made only one remark; but the doctor's wife was never happier than when she was allowed to air her views without protest.

"I want you to marry well, Laura," she said. "You are good-looking, and you can hold your own with anyone. You are looking extremely well to-night, and your new dress suits you perfectly. Mrs. Stockdale is a treasure of a dressmaker. I shall never cease to be thankful that she was recommended to us. I feel sure that you will attract attention to-night, Laura. I look to you to do me credit. I don't expect ever to get any satisfaction out of Effie. She takes too much after your poor father in some ways, and in others she is audacious and unconventional to a degree. I tremble to think of what will happen when she is old enough to go out. I dread having to do for her what I am doing for you."

Laura Sherwell laughed a little maliciously.

"I don't think you need trouble about that, mother," she said. "I don't fancy that Effie will allow herself to be hawked about in the marriage market. I don't believe she will even condescend to balls and parties. She will want to bind up humanity's cut fingers; and if they are grimy with the grime of the slums she will go into ecstasies over the business. Dr. Annesley and she ought to be in full sympathy with each other. I imagine they will plot all manner of wickedness together when Effie gets out of the schoolroom."

"I wish you wouldn't talk such nonsense!" said Mrs. Sherwell fretfully. "Effie's present vexes me enough; you needn't prophesy all kinds of horrors for the future. Oh, here we are!"

The cab stopped before a brilliantly-lighted house, into which they disappeared. We need not follow them; we will return to the girl whom we left standing on the steps of the doctor's house.

The maid who had opened the door for her mistress, and heard her careless reply to Thirza's question, corroborated it.

"Dr. Sherwell is out; but Dr. Annesley is in. Will he do?"

"I—I don't know. Dr. Sherwell was expecting me by this train. Was that Mrs. Sherwell? Didn't she know I was coming? I—I am Miss Lee."

"The mistress wasn't expecting anyone that I know of. Were you coming to stay?"

She added this question on seeing the cabman bring his cab to the steps and busy himself with the luggage.

"Yes; Dr. Sherwell is my uncle."

The maid looked at her for a moment, pitying the distress she was in, for surely it was a strange welcome, and yet not daring to incur the wrath of her mistress by admitting the stranger and her luggage on her own responsibility.

"You'd best see Dr. Annesley," she said: "he'll know what to do. If you'll wait a minute I'll ask him to come down."

She went away, and Thirza leaned wearily against the door, feeling very lonely and desolate, and wishing she had waited for a reply to her letter before thrusting herself upon her unknown relatives.

She was roused from her painful thoughts by the sound of a rich voice speaking energetically, and, looking up, she met the gaze of a pair of kind, dark eyes.

"Dr. Sherwell will not be home till ten o'clock," said Hugh Annesley, "and Mrs. Sherwell will be much later. I am very sorry. Your letter must have miscarried. Jessie"—turning to the servant—"we must do what we can for this lady till your mistress comes home. Where is Miss Effie?"

The girl's face lighted up.

"In the drawing-room, sir. Shall I tell her?"

"No. Tell the cabman about the luggage"—he put some money in her hand to pay him—"and I will see Miss Effie. May I take you to your cousin, Miss Lee?"

"If—if you think it best," was the timid reply. "I thought they would know all about my coming."

There was the sound of tears in her voice. Hugh Annesley looked down on her with sympathy.

"Letters go wrong sometimes," he said. "I am very sorry Dr. Sherwell is not at home to welcome you."

He opened the door of the drawing-room—a big room on the first floor—and entered it with her. The gas was lighted, and a cheery fire burned in the grate; but the room was empty. He took up a book which lay open on a chair, and smiled as he read the title.

"Miss Effie is not far away," he said, laying the book on children's ailments on the table. "If you will take this chair, Miss Lee, I will soon bring her to you."

He wheeled an easy-chair in front of the bright fire, saw the tired girl sink wearily into it, and then went across the landing to the doctor's study.

"Just what I expected!" he exclaimed, as he entered.

A pale face was suddenly lifted to his—a bright, intelligent face, with a wrinkled forehead. Masses of dark hair hung all about it, covering the hands which were held up to the cheeks and the elbows that were planted on the table, on each side of a huge book.

"What did you expect, Dr. Annesley?"

"To see you trying to wrest secrets from books you ought not to touch."

"Oh, bother!" said the girl impatiently. "I can't stay studying primers all my life! There are a lot of things about scarlet-fever I don't understand yet. There isn't enough about it in the book I have, and I can't find a word about it in this huge volume."

"No." He took it away gently, and put it into its place on the shelf. "You mustn't take books from these shelves without permission, Miss Effie."

"Mustn't?" she flashed.

"Mustn't," he repeated. "I don't want to bother your father about it; but I want you to promise me not to touch them again."

"I won't promise anything of the kind!"

The young doctor looked kindly into the rebellious face.

"Yes; I think you will," he said cheerfully.

"I won't! It's too bad!" she burst out. "You all conspire to keep me an ignoramus on the only subject I want to know anything about. Father laughs at my questions, as if I were a baby playing at wisdom, and mother and Laura pour scorn upon every remark I make about the grandest science on earth, and you—"

She paused, half-choked with her indignation, her dark eyes regarding him defiantly, and then went on:

"You think, because I'm a girl, I ought to know nothing, because I shall never be able to make any use of my knowledge; and I'm just aching—aching to be able to relieve pain and cure disease! Oh, I can't see why I wasn't born a boy, so that I could have done it!"

Hugh Annesley smiled very tenderly.

"You weren't born a boy because you will do your work better as a woman," he said. "Don't be afraid. God will find you work such as you are longing to do, and He will fit you to do it."

Effie looked at him in amazement.

"Then you don't mean to pour cold water on me, and try to drown my ambitions? I thought you did."

"By no means. I am glad to think of what you will do for suffering humanity in the future; and I promise to help you all I can, if, in return, you will promise not to run wild among your father's books in his absence."

"Very well; I won't."

"Stick to the lessons your governess gives you for the present. You cannot have too much knowledge of a general kind, and fifteen is too young to dip into the profundities of medical science."

"I suppose it is," she sighed; "but I do love it so! Did you guess what I was doing, Dr. Annesley, or did you catch me accidentally? I thought I was quite safe."

The young man started at the question.

"How stupid of me!" he exclaimed. "I quite forgot what brought me here. Miss Effie, did you expect a visitor to-day—a relative?"

"No. Why?"

"A young lady has come—a Miss Lee. She has evidently had a long journey, and is very tired, and somewhat distressed to find that she was not expected."

"Come to stay, do you mean?"

"It looks like it. She has several boxes, and is dressed in mourning, as if she had lost someone dear to her."

"I don't know her name from Eve's," said Effie. "I fervently hope it isn't a poor relation who is thrusting herself upon us. Where is she? Ought I to go and see her?"

"I have taken her into the drawing-room, and I said I would bring you to her."

Effie rose and flung back her long hair. She looked cross and disturbed.

"Then I suppose I'm bound to see her, as no one else is at home. It's a horrid nuisance!"

She was leaving the room, when Hugh Annesley stopped her by putting his hand on her arm.

"Miss Effie," he said gently, "don't forget that there are many kinds of wounds and aches and pains in the world, and that he or she who aspires to the dignity of healer must not take the physical into account and ignore everything else."

"I don't quite see what you mean, Dr. Annesley."

"When you see Miss Lee I think you will understand," was the reply. "Keep your eyes open, and remember that your mission is to heal."

He opened the door for her, closed it behind her, and then knelt for a moment beside the chair she had left, praying that her heart might be touched into love and sympathy with the stranger; for the young doctor knew that scant welcome might be expected from the mistress of the house, and that the girl's lot promised to be a hard one. With Effie on her side, life would be endurable, for Effie was a warmhearted, sympathetic girl, whose good qualities were not such as to commend themselves to her ambitious, worldly mother, and who had scarcely any friend on whom to expend the wealth of her stored-up love.

Effie pushed open the door of the drawing-room. There was something about the position of the fair head in the cushioned chair which made her move softly across the room. When she stood before the new-comer there was a tender smile in her eyes, for the quiet and the warmth of the room had been too much for the girl—she had fallen asleep.

Effie noiselessly ensconced herself in the corner of a sofa and examined the unconscious face at her leisure. It was pale and thin, and even in slumber it was troubled. The hands which lay on the black dress were neither very white nor very small, though they were shapely enough. They looked like the hands of one who had not been afraid to take up the work that lay near them. The clothing was neat, but not in any way stylish, and the dust of travel which was upon it gave it a somewhat shabby appearance.

Effie's heart was touched. She wanted to go and take the work-worn hands in hers, and kiss the thin, pale face, and speak words of kindly welcome.

"I wonder who she is," she said to herself. "A poor relation? That won't suit mother. She won't allow her to stay, unless father puts his foot down; and then it will be horridly unpleasant for her. And, if I dare to put in a word for her, mother will sit on me. I ought to be like a squeezed-out lemon, I've been sat on so many times; but I suppose I must be a sort of indiarubber ball. Miss

Lee. I wonder what her other name is? I wish she would wake up. I shall soon be asleep myself. I wonder if she cares anything about poor people and their ailments. It would be lovely if she did! And then we could talk about things together. I'm so glad Dr. Annesley doesn't think I'm silly. He's a brick! And he is going to help me!"

Her dark face grew soft as she went mentally over the words he had spoken.

"How happy I shall be if what he hopes for me really happens!" she said.

Unconsciously she spoke half aloud. The sound of her voice roused the sleeping girl. She opened her eyes and stared about her in confusion, a wave of crimson rushing over her face when she discovered that she had been asleep, and that someone had been watching her slumbers.

CHAPTER II.

FRIENDLY AND OTHERWISE.

THE two girls looked at each other for a moment—one calm and self-possessed, the other very nervous, and flushing to the roots of her hair with shame at having been caught sleeping.

"I—oh, I beg your pardon!" Thirza stammered, half rising from her chair. "I—I don't know what made me do such a silly thing."

"You needn't beg anyone's pardon," said Effie, watching her closely. "It was my fault that you were left so long alone. I dragged Dr. Annesley into an argument, or a squabble, or something, and he forgot what he had come to tell me. Don't you think Dr. Annesley's a brick? He's wonderfully clever, and he's going to— Oh, I forgot," she said, pulling herself up, as she saw that the girl looked uncomfortable. "You want to see my father, and he won't be in till ten o'clock. Are you a relative of ours? Dr. Annesley seemed to think so."

"My mother was your father's sister," was the low reply. "She died last week."

"Then we are cousins," said Effie promptly. "Are you coming to live here?"

"I—I don't know," said the girl timidly. "Mother told me, when she was dying, that I must come to my uncle. She said he had promised to look after me. I only found the letter with his address yesterday, and then I wrote, and was waiting for an answer to my letter; but the landlady said I must go at once, as some other people wanted the rooms. That is why—why—"

Her voice faltered, and her face grew very pale. Effie sprang up, full of excitement.

"Oh, you are going to faint," she exclaimed, "and I know exactly what to do! Come, you must lie flat on the sofa, with nothing under your head. You see, faintness is caused by—"

She paused, finding that she was addressing deaf ears, and flew to her room for remedies, rejoicing exceedingly when the blue eyes unclosed and fixed themselves upon her.

"That was lovely!" she said. "I so seldom get a chance to practise on anyone. Are you feeling better?"

Thirza nodded. Tears filled her eyes, and Effie, seeing them, threw herself on her knees by the sofa, professional interest forgotten, and a great tenderness taking its place, making her dark face very attractive.

"Are you very unhappy?" she said. "I can't bear to see you cry. I forgot you were my cousin just now. I only remembered that I had got 'a case.' I didn't mean to be unkind. Did you think me very horrid?"

The girl shook her head, and smiled a little.

"No; I like you. I think you would be my friend if you could."

"Yes; that I would! Only"—Effie's voice and face changed into tone and look which meant despondence—"it takes me all my time to be a friend to myself. I'm the sort of girl that makes her mother wonder how she ever came to have such a daughter, and I get into no end of scrapes. I'm the black sheep—I mean, the ugly duckling—of the family, and Laura is the swan. My name is Effie. Will you tell me what yours is?"

"Thirza—Thirza Lee."

"That's pretty. Do you like medicine?"

"No. I've never taken much; but—"

"Oh, I didn't mean that! I meant the study of medicine. I like to know about ailments, and how to cure them—especially poor people's ailments. You may have a cushion under your head now that the faintness has

gone," she said parenthetically, suiting the deed to the word. "Is that comfortable? Yes; if I were a doctor, I wouldn't go among the grand folks. I would go among the poorest people, and I would teach them the value of cleanliness and ventilation, and show them how important it is that food should be thoroughly cooked. Once"—she lowered her voice—"I went into a dreadful house. A little thing, only about four years old, had cut its hand very badly, and I took it home to dress the cut. Would you believe it—there wasn't a clean piece of rag in the house, and I had to use one of my best handkerchiefs? Mother would have been wild if she had known where I was. The woman was very civil; but she laughed when I gave her some good advice, as if I were a baby talking nonsense. Are you tired of my chatter? I like to talk, but I don't often get the chance. O-oh!"

"What is it?" asked Thirza, seeing a look of dismay on the animated young face.

"Well, you must think me horrid! I forgot that you would be hungry, and all the rest of it. Come into my room and get rid of travel-stains, and I'll go and make cook send us up a nice supper. I guess you'll have to share my room to-night. Will you mind?"

Thirza Lee's lips trembled.

"I think God was very kind to bring me first to you," she said simply.

Effie stared, and then led the way into her bedroom, supplied her cousin with all she needed for her toilet, and then left her. When the two met again, and sat together at the big dining-table, Effie looked at the older girl approvingly. A little colour and brightness had come to the tired face, and the blue eyes had a new light in them.

"How nice you look!" she said impulsively. "Do you feel happier now?"

"Yes; I had no right ever to feel miserable."

"No right? Why not?"

"Because, whatever happens, God will never leave me," said Thirza, the colour flooding her cheeks. "I ought not to have forgotten for a moment that He was my Father, and that He would do the best for me. I'm afraid you must have thought me very wicked to ever seem to doubt Him, and to dishonour Him by showing such fear and doubt."

Effie's eyes opened wide in surprise.

"I don't know a bit what you mean," she began, when the door opened, and Dr. Sherwell entered.

"Well, my dear, company?" he said, apparently surprised. "Do I know your friend?"

"You ought to do, daddie!" cried Effie, springing up and hugging him, "seeing that she is your very own niece, Thirza Lee! Tell her you're glad to see her, dad, because she's lost her mother, and she hasn't any other home but this."

Dr. Sherwell's face grew grave. He put aside his young daughter's clinging arms, and advanced towards Thirza, who had risen.

"Thirza Lee—Mary's child?" he said, as he took her hand in his. "And Mary is dead? When, my dear? Why wasn't I told?"

Thirza's tears began to fall as the sorrowful, sympathetic voice fell on her ears. This man had loved her mother, though they had been divided in their lives.

"She went out of my life altogether," he went on. "I tried to find her, but failed. I have heard nothing of her for ten years. Why was it, my dear?"

"I think it must have been because she was poor," said the girl brokenly. "She said she would never ask anything for herself; but for me—she said you had promised—"

"To care for you? Yes." The doctor knitted his brows. "Yes, yes; you did right to come. But why didn't you write? Tell me all about it, my dear."

Thirza told her story, with the doctor standing at her side holding her hand.

"I—I can work for my living," she said, "if you think it best. I am twenty, and I—I think I could do something. Mother made me promise to come here. She said I was too young to face the difficulties and dangers of life alone; but—"

"So you are, my dear—so you are. I promised your dear mother ten years ago that you should find a home here when you needed one, and I will keep my promise."

"Will Mrs. Sherwell care to have me?" began Thirza timidly.

The doctor stopped her.

"You leave all that to me, my dear." He turned to his daughter. "Effie, your mother won't be home till past midnight."

"I know, dad. Thirza and I are just going to tuck ourselves between the blankets, and leave you to fight it out."

"My dear?"

"Well, you know what I mean, dad dear. Now, do let poor Thirza get some supper. She's nearly-famished, and I'm ravenously hungry."

"Well, well, then I'll say good-night," he said, with an air of relief. "You must wait for your aunt's welcome till morning."

"And may you get it then!" said Effie, under her breath. "Good-night, dad. You're a brick! He's the best father in the world," she said, when he had gone. "If mother and Laura aren't quite as kind as you would like them to be, remember that you can always count on the dad and me."

Two hours later the two girls were wrapped in slumber, and Dr. Sherwell, forgetful of everything except the clever paper he was writing for a medical journal, was sitting alone in his study, when the door was flung open, and his wife entered.

"Malcolm, what is this absurd story with which I am greeted downstairs? The maid tells me that some relative has thrust herself upon us. What is the meaning of it? I never heard of such a thing in my life! I saw the girl on the doorstep as I went out, and remarked on her poverty-stricken appearance; and now I hear that she is actually sharing Effie's bed!"

"My sister Mary's daughter will do my daughter no harm," said the doctor quietly. "Sit down, Fanny, and let me tell you about it. I have a long letter here from my dead sister. It ought to have been here this morning, enclosed in the one which announced Thirza's coming; but it was only delivered by the last post. Mary has hidden herself from me for ten years, because she didn't want me to know how poor she was; but she begs me to save her daughter from the charity of a cold world, and reminds me that ten years ago I promised to care for Thirza when the need arose."

"And that means—"

"That we shall have three daughters instead of two. You will welcome Thirza, Fanny?"

"I shall do nothing of the kind! I would not do such an injustice to my own girls, poor dears!"

"There need be no thought of injustice, my dear. Effie has evidently sworn eternal friendship with her cousin already."

"Effie!"—Mrs. Sherwell's tone was full of contempt—"Effie would fraternise with a sweep or a pickpocket, if the fancy took her! She hasn't sense to see that this interloper—"

"My dear, you are speaking of my dead sister's child!" remonstrated Dr. Sherwell.

"I don't care!" said the lady angrily. "I don't want this girl here. She can get her living without robbing our girls. I utterly refuse to have her here!"

"Fanny, suppose Laura and Effie were left orphans, and their only relations refused to show them any kindness?"

"Laura and Effie are different. I don't think we need argue about it, Malcolm. I'm tired, and want to go to bed. Shall we consider it settled?"

Dr. Sherwell looked up with a quiet smile.

"Yes, dear—absolutely settled, because of a brother's promise to his dead sister."

"I didn't mean that," she said, flushing with something like shame. "You have no consideration for me, Malcolm."

"Have I not? Dear, I don't think you would be really happy among all the luxuries with which we are surrounded, if the thought of your orphan niece cast upon the tender mercies of strangers came to you occasionally."

Mrs. Sherwell retorted angrily. The doctor answered her gently but firmly; and when at last she left the room she knew that further protest would be useless. Dr. Sherwell had made a solemn promise, and he meant to keep it.

"Well," she said to herself, as she went upstairs, "there are more ways than one of getting rid of unwelcome guests. If Thirza Lee is here in six months' time, I shall be surprised, that is all."

She went into Laura's room as she passed, and poured out some of her indignation.

"Remember, I am determined that she shall not stay," she said, "though your father is equally determined that she shall. I shall keep her in the background as much as possible, and make her feel herself a dependent and intruder. If she is a girl of spirit, she will resent that, and take her departure."

"Unless she elects to play Cinderella, on the chance of the fairy godmother turning up!" laughed Laura lightly. "Say good night, mother. I'm dreadfully tired. And don't let your sleep be troubled by dreams of Thirza Lee. I suppose we can suppress her between us, if she is an undesirable acquisition."

"If!" exclaimed the other. "There's no 'if' about it. And just imagine Effie receiving her with open arms, and sharing her bed with her! I'm quite in despair about that child. Good-night, Laura. I think you made an impression to-night, my dear. Sir Edgar Lefroy seemed to be greatly taken with you. I heard him plying Mrs. Mander with questions about you."

"I hate Sir Edgar!" said the girl sharply. "I don't see anything attractive about him."

"My dear," was the shocked reply, "where are your eyes? He was the most eligible man there—the richest, and the only one with a title. Think, if you were to become Lady Lefroy! How proud I should be! I need to be doubly proud of you, Laura, because I foresee nothing but disappointment in store for me with regard to Effie. Good-night!"

CHAPTER III.

TAKING HER PLACE.

"MOTHER, this is Thirza." Mrs. Sherwell had just seated herself at the breakfast-table opposite to her husband, when Effie brought in her cousin, and introduced her so unceremoniously. As the doctor was gravely watching, she was obliged to behave with at least an outward appearance of civility. She held out her hand stiffly, and smiled chillingly.

"How do you do, Miss Lee? You took us by storm last night."

"Yes; I am so sorry," said Thirza timidly. "My uncle would tell you how it was."

"Dr. Sherwell made some kind of explanation, I believe. Will you take that chair by Effie? Effie, I must request you to sit up straight, and to take your elbow off the table."

"All right, mother," said the girl, straightening herself, with a yawn. "I don't think I'm quite awake yet. We talked for hours last night, didn't we, Thirza? I'm ever so glad to have a cousin, mother. You have no idea how jolly it is. Especially when—"

Mrs. Sherwell silenced her daughter by a look, and gave her attention to the coffee and to her husband.

"Isn't Laura coming down?" he asked.

"No; poor child, she is quite tired out this morning. I made her stay in bed to breakfast."

"Hot, stuffy, crowded rooms, late hours, and excitement—bad, mother, bad," said the doctor.

"Possibly, my dear; but absolutely necessary," replied his wife. "Laura was quite a success last night."

"That means that someone fell in love with her, doesn't it?" said Effie, who had finished her porridge. "Whatever things you do, however great and glorious, if no one falls in love with you, you're a dead failure. Isn't that it, mother?"

Mrs. Sherwell deigned no reply.

"Who was it, mother? Do tell! Did he fall at her feet and—"

"Will you please stop talking nonsense?" was the irritable reply. "You are an adept at saying silly things. Pass Miss Lee's cup."

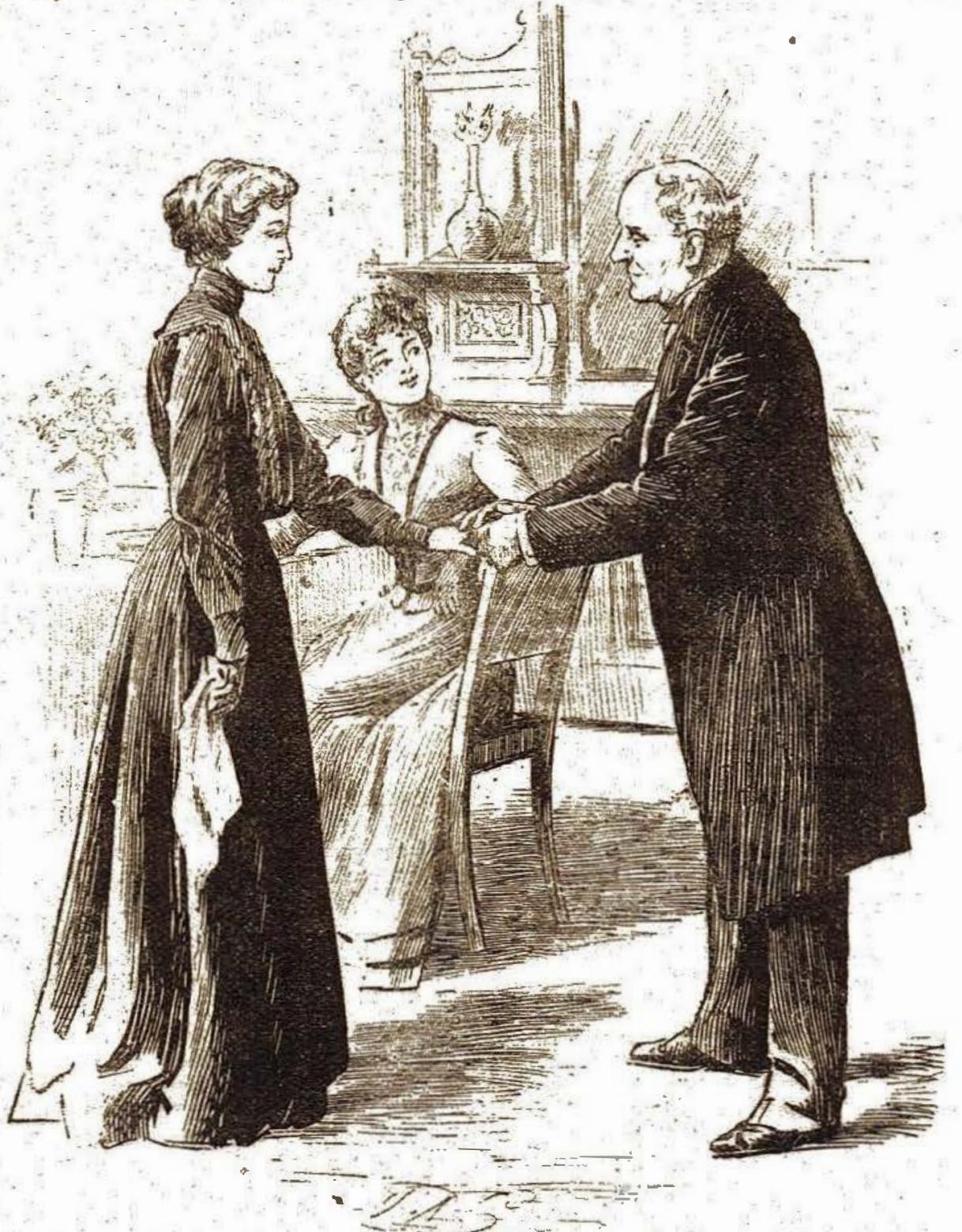
"Her name is Thirza, mother. We mustn't call her Miss Lee when she's such a very near relative. You would like to be called Thirza, wouldn't you?" she said.

Thirza bowed her head slightly.

"If Mrs. Sherwell doesn't object, I should prefer it," she said—a remark of which that lady took not the slightest notice.

The doctor, looking up, saw that his niece felt the great want of kindness in his wife's manner, and tried to atone for it in every way in his power. Everyone was glad when the uncomfortable meal came to an end. The clock struck nine, and the door-bell rang.

"That's Miss Crawford," said Effie, with a wry face, "come to stuff geography and French and German into me like cook stuffs sage and onions into a goose. I hate common lessons, when I might be studying more important things! Oh, I forgot, though. Dr. Annesley



"Thirza Lee—Mary's child?" Dr. Sherwell said, as he took her hand in his.

said I had better learn all I could, and the others would come after. So, good-bye, dear people. I'm off to be stuffed, with no more protest than the goose!"

She dropped a funny little kiss on Thirza's forehead, and rushed away. The doctor had already gone. Mrs. Sherwell followed Effie, and Thirza was left alone. The maid came in to clear the table; when she went out the room was very still. Thirza sat looking into the fire, feeling very lonely, and wishing someone would come, and that some task might be set her. This enforced idleness, without even a book within reach, was very trying to one who had been accustomed to a busy life.

Two hours passed before Mrs. Sherwell came back, and then Thirza ventured to ask for something to do.

"There is nothing for you to do at present," was the reply. "Each of the servants has her own work, and, naturally, I prefer to do my own myself. By the way,

HORNER'S PENNY STORIES.

perhaps you would like to unpack? I have given you as good a room as I can spare, and your boxes are already in it. You had better go and take possession. Jessie will show you which it is."

She rang the bell and gave her orders. With a word of thanks, Thirza left the room, and followed the servant to the top of the house. The maid's face was burning as she opened the door of an attic, and stood aside to allow Thirza to precede her, following her into the dull, sparsely furnished room, and shutting the door.

"It's a shame to bring you here, miss!" she burst out. "I had a better room myself at my last place. If you would just say a word to the master, the mistress would have to give you something better than this. I told her it wasn't quite the thing for the master's niece, and she nearly gave me notice on the spot. Not that I should have cared much, but for the doctors and Miss Effie. Will you tell him, miss, before your boxes are unpacked?"

Thirza stood in the middle of the attic—the only place in which she could stand upright—and looked round.

Everything was shabby, from the old iron bedstead to the cracked looking-glass on the shaky toilet-table. There was not an article of furniture that did not look as if it had been discarded years before; and the floor was absolutely bare, except for a strip of faded carpet by the side of the bed.

A lump rose to Thirza's throat, but she smiled into the anxious and ashamed face of the servant.

"No," she said softly, "I will not trouble my uncle; and, after all, I am better off than my Master. You know, Jessie, He had not where to lay His head—Jesus, I mean," she added, seeing the girl looked puzzled. "He said, 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.'"

Her face took on a new beauty as she stood for a moment wrapped in her own thoughts.

"He understands our sorrows, and sympathises with us, because He suffered Himself," she said, under her breath, for her own comfort. The servant watched her wonderingly. She had been ashamed of her task of conducting her master's niece to the room assigned to her, and had expected a burst of indignation, instead of this calm, patient acceptance of what was nothing less than an indignity.

"She takes it like an angel," she said to herself. "She's real good, if she is poor; and the mistress needn't think to snub her, for she can't do it."

Aloud she said:

"Can I help you, miss? There's nothing I wouldn't do, if you would let me."

"Thank you," said Thirza, smiling. "Yes, you can help me to uncord this box, and this, and to pack the others away into a corner. And, Jessie, it would be better not to tell Miss Effie about this"—she swept her hand round the attic. "She might make remarks about it which would vex her mother."

"That she would! And she'll find it out soon enough, without me telling her. There isn't much escapes Miss Effie, bless her! She's always getting into scrapes, but she's a real kind-hearted young lady. She came and sat with me nearly two hours one night when I was ill, trying all sorts of things to do me good. Her mother thought she was in bed, fast asleep, and she came up and caught her bathing my forehead at ten o'clock. Poor Miss Effie got dreadfully scolded; but she would have done the same thing the next night, if she hadn't been watched. There's the bell. I must go. If you ever want anything, Miss, I'll be only too glad to help you."

When Jessie had disappeared Thirza sat down on her bed, which creaked and shook under her light weight, and faced her position. It was easy to see that Mrs. Sherwell resented her coming, and meant to make things unpleasant for her.

Should she summon her small stock of courage, and leave the house where she was not wanted; or should she respect her mother's wishes, and stay—at any rate, for the present? It might be that God had some work for her to do even there; and her thoughts turned yearningly to Effie—warm-hearted, clever undisciplined Effie—whose work might be so grand, if it were only built on the right foundation; and, thinking as much of Effie as of her own shrinking from the unknown outer world, she said:

"I will stay—for a while I will stay. God help me to witness for Him in a household where He is not honoured."

The ordeal which presented itself when she went down-

stairs was that of being presented to her elder cousin. Laura Sherwell was a proud, handsome girl of her own age. She looked Thirza down from head to foot, and offered a limp hand rather reluctantly, murmuring an almost inaudible greeting.

Mrs. Sherwell glanced sharply at her niece, expecting to see signs of disturbance on her face; but it was calm and peaceful, and the quiet blue eyes which met hers had no resentment in them.

"You found your room all right?" she said.

"Yes, thank you," was the cheerful reply. "Jessie helped me with my boxes, and I have done a little unpacking. Can you give me something to do? I have been accustomed to a busy life."

"Laura can, I dare say. Can't you, my dear?"

"Heaps!" said the girl, yawning. "I tore my dress cruelly last night, and I hate mending. I will bring it for you to doctor, if you are handy with your needle."

She went away, without waiting for a reply, and brought down an evening-dress torn almost beyond repair. Thirza's heart sank, but she accepted the task smilingly, and spent the rest of the day over it, feeling justifiably proud of her work when she gave back the dress to her cousin.

"Thanks," said Laura carelessly, after she had examined the work critically. "It's not badly done, though you have spent an unconscionable time over it. You could easily earn your living with your needle, I should think. It is easy enough to get dressmakers to make one's dresses; but to find a person willing to come by the day and mend up one's old things is not so easy. You would shine in that direction, I should imagine, if you chose to do so."

Looking up, she intercepted an angry glance from Effie, who was busy with her lessons.

"That's just horrid of you, Laura," she said, "after what Thirza has done for you. I think it's just sweet of her to sit all day over your old dress."

"So it is, Miss Pepperbox; and I have no doubt that she is delighted to do it here, instead of having to turn out to sew for the wives of Tom, Dick, and Harry. Go on with your lessons, my dear. Little girls should be seen and not heard."

With that Laura resumed her novel. Two pairs of cheeks burned hotly, but only one pair of eyes had an angry light in them, and those were not the eyes of the girl whom Laura Sherwell was trying to insult sufficiently to make her take her departure from 24, Grosvenor Street.

She shook her head very slightly as Effie looked across at her, and a light shone through the mist of tears in her blue eyes.

After that Thirza never needed to ask for work. No sewing-maid engaged by the day could have been expected to work harder, or to bear with the humours and caprices of her employers more unquestioningly than Thirza was.

She bore her lot patiently enough, finding sufficient reward in being allowed to spend her leisure hours with Effie, whom she had managed skilfully to exclude from her attic. It was a week after she had been installed there that Effie came flying down the stairs, with a red, excited face, encountering Dr. Annesley on the first landing.

"It is a shame!" she said, expending her indignation upon him because he was the first person she met. "Thirza never would let me into her room, but I meant to see it when she was out; and it's a horrid attic, not nearly so nice as the maids have. I'm going to tell father, and then there'll be a row downstairs."

"Which would please your cousin, I suppose," said Dr. Annesley, "and make things easier for her?"

"Wouldn't it?" said Effie dubiously.

"Well, think about it before you speak," he said, smiling. "Miss Lee might get a better room, certainly; but—"

He paused significantly.

"But, oh dear, you think they might make things more unpleasant for her! Oughtn't I to interfere, Dr. Annesley? I do hate to see people badly treated; and I always feel as if I must try to set things to rights."

"In the years to come you will do that; but not now—not yet."

She looked at him almost reverently.

"Perhaps it is a good thing I met you," she said. "If you had not been just here, by this time I might have said things which would have hurt my dear Thirza. Isn't she sweet, Dr. Annesley?"

"Yes."

"How quietly you say it! But, then, you don't know what an angel she is. Mother and Laura treat her like——"

"Hadn't you better make your sentence end there, Miss Effie?" interposed the young doctor gravely.

"Oh dear! Is that wrong, too? I must have a safety-valve, you know, doctor dear."

At that moment the drawing-room door opened, and Miss Sherwell looked out.

"I thought I recognised the voices," she said. "You let that tiresome child trouble you too much, Dr. Annesley. Mother and I are having tea. Will you let us give you some, if you have time for it?"

He smiled into Effie's scowling face, and thereby smoothed it, and followed Miss Sherwell into her mother's presence, chatting for five minutes over his cup of tea, and then going off to his work.

Five minutes was a very brief space of time, but in it the two ladies had managed to make various malicious remarks about their young relative, which the young man found it hard to listen to in silence.

"She is quite capable of imposing upon him," said Laura, when he had gone. "It's as well that he should know the truth about her."

It did not seem to strike the girl that what she called "the truth" had nothing of truth about it, and that it was jealousy and fear which were prompting her to show her cousin to Dr. Annesley in a false light. Like her mother, she was ambitious, and eager to make "a good match"; and yet, school her heart as she might, she could not turn Hugh Annesley out of the place in it which, all unconsciously to himself, he had gained. Outwardly, she scoffed at what she called his low aims, but inwardly she compared every other man with him. He was the standard by which she measured the merits of possible and impossible suitors.

If he had asked for her love, she would have dismissed him with scorn; but she was none the less determined that Thirza should not be on friendly terms with him.

"If she poses as a martyr, she will win his sympathy," she went on; "and everyone knows what sympathy leads to."

"Love?" interrogated the mother. "What a silly, romantic child you are! It might not be a bad thing. They would make a good pair."

"They never shall," said Laura, turning pale—"never, if I can help it!"

"Why, my dear? You know you are too sensible to think of him yourself. You would never——"

"Of course not! I should not dream of such a thing!" said the girl indignantly; but in her heart she cried: "Why isn't he such as I could let myself love? Why is he content with grovelling in low places as a doctor's assistant, when he might be rich and famous if he chose?"

The winter months passed on, and Thirza was studiously kept in the background, her mother's recent death being a very convenient excuse when Dr. Sherwell inquired of his wife the reason why the girl was never present at dinner when guests were invited, nor made a sharer in any outdoor pleasures.

Thirza herself never complained when her uncle made himself anxious about her. In many ways her lot was trying; but she had great compensations, and not the least of these was the quiet friendship which gradually grew up between her and Hugh Annesley; while Effie's worshipping love was a very precious thing.

A very slight incident changed the course of her life, and partially released her from the constant slavery of the needle. Effie, studying one evening in the room where the rest of the family were sitting, suddenly flung her book into a corner.

"It's some German I have to translate," she explained, when questioned, "and it's too horribly difficult for anything. I can't do it, and Miss Crawford will be ever so cross. Laura could help me, if she liked, I suppose; but she never will."

Laura shrugged her shoulders.

"No, thanks; I'm not so fond of German. Why don't you ask Thirza?"

She looked scornfully in Thirza's direction. The girl met her look quietly, and then turned to Effie.

"I will help you, if you like, dear," she said, to everyone's astonishment.

Mrs. Sherwell listened silently as the difficult lesson was made easy; then she said stiffly:

"What other languages are you acquainted with?"

"I only know French and German."

"Do you play?"

"Yes, Mrs. Sherwell."

"Play something, that I may judge of your ability."

Effie sprang to the piano. Thirza followed slowly, and played one of Beethoven's sonatas. When she had finished Mrs. Sherwell continued her catechism, and made herself familiar with the list of Thirza's accomplishments.

"I call it perfectly absurd," she said, turning to her elder daughter—"perfectly absurd to be paying Miss Crawford such an exorbitant salary when Thirza could take her place quite easily! I suppose," she continued, turning to the startled girl, "you would prefer to teach Effie to remain idle in your uncle's house?"

"Say 'Yes,' Thirza! Quick! Say 'Yes!'" cried Effie excitedly. "I'll be ever so good if you will!"

"I should like it, if you think I am qualified for the post," she said, in reply to her aunt. "Mother used to say that giving out was very different from taking in, and that I should never be a successful teacher."

"Fiddlesticks! You explained the German all right—at least, I suppose you did. We'll risk the rest. I'll dismiss Miss Crawford with a week's notice. I never liked the creature, and I shall be glad to get rid of her. Effie, don't look so ridiculously delighted! You will not be allowed to shirk your lessons because your—er—cousin is your governess; so don't try that game. I shall keep an eye on your progress."

"Two eyes, if you like," said Effie, under her breath. "so long as I have my dear Thirza!"

"What are you saying, Effie?"

"Nothing, mother. Only I'm going to be extra-specially good when I've said farewell to Miss Crawford."

CHAPTER IV.

DISAPPOINTED AMBITION.

THIS economical move on the part of Mrs. Sherwell set Thirza's doubts at rest. She had felt that God had some particular work for her to do in her uncle's house, and now it was made plain to her what it was. Already she had great influence with Effie, and the daily contact with her would make it greater still. She would win Effie for her Master—bright, sympathetic, impulsive Effie, who would do either great harm or great good in the world.

The unwelcome guest's banishment to the schoolroom was a great relief to Mrs. Sherwell and her daughter, and it was scarcely less a relief to be spared some additional hours of Effie's company; for Effie had an inconvenient way of saying straight, disagreeable, truthful things—a bad habit, of which it was impossible to cure her. Now, to her great delight, she was allowed not only to receive her lessons in the schoolroom during the day, but to spend the evening hours of preparation there; while Thirza, always at hand when difficulties arose, busied herself with the endless sewing which still found its way to her.

Mrs. Sherwell's idea of training her younger daughter was evidently to wash her hands as far as possible of all responsibility concerning her, while she devoted herself to the more satisfactory Laura. So Thirza had a clear field, and her gentle hand dropped the good seed, praying for a harvest which should satisfy her Master.

The days and weeks passed pleasantly enough on the whole. Dr. Sherwell assured himself that his niece liked her new tasks, and popped into the schoolroom occasionally to speak words he could not venture to utter in the drawing-room. Dr. Annesley, too, managed to find a pretext for putting in an appearance there now and again; and it was surprising how often he "happened" to meet governess and pupil in their daily walks.

Effie hailed his coming with delight, and very quickly drifted into "medical" talk, plying the young fellow with questions, which he answered just as readily as if Effie's ambitions were of the first importance to him, and so it her constant, rapid flow of talk were not silencing the voice which had become the sweetest in all the world to him.

He had watched Thirza Lee at a distance all through the winter months, and had seen that a strong, steadfast soul dwelt behind the timid, shrinking exterior, and that the girl's patience and sweetness never failed her, however greatly she was tried.

Once he had called her into the consulting-room, when no one else was near, to assist him with an accident case he had suddenly been called on to treat. He had feared for her, while wishing to test her; and he had watched her face grow white, and her lips and hands tremble, and then had seen her control herself, and grow calm and brave, and wonderfully helpful. Then, when he had betaken himself into the next room, he heard her voice, steady and sweet, speak words of sympathy and comfort to the man whose strong right hand would be helpless for many a day; and it seemed to him as if the sufferer had been taken by a few brave, womanly words right into the presence of a God of Love.

The momentary sight of her in a morning was sufficient to make the day bright for Hugh Annesley. If he could touch her hand as he spoke his morning greeting, he felt as if a benediction were already upon his day, and he worked the better for it.

He knew quite well that she was "the one woman in the world" for him; but she, brightening visibly under his sympathetic looks and words, never dreamed that life would bring more than glimpses of him, nor had any idea

"Decline what?" said the doctor, coming in just then with Hugh Annesley.

"An invitation to Mrs. Smith's garden-party," was the reply.

"Why should she decline?" came the quick question. "If it's a question of dress, I'll give her a cheque, with the greatest of pleasure. Eh, Thirza?"

Mrs. Sherwell looked angrily at her husband. Her reply was prevented by the girl.

"Thank you, uncle; I don't wish to go. I should feel out of place."

"Of course she would, Malcolm! You have such ridiculous ideas! Besides, you forget that Thirza has undertaken Effie's lessons. Are you among the fortunate people who have received an invitation, Dr. Annesley?"

"Yes, Mrs. Sherwell," said the young man quietly.

He missed the pleased expression of Laura's face by watching the quiet face of the girl who sat by the piano quietly mending dilapidated music.

"That is right," said the doctor's wife. "Mrs. Smith's garden-parties are very brilliant affairs. Can you go, Malcolm?"



Laura brought down to Thirza an evening-dress torn almost beyond repair.

that he wanted to be more than the kind friend he had proved himself ever since the sad evening of her coming to Grosvenor Street. She took the evidence of his friendship gratefully, as a gift from God, and a new sunshine touched her life. Fortunately for her, neither Mrs. Sherwell nor her daughter guessed anything of it, and Laura was torn between her longing to make a good match and her strange love for her father's assistant.

With June came the first of the garden-parties which Westchurch people loved so well. Someone who had happened to meet Miss Lee included her in the invitation sent to the others.

"You will decline it, of course?" said Mrs. Sherwell, half interrogatively. "You could not go to a garden-party in shabby black, even if your mother's recent death did not forbid your going. It was exceedingly kind of Mrs. Smith to ask you; but you could not take advantage of her kindness."

"No; certainly not," chimed in Laura. "Mrs. Smith is not half exclusive enough. She wouldn't think it a very great sin to invite our housemaid to her garden-party, if she happened to take a fancy to her. It's very ridiculous; but, of course, you will decline, Thirza?"

"No!" said her husband. "I have no fancy for that particular kind of amusement. Give us a cup of tea, my dear—we have just had our nerves shaken a little—and then we must be off again."

He drank his tea standing, and turned to Thirza as he left the room.

"You are sure you don't care about going, child?"

"Quite sure, dear uncle! I shall be much happier at home with Effie."

The blue eyes uplifted to his were perfectly peaceful, and there was even a suggestion of happiness in them, as if their owner knew that she would have the best of it.

The afternoon came in due time, brilliant enough to please everybody. Laura Sherwell looked well in her new summer dress, as her looking-glass had told her before her mother triumphantly assured her of the fact.

"Sir Edgar Lefroy will surely come to the point this afternoon!" she said. "You can easily give him the opportunity he wants. I'm sure that is all he is waiting for."

"Yes, I think you're right, mother. I suppose I had better take your sage advice."

She sighed as she spoke, and they went out together, encountering Hugh Annesley in the hall.

"You are going to be late," she said playfully, as she saw that he was still in ordinary attire—"very late, I'm afraid!"

"For what, Miss Sherwell? Oh, the garden-party! I'd forgotten, but I declined it days ago. It isn't quite in my line, you know, and we are very busy just now."

"Worldly things are not in your line, of course!" she said, a little sarcastically. "Our household ought to be the better for two such saints as you and Thirza Lee, though for my part I prefer people who can enjoy life without being afraid they are sinning every time they smile!"

The young doctor smiled at that without feeling particularly sinful, and turned away. Like Effie, he had become accustomed to being sat upon.

He could not be expected to guess that, with words of contempt on her lips, the spoiled girl went from him feeling that some of the anticipated brightness had gone suddenly from the day, because he was not to mingle with the gay throng at Mrs. Smith's.

"He cares more for Effie than for me," she said to herself, as she took her place in the carriage beside her mother. "How silly I am to care! As if it made the least difference! Why should I mind that my father's unambitious assistant is scarcely aware of my existence? If he went down on his knees to me, I should only scorn him. And there are others——"

Her mother rallied her on her abstraction; but the cloud on her brow did not lift until she was fairly among the brilliant company gathered in the beautiful gardens. She was good-looking and well-dressed, and conscious that she could hold her own even among such a crowd of fashionable people, and that was enough to drive troublesome thoughts away for the time.

"I have not seen Sir Edgar, dear, have you?" said Mrs. Sherwell anxiously. "He said he would only be away for a week. Oh, there he is! Who is with him? I can't quite see."

"Only Angela Smith, mother. What a fright the girl is! She hasn't the least bit of style about her, and Sir Edgar appreciates style. I suppose he feels bound to pay some attention to the daughter of his hostess, but he must be dreadfully bored."

She watched the pair lazily from her seat beneath a shady tree, and presently they sauntered towards them, shook hands cordially with the two ladies, and stood chatting easily with them.

Angela Smith's girlish face was very bright and happy, and Laura felt vaguely that the man was improved—that something had gone from his manner and speech which had marked him as gay and frivolous.

"I didn't go away after all," he said, in reply to a question of Mrs. Sherwell's. "I couldn't tear myself away from Westchurch. Ah, you haven't heard the news, then? May I tell it, Angela? Mrs. Sherwell and Miss Laura are such old friends, that I'm sure they will rejoice in our happiness."

Mrs. Sherwell looked from the girl's blushing face to Sir Edgar's, and knew what he had to tell.

"Your happiness!" she echoed. "That means—— But no, surely I am mistaken?"

"Not at all!" said Sir Edgar cheerfully. "Miss Smith has promised to be my wife. Of course, I'm not nearly good enough for her; but she is going to take me in hand, and make just what she likes of me. There is room for improvement, don't you think, Miss Sherwell?"

Laura deigned no reply. Her attention was evidently fixed on a group of young girls chatting near her. No one looking at her would have dreamt that she was keenly conscious of the fact that the castle she had built in the air had crashed into ruins about her. Her mother, on the contrary, could not conceal her chagrin.

"That is totally unexpected news," she said, glancing significantly at her daughter—"totally unexpected, Sir Edgar!"

"Why, yes!" he said innocently. "And no one is more surprised than I am. I thought I was a confirmed bachelor, fortunate in having a host of kind friends, but never dreaming of—of this. You and Miss Laura have been among my kindest friends, and I hope you will continue to be such."

Mrs. Sherwell's face was very red. She murmured some inarticulate reply, which Sir Edgar took for congratulations.

He bowed and smiled, and moved away, all unconscious

of the tumult raging in the breasts of the two women. He had been perfectly sincere when he said he had never dreamed of love until Angela Smith crossed his path.

He was a favourite wherever he went, but perhaps Mrs. Sherwell and her daughter were the only women who translated his courteous attentions and kindly speech into professions of love.

"Well?" said Mrs. Sherwell, when she had recovered sufficient breath to enunciate the monosyllable.

"Well, mother?" said Laura languidly.

"That's what I call a barefaced insult! To think that he could face us both in that audacious way, after doing everything but propose to you, and speak calmly of his engagement to that chit! I wanted to say something cutting to him, to show him what I thought of his behaviour, but that baby Angela would have retailed it, and people would have rejoiced over our disappointment. It's a crushing blow, Laura! I made quite sure that your future was settled. Poor dear, it's enough to break your heart!"

Laura laughed lightly. She was feeling humiliated, but her heart had not been touched.

"Oh, no; it's made of fairly tough material," she said; "but I wish we could go home. I'm sick of all this!"

"You must stand it a little longer. Don't let people see that Sir Edgar's engagement gives you anything but pleasure. Come, we will go and congratulate Mrs. Smith as prettily as we can, and that will throw them off the scent."

An hour later they took their departure, preferring to walk the mile back rather than wait for the carriage which was to be sent for them.

Almost within sight of their home they were hailed by an excited shout, as a dogcart pulled up close beside them.

Looking up, they saw that it was driven by Hugh Annesley. Thirza Lee, sitting by his side, looked bright and bonnie, and very happy; while Effie, occupying the back seat, had delight written in big characters on her smiling face.

"Shall I get down, mother, and let you and Laura be driven home?" she said. "We've had such a lovely drive, right out to Alliston."

"By whose permission?"

"Oh, dad's, of course! He thought of it directly you had gone—at least, a message came from someone who was ill, and dad said Dr. Annesley had better drive out, and then Thirza and I could go, too. It's been perfectly jolly! Shall I get down?"

"No, you can go home. I'm surprised that Thirza should have taken such a liberty in my absence!"

Thirza looked distressed. Hugh Annesley answered for her.

"Lessons were done, Mrs. Sherwell, and the doctor insisted that both the young ladies would be benefited by the drive out."

"I should have been consulted!" was the cold reply. "Pray drive on, Dr. Annesley!"

He bowed, and obeyed her, and the ladies continued their homeward walk. Laura's anger made her face pale. The sight of Thirza Lee sitting happily by Hugh Annesley's side hurt her far more keenly than Sir Edgar Lefroy's engagement had done, and she put her anger into bitter, cruel words, resolving in her inmost soul that Thirza should not win the prize which she herself would have striven for, had not her pride and ambition been so great.

That evening Thirza had to listen to words which brought the colour to her pale face. She was accused of unwomanly behaviour, and taunted with trying to gain the affection of Hugh Annesley.

She had it all to bear in Effie's presence, and Effie's indignant protests were silenced sternly before they were half uttered.

When the two were alone, Thirza said quietly:

"I think I must go, dear. Your mother and Laura have disliked me from the first, and I am sure they would be glad to see me gone."

"You sha'n't go!" cried Effie, throwing her arms round her neck. "I can't do without you, dear. I was dreadfully lonely before you came, and I—I was very wicked. I'm trying to be good now—I really am; but if you go away I shall be just as bad as ever. You said you were sure that God sent you here; and, if you are sure, you have no business to run away. Don't take any notice of the horrid things they say to you. I would bear a great

deal more than that rather than be parted from you. Say you will stay!"

"I must think about it, Effie dear, and ask God to tell me what He wants me to do."

CHAPTER V.

THE WHITE ROBE.

 ONE hot July afternoon Effie Sherwell, approaching her home, saw a girl turning away from the door, her face stricken white with some pain or trouble. As she passed Effie she sobbed, and the tender-hearted girl saw tears in her eyes.

"What is the matter?" she said, stopping.

The girl dried her eyes instantly, and, seeing the sympathy in the young face, spoke scornfully.

"Oh, it's only one of the ways of grand folks!" she said. "They never want money themselves, and they never think it means life or death to some of us."

"Have you been asking Dr. Sherwell to help you? Oh, I'm sure he wouldn't turn you away if he knew you really needed help!"

"Dr. Sherwell has naught to do with it! And you needn't think I've been begging. I never begged in my life. I only ask for what's just and right. If I want to buy something, I buy it, if I have the money; if I haven't, I go without. I pay honestly for whatever I get; but these fine folks hire one's flesh and blood and strength, and never think of paying for it till it's quite convenient, whether we starve or not while we're waiting for the money. My ladyover there can't be bothered about it just now—that's the message the servant brings. And I've worked half through the night, because Janie—that's my sister—needs nourishing food, and I hadn't the money to get it with."

"Was it Mrs. Sherwell—and sewing?"

"Yes—leastways, it was Miss Sherwell. They're both alike."

"Stay here, then, and I'll get you the money. It's a horrid shame that you should be kept without it for a minute!"

Effie rushed into the house, encountered her sister on the stairs, and was told to mind her own business. Then she burst into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Sherwell was entertaining a caller.

"Mother," she said, "Laura refuses to pay her debts. That girl who did the sewing for her wants the money dreadfully. Will you pay it, if Laura won't? It's hateful not to pay poor people!"

"My dear Effie," said Mrs. Sherwell sternly, "when will you learn to enter a room properly? The young person will be paid at the proper time. Can't you see that I am engaged now?"

"But, mother, she is depending on the money for——"

"That class of person always is depending on the money for something—otherwise spending it before it is earned."

"And Laura, I suppose, will wear the thing before it is paid for? I'd rather go in rags than do that! Laura wouldn't listen to me. Mother, do pay the girl!"

"Leave the room, Effie, and leave us to manage our own affairs."

"I think you are dreadfully cruel!" said Effie, her eyes full of indignant tears. "I should hate to be in debt to poor people!"

With this parting shaft she ran away, and rushed out into the street.

"Mrs. Sherwell is too busy to be honest to-day!" she said hotly, when she joined the girl. "Is it much that they owe you?"

"Much? Yes, to me. It's five-and-sixpence."

"Oh, I can pay that!" said Effie, taking out her purse and counting out the money. "Is your sister ill?"

"Yes, miss; she's consumptive. I don't know how to thank you."

"May I come with you and see her? My father is a doctor, and I'm dreadfully interested in people who are ill."

"Why, yes; but it's a poor place for such as you."

"I shall like it all the better. I'm more interested in poor places and poor people than in anything else in the world—except medicine."

"Come on, then!" said the girl, with a hard little laugh.

"It's not many people that care what becomes of such as we. But what will your folks say?"

"I don't care what they say!"

With this defiant remark, Effie marched on with her companion, her head raised, and resolution written on every line of her face. She knew that she was about to tread on forbidden ground, but her indignation at her mother's cruel carelessness rose high enough to drown every consideration of what was right and wrong.

The street into which she was taken was dreary and dirty; the court which led out of it was worse, for the sunlight never penetrated to its depths. The room at the top of the house, approached by dark, evil-smelling stairs, was gloomy in the extreme; but it was clean and tidy, and attempts had been made to make it bright and homelike.

A girl of twenty lay on a bed near the window. She raised herself as the door opened, and spoke eagerly:

"Oh, you have been a long time, Margie!"

"Have I, pet? Well, I couldn't help it."

Margie ran forward and bent over the bed, the light of affection shining in her eyes.

"I've got the money," she said, "and you shall have anything you fancy. This young lady's come to cheer you up a bit. She's Miss Sherwell's sister."

"She can't cheer me up. How can she, when I know I'm going to die?"

A great choking cry broke from the older girl's lips.

"You're not?" she said, almost fiercely. "How can you frighten me by saying such cruel things? Here, miss, tell her it's all fancy, while I go out and buy her something nice for her tea."

She rushed out as she spoke, afraid of breaking into tears before she reached the door.

Janie looked after her, and sighed.

"She hates to think about me going, and I hate it, too. Where do you think we go when we die, miss? I lie awake at nights wondering and wondering, till I nearly frighten myself to death. Where do we go?"

"To heaven, if we're good, I suppose; though I don't know very much about it."

"Don't you know how we get there? Once I heard a man preaching in the street say we couldn't be let into heaven unless we'd a white robe on. I puzzled my head about it till it went nearly silly. What's the good of a white robe? And, anyhow, Margie couldn't buy me one; and, if she did, it would only lie with me in the grave. Do you know what he meant?"

"No; I don't think I do," said Effie slowly.

"I've asked everybody I've seen, and nobody knows. The doctor came once, and I asked him. He said it was a bit of a fairy-tale, and I wasn't to bother my head about it, so long as I didn't get into wrong ways, like the other girls in the court. Nobody knows; and it seems I'll have to die without finding out." She raised herself, and her big eyes seemed to burn themselves into Effie's face. "Such as you are clever, they say, miss. Isn't there anybody you know that could tell me?"

"I expect my cousin could. She likes to talk about God and heaven, and things," said Effie, watching the painful eagerness in the worn, flushed face. "Shall I ask her, and come and tell you some day what she says?"

"Some day? How d'you know I shall be living then? If you think she knows, go and ask her now, and come back quick and tell me."

"Do you want me to very much?" said Effie dubiously.

"Yes, I do. Don't I tell you my head's going silly, and I can't sleep at nights, trying to find out? You might go and ask her."

Effie rose suddenly. "I'll go this very minute," she said, "and I'll come back as soon as I can. If I don't come, you'll know that they've caught me and stopped me."

As she went towards the door a knock came to it, and the next moment she came face to face with Thirza, who looked tired and worried.

"You, Thirza? Did an angel tell you to come?"

"No, dear. Your mother guessed where you had gone, and sent me after you. She is very angry, Effie."

"Thirza, what is the white robe?" Effie asked, resuming her seat by Janie's bedside.

"The white robe?" echoed Miss Lee, amazed at the way in which she was received.

"Yes, the white robe!" cried the girl on the bed. "They say you can't get into heaven without it."

Heaven's lovelight dawned in Thirza's eyes as she looked into Janie's poor, anxious face.

"It's the forgiveness of Jesus," she said, very gently. "Would you like me to come to-morrow and tell you about it?"

"No; I want to know now!" was the eager reply. "I'm afraid of dying before I get it."

Thirza looked at Effie. Effie returned her glance calmly. "You needn't worry about me," she said. "I'm not going to stir from this place till poor Janie gets to know what she wants. If mother is angry, it can't be helped."

"She told me to bring you back at once." "You can't carry me," said Effie coolly. "I'll go of my own free will when Janie is satisfied."

"Do be quick and tell me!" said the sick girl impatiently. "You rich people never think about anybody but yourselves."

"Yes; tell her," said Margie, who had come in. "I have no peace of my life for her wanting me to find out about it; and nobody seems to know, and she says she daren't die till she's got it. And, though I'm her sister, I'm pretty well sure she's good enough to get into heaven without all this fuss. The angels couldn't ever cast it up to her that she'd done anything bad, that I do know."

Thirza went to the bedside, and sat on a stool beside it.

"And you, poor child," she said, "feel in your heart that you're too wicked to enter the presence of God."

"That she isn't!" exclaimed Margie fiercely.

"We are all wicked, Janie. Evil thoughts steal into our hearts, and sinful words fall from our lips, and our hands do wrong deeds. And we forget God—God, who loves us so. We forget that He claims us for His own."

"He gave His Son to die that we might be saved from the power of the Evil One, who tries all through life to drag us away from that which is good. He follows us up to the very gate of death, trying to prevent us turning to God; but he can't do it unless we let him. If we cry to God, He will always hear us."

"And give us a white robe?"

"Yes, dear. Sin has made our hearts black, and no black heart can enter Heaven. Sin must be punished. God could not be God and leave it unpunished, however much He loved us. So He gave His Son to be punished instead of us, to die for us—that is, if we feel that we have done wrong and are sorry about it, we can ask God to forgive us, because Jesus has borne the punishment for us. And when He forgives, the blackness goes away from our hearts, and they become white. And when we reach the gate of heaven, the angels will see that the whiteness of our hearts is like a white robe covering us, and we shall not be kept out of the presence of God. Do you understand, Janie?"

"Yes, miss. But how will I ask God?"

"Just speak to Him as you speak to your sister when you want anything. He is close beside you, waiting for you, and wanting you to ask Him to make you good. Speak to Him in the night when you are wakeful. He can hear your softest whisper. Say, 'Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Forgive my sins, and make me pure and good, for Christ's sake.' And He will, for He says, 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.'"

Janie looked up wistfully into the sweet face.

"I should think He loves you very much," she said.

"Very much, dear, but not a bit more than He loves you. I ask Him every hour to keep my heart very clean and pure. When I feel how much He loves me, I am very, very anxious that He shouldn't see anything in me which displeases Him. Shall I ask Him to make us all what He wants us to be?"

She knelt as she spoke, and Effie knelt close beside her, her frame shaken with half-suppressed emotion.

"Dear Father in heaven," Thirza prayed, "look down upon us, and wash us whiter than snow. We know that we have sinned and grieved Thee very much; but Thou dost love us even when we are far, far away from Thee. Jesus shed His blood that our hearts might be washed and made clean and holy, and we ask Thee now to take away every bit of sin, and to help us to live lives which will please Thee, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

She rose, stooped hurriedly, and kissed the sick girl's white forehead.

"I must go now," she said. "I will come again if I can; but if not, remember that Jesus is quite close to you, and He will always stay with you if you will let Him."

Effie's eyes were red, and her voice shook.

"If they don't let me come again, Janie," she said, "I will try to send you a message, or something, somehow."



Laura and her mother saw that the dogcart was driven by Hugh Annesley. Thirza was sitting beside him, and Effie occupied the back seat.

"Good-bye!" She followed her cousin from the room, down the dark stairs, and up the gloomy court.

"I expect we shall catch it," she said, trying to laugh; "but it would have been cruelly wicked to leave Janie's question unanswered, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," said Thirza. "I think God meant it to be answered, and we must be willing to take the consequences. Effie, dear, what is the matter?"

"I was thinking about the white robe. I need it as much as Janie, don't I? If I were to die now, the angels would shut the gate of heaven against me. Wouldn't that be dreadful?"

"Yes. And, Effie dear, apart from that, think how we insult God by going through the best years of our lives in sin-soiled robes, when it is His will that even now we should walk with Him in white in a sinful world!"

"I never thought of that!" said Effie. "That's heaps better than wanting to have the robes made clean at the last moment, just that we may be allowed to creep into

heaven. Thirza, all that you said to Janie would apply to me, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, dear."

"I think my robes would take a great deal to make them clean," said Effie thoughtfully, glancing back over her wilful young life, and knitting her brows.

"Dear, the fountain Christ opened when He died was to wash away all uncleanness. Oh, Effie—Effie, I have prayed every day that God would touch your loving heart and make it His! You will be able to do so much for Him."

Effie was silent for the rest of the way home, not even answering Thirza's remarks. When they arrived at the house, she looked up with a tremulous smile.

"I have been asking Him to do for me what you asked Him to do for Janie," she said, "and I think He will. Only"—she sighed a little—"it will be dreadfully hard to—give up having my own way, and all that."

"God will help His child to keep her white robes clean when once they are cleansed," said Thirza. "His children may walk hand in hand with Him, and not be burned in the fire of temptation, or soul-soiled by the sin which is all around them."

She walked downstairs, and entered the drawing-room. Laura glanced at her in cold scorn; her mother looked intensely angry.

"Well, what have you to say for yourself?" she asked sharply. "First, you come and insult your sister and me before Mrs. Priorley, then you march off to the slums, and fraternise with low-bred people; and then you ignore the fact that I am waiting for an explanation, and shut yourself up in your own room. Your conduct is most reprehensible, and you are getting worse and worse every day. You make me ashamed of you—bitterly ashamed! I ought to punish you, but I really don't know what kind of punishment would be effective for a wilful, disobedient girl of nearly sixteen. Laura is a great comfort to me, but you—you are a constant anxiety and disappointment. Don't stare like that! Why didn't you come to me at once?"

Effie stood tall and straight during this long speech, her dark eyes fixed on her mother.

"Because I had to go to God first!" she said, without fear or hesitation.

"What?" exclaimed Mrs. Sherwell.



"Thirza, what is the white robe?" Effie asked, resuming her seat by Janie's bedside.

"I'm going to ask Him now to do that for me," Effie said. "Tell mother I will come to her in five minutes."

"Hadn't you better come now, dear?"

Effie paused, with one foot on the stairs.

"No, I think not," she said slowly. "I've sinned against God more than against mother, and I want to tell Him so."

She went upstairs to her room, and, kneeling at her bedside, she poured out her heart in very simple, straightforward language, confessing the sins which had hitherto lain very lightly on her conscience, but which now seemed to be very terrible crimes.

She forgot that she had promised to go downstairs—forgot everything except that she had a black heart, which needed cleansing, and that God's love and pity and the great sacrifice of Jesus had made it possible for it to be washed white as snow.

By and by a light tap came to the door, and Thirza's voice made her lift her head.

"Dear Effie, I am afraid you must come at once. Your mother thinks that you are still defying her," were the words which reached her ear.

"I will come," she said, rising and opening the door. "I had forgotten."

"I had to go to God first. I saw a girl in Maple Court who was troubling about being sinful. She will die soon, I think, and she was afraid, because she hadn't got on God's white robe of forgiveness. And it made me think that I hadn't, and somehow I began to see how very sinful I was, and how hateful I must be to God, and when I came in, I ran upstairs to ask Him to forgive me, and help me to be a better girl. I know I've been horrid, mother, but I do mean to try to be what God would like me to be, and I think I sha'n't be such a trouble to you any more."

Mrs. Sherwell stared in astonishment.

"Is all this rigmoré designed to divert my attention from your grave misbehaviour to-day?" she demanded. "You evade my questions!"

"I couldn't help doing what I did, mother. That girl's sister is very ill, and she wanted the money to buy her things."

"And haven't you sense enough to see that your behaviour to-day will delay the payment still longer?"

"No, mother; I paid it out of my pocket-money," said Effie gently. "I'm sorry I was rude to you, but something in me was sorry for the girl, and made me angry. If you could see Janie, mother—"

"There, that will do! Your pocket-money shall be stopped for a month, and you will not go near Maple Court again! Do you hear?"

"Oh, mother, I do want to go to comfort Janie, and I'm sure I could do her good. I'm sure God wants us to—"

"Do stop that canting!" was the impatient rejoinder. "I suppose you catch these low practices from Thirza. I wish the girl was at Hanover! Remember, I absolutely forbid you to go near Maple Court, or any other similar place. Not another word! Leave the room!"

Effie obeyed silently. Laura looked up and laughed.

"What a turn to affairs!" she said. "Fancy madcap Effie turning religious! Poor mother! You have your hands full with your daughters! I shouldn't wonder if Effie goes right in the opposite direction now—turns saint, and takes the veil. If she does, you will be saved fighting matrimonial battles on her behalf; and that will be something."

"Nonsense! It is a childish fancy that will pass," said Mrs. Sherwell testily. "Your future is my concern just now. Time enough to think of Effie's."

"Bother my future! I think I'll be an old maid, mother."

"You'll be nothing of the kind! Do you wish to disgrace me, after all I've done for you? Leave that sort of thing for Thirza. She is cut out for an old maid."

"Hugh Annesley thinks otherwise, I fancy," said Laura, trying to speak carelessly.

"Well, let him. They would suit each other admirably, and we should get rid of her."

"I suppose we should," said Miss Sherwell; "and we should certainly survive the loss."

Nevertheless, she was losing no opportunity of disparaging Thirza Lee in Dr. Annesley's presence, and she made strenuous efforts to prevent their meeting.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DOCTOR'S VERDICT.

"DR.

RANNESLEY!"

"Yes, Miss Effie."

"Are you very busy just now?"

"Not too busy to be at your service, if you want me."

The young man looked kindly into the girl's troubled face.

"I do want you; but not for myself," she said. "On Monday I saw a girl in Maple Court. She's dying of consumption. Perhaps you could do something for her. Mother has forbidden me to go again, and I must obey her."

"Must obey? I like to hear you speak like that."

Effie coloured.

"I don't want to obey," she said. "But I—I am trying to obey God, because I have given myself to Him; and so I must not do what mother does not wish me to do."

"Thank God!" said Hugh Annesley.

"A letter came this morning to say that Janie—Janie Peters is her name—was much worse, and was asking for us. Her sister said she was suffering very much. Thirza has gone, and it came into my head just now to ask you if you could do anything to ease her pain."

"I will try," said the young doctor, with alacrity. "Tell me where to find the place."

Effie directed him as well as she could, and he set off—glad because his errand was to the poor, jubilant because Thirza was already there.

Thoughts of her occupied his mind as he strode along. He thought of her timid, shrinking, weakened by grief and the loneliness of her position, as she was on the night when first he saw her, and marvelled at the bravery with which she had taken up her cross, and borne meekly the insults, neglect, unkindness which had fallen to her lot. He thought of her influence over Effie, of the many ways in which she tried to serve her Master, Christ, both indoors and out; of the growing sweetness of her character, and the beauty of her life.

He was climbing the dark staircase in Maple Court long before he had got to the end of the beautiful things he thought about her, and at the door at the top of the stairs he stopped. It was open, and he could see Thirza sitting by the bedside, her face alight with loving sympathy, her voice sweet and tremulous as she spoke of the never-failing love of God.

"He has promised to stay with you to the end, dear,"

she was saying. "He will hold your hand and wrap you up in His love. Don't let the Evil One make you afraid. If he whispers things which distress you, turn away from him to God, who said, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' He couldn't, you know, dear, after giving His life for you. He wants to have you for His very own."

A violent fit of coughing shook the girl, and seemed to be tearing the life out of her. Hugh Annesley went quietly down the stairs and hurried to the nearest chemist's. When he returned he entered the room, smiled a greeting to Thirza, and bent over the sick girl.

"I am a doctor," he said, very gently. "Will you take some medicine I have brought?"

She looked at the kind, strong face, and nodded.

"I'll take it," she said; "but it's no good. I'm about done for."

"Yes," said her sister bitterly; "it's no use coming now. If she'd had better food, and suchlike, she'd never have been going off to leave me. And grand ladies like that Miss Sherwell will keep us waiting for our money, and then beat us down to the lowest halfpenny. And they pretend it's charity to give us work at all."

"Miss Sherwell wouldn't keep you waiting for your money, surely?"

"Wouldn't she, then? Ay, more than once or twice; and Janie without a morsel of food she could eat. I'd have gone to the doctor about it—they say he's kind—but maybe they would have stopped giving me work. Oh, I've done all I could to keep Janie alive, and now she's going to die!"

"Nothing of the kind!" said Dr. Annesley cheerily.

Three pairs of startled eyes looked anxiously into his, and Thirza said:

"Do you mean it, doctor?"

"Of course I mean it! If you will help me, Miss Lee, I think, with God's blessing, Janie may live many long years yet."

A wild cry escaped from Margie. She flung herself at the doctor's feet.

"Oh, if you'll save her I'll bless you all the days of my life! She's all I have. The other doctor said he couldn't do anything, because she was in a consumption. Isn't it consumption?"

"Get up, child. No; it's only want of food and medicine and fresh air and skilled nursing. These she shall have, please God. Miss Lee, will you join hands with me in this?"

Thirza nodded, too much moved to speak.

"Thank you. Then, if you will remain here, I will go and make arrangements. I think I know a good woman in the country who will take Janie and you in. You," he said, looking kindly at Margie, "must part with your sister for a while, so that you can have her altogether, well and strong, in time. Can you?"

"I can do anything," sobbed Margie, "if you'll make her well! And, oh, Janie dearie, I'll work like a slave while you're away, to have things nice for you."

Thirza and the doctor looked at each other.

"You mean me to stay with Janie?" Miss Lee said. "But what about my aunt's permission, Dr. Annesley?"

"Oh, I'll get that!" he said, rising. "But if it means farewell to your only home, will you do this thing?"

He had drawn her away from the bed. She stood facing him for a moment, and looked thoughtful.

"Yes," she said presently. "If this is my duty, I will risk the loss of my home for it."

He took her hand and held it for a moment.

"God bless you, dear friend!" he said, in low tones. "I knew you would!"

When Hugh left Maple Court, it was with the intention of asking from Dr. Sherwell financial help to carry out his scheme, he himself being too poor, because of his lavish expenditure among the poor, to carry it out unaided; but in the walk home he changed his plans, and resolved to explain matters to Mrs. Sherwell and her elder daughter, and invite their co-operation.

"I will do that for their own sakes," he said. "It will give them an opportunity to atone for what must have been unconscious cruelty, and it will do them good to have something to think of besides the empty pleasures of their frivolous lives. I wish good Dr. Sherwell were not so blind to the imperfections in the character of those who are dearest to him."

Effie's anxious face greeted him.

"Were you in time? Could you do any good?" she asked.

Her eyes shone when he told her his opinion, and spoke of his plans.

"I wish I were old enough to nurse Janie myself," she said. "Will you be able to get a good nurse?"

"Yes. Thirza—Miss Lee is going to undertake the nursing."

"Thirza? Mother will never allow it!"

"Perhaps not," said the young man gravely. "But your cousin thinks it her duty, and she is prepared to risk the loss of her home for the joy of winning Janie back to life."

"That's noble!" said Effie, her lips quivering. "But—but that means I shall lose her. Oh, I can't bear that! Nobody was ever so much to me before Thirza came. And you, Dr. Annesley—won't you miss her?"

Hugh Annesley smiled.

"You and I must be brave, and bear the parting for a while," he said; "and afterwards——" He paused a moment. "God has our afterwards in His own keeping, so it will be all right."

Effie's eyes flashed. Young as she was, she was quick-witted and keen-sighted, and something in the man's face told her the secret of his heart.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "I do believe you are—I suppose I oughtn't to say it; but it would be lovely if it is as I think!"

"What do you think?" he said, smiling. "That I think Thirza Lee is the best woman in the world? Well, I do; but you mustn't tell her so. A poor man has to keep from saying a great many things he would like to say; and I am very poor."

"That's because you stay helping father, and giving all your money to the poor. You will get a practice of your own some day. And then——" she clapped her hands—"you will marry Thirza; and that will be lovely! You won't wait till then before you tell her, will you? Tell her at once, and make her happy. She has had so many things to make her unhappy, and she has borne them so sweetly. Do you think God can ever make me as good and useful as Thirza?"

"Yes, if you will let Him. Where are your mother and sister, Miss Effie?"

"Sitting in state in the drawing-room, waiting for callers. Oh, I do hope I sha'n't have that to do when I grow up. It's a horrid way of spending one's life!"

The young doctor's face was grave when he entered the drawing-room. Mrs. Sherwell motioned him stiffly to a chair, but he remained standing by the empty fire-place—a well-built, manly figure, which was the admiration of Laura Sherwell.

"You look as if you had been to a funeral, doctor!" she said flippantly.

"I have been to a sick-bed, Miss Sherwell, and have come away, hoping, with Mrs. Sherwell's kind help and yours, to chat the grave of its victim."

"What funereal language! Who is the victim?"

"A girl in Maple Court. She is supposed to be consumptive, but she is merely suffering from want of the necessaries of life. Her name is Peters. Her sister is a sempstress, who evidently finds it hard to provide her invalid with even the plainest food. She tells me that people make her work hard for very little money, and that some of them keep her waiting for her money, while her sister is starving. I think if the girl were to die, she would consider that these people had murdered her darling just as surely as if they had used cold steel!"

Annesley's face was pale, and, unconsciously, he spoke very sternly.

"Well, doctor, what has that to do with us?" began Mrs. Sherwell coldly.

But Laura, who had caught a look in the man's eye which maddened her, answered hotly.

"Can't you see, mother, that miserable wretch Effie and her prig of a governess have been poisoning Dr. Annesley's mind?" she said. "They go poking their noses into other people's business, and think it is their special mission to set the world right. You will really have to dismiss Thirza Lee, unless you wish Effie to be absolutely ruined. What do you mean, Dr. Annesley? Why do you taunt us about not paying our debts the instant they are due? It is something new for us to be talked to in our own house as if we were thieves and murderers! Are you going to allow these insults, mother?"

She was almost beside herself with rage. Mrs. Sherwell looked icily into the doctor's troubled face.

"Perhaps you will be good enough to explain?" she said shortly.

"I'm afraid I have blundered sadly," he said. "I am sorry. I came to enlist your sympathy and ask your help. This girl's life can be saved if she is taken away from her wretched home to the fresh air and sunshine and wholesome food of the country. I have too many claims upon me to undertake the whole of the expense myself, and I left Maple Court with the intention of asking Dr. Sherwell to see me through with the case. And now I am asking you instead. Will you help this girl back to life? With your permission, Miss Lee will undertake the nursing, and stay in the country till our patient has recovered her health."

"Our patient!"

The words had as bad an effect on Laura Sherwell as the name of "Miss Lee" had on her mother.

"Where is Thirza Lee?"

"At Janie Peters's bedside, waiting for your decision."

"That is easily given," said Mrs. Sherwell. "I do not choose to have in my house a girl whose tastes are low enough to take her into the slums for recreation——"

"Not recreation, mother," interrupted Laura. "Poor Thirza is only trying to get into favour with her dear Dr. Annesley by taking up the things he loves. I believe she hates the whole thing, only men are so blind they——"

"Hush, my dear!" said Mrs. Sherwell, seeing that Laura was forgetting herself in her anger. "Let me finish what I was saying. If this girl is ill, she can go to the hospital; there is no need for Thirza Lee to pose as a martyr of a nurse——"

"It is not a case for the hospital, Mrs. Sherwell."

"And if Thirza Lee prefers nursing a slum-girl to being governess to my daughter, she has my permission to do it; but on no account will I allow her to combine the two occupations in the slightest degree."

"Nor to come back to you when her task is ended?"

"Certainly not! She must choose once for all. I have borne a great deal for my husband's sake, but I will bear no more. Effie is becoming a little prig under her influence, and is taking to preaching sermons to us. I wish we had never seen the girl!"

It was in Hugh Annesley's heart to tell the proud woman that she had been entertaining an angel unawares, but he forbore. He himself knew it to his great joy.

"Then, will you not help me in any way with this sick girl?" he asked wistfully, more for their own sake than for Janie's.

"Not in any way!" said Mrs. Sherwell stiffly. "The doctor subscribes to various hospitals and charities, and that is enough, without my interfering in disagreeable cases. I don't believe in promiscuous charity."

"I am sorry you will not," he said gently. "It helps us so to help one another."

He bowed, and left the room.

"He will end by marrying Thirza," said Laura.

"My dear, how often you have made that same remark! If you harp on that subject much longer, I shall begin to think you are half in love with Hugh Annesley yourself."

"And if I were?" said the girl, half curiously, half defiantly.

"I should wash my hands of you. But I am not afraid!"

"No, you need not be afraid," said Laura, with a scornful laugh. "I shall never so forget myself. But if Hugh Annesley had wealth and position, I would choose him before every other man in the world."

"But he has neither," said her mother sharply; "therefore you must put him completely out of your thoughts. I confess I do not like this continual harping on one string. I shall never know an easy moment till you are properly settled."

CHAPTER VII.

HUGH ANNESLEY'S CHOICE.

AFTER his unsatisfactory interview with the ladies, Hugh Annesley found it delightful to tell his story to Dr. Sherwell, for, though not strictly a religious man, the doctor was noted for his kind heart and for his ready, practical sympathy with poor sufferers.

It was far from Hugh's wish to be the cause of dissension between husband and wife. He said nothing of his appeal

to them, nothing of the probable cost to Thirza of the position she had taken up.

He gained her uncle's permission for her to follow the promptings of her own heart, and a promise to be responsible for most of the expense of the case. Many and many a five-pound note, of which Mrs. Sherwell never dreamed, went to help disease-stricken slum-dwellers, as well as needy sufferers among the respectable poor, to struggle back to health and strength, and any particular case in which Annesley was interested gained his instant sympathy.

He was very fond of the young doctor, whose history he alone of his family knew. It had been confided to him at the commencement of their acquaintance, and at Hugh's request he had let nothing of his knowledge pass his lips, the young man wishing neither to be praised for a hero nor blamed for a fool.

It was not the need of money in the first place which turned Hugh Annesley's thoughts in the direction of medicine.

He had had a luxurious bringing-up. Orphaned before he could talk, he had been adopted by an uncle and aunt, who had made his happiness their chief concern, never refusing to gratify his fancies, whatever cost and trouble might be entailed.

So he passed through life until, in his twentieth year, his indulgent aunt was taken away, and he and his uncle faced their great sorrow together.

The difference of the effect of the blow on the young man and the old one was very great. Sir Griffith Annesley rebelled against the unseen power which had torn his idolised wife from his side.

The fountain of love and kindness which had constantly welled up in his heart when she was with him seemed to dry up, and he grew hard and cold.

Hugh, in his grief, found his thoughts straying away to the great beyond—to the life after death. Death's icy breath had never touched him before. The thought of it had never entered his mind. In the pride of his youth and strength, in the comfort and luxury of his home, in the certainty of the love of his relatives, he had felt secure and happy.

He had been shielded from trouble and sorrow ever since he could remember; but in the shadow of his great loss he looked in the face of Death, and knew that the deepest earthly love was perfectly powerless to keep that enemy away.

The knowledge changed his whole life. The things which had delighted him once ceased to have any charm for him, and he began to see that he must take life seriously.

A study of the New Testament made him acquainted with the character of the Son of God, who stands revealed there in all His Divine glory, perfect God and perfect man—the Example as well as the Saviour of the world.

His heart bowed in penitence before the Redeemer's cross, and he rose forgiven, full of adoring love, bent on treading the path the shining feet of the Christ had trodden.

He knew that some day he would be a rich man, and that some of the property which would come to him was in the heart of a crowded city, where the poorest of the poor dwelt in poverty and wretchedness.

With his life-purpose all unshaped, he made his way into the dreary city, saw what made his heart sick within him, and returned home weary and dispirited, but resolved to become a doctor, that he might be able to minister to those whose condition had roused his pity.

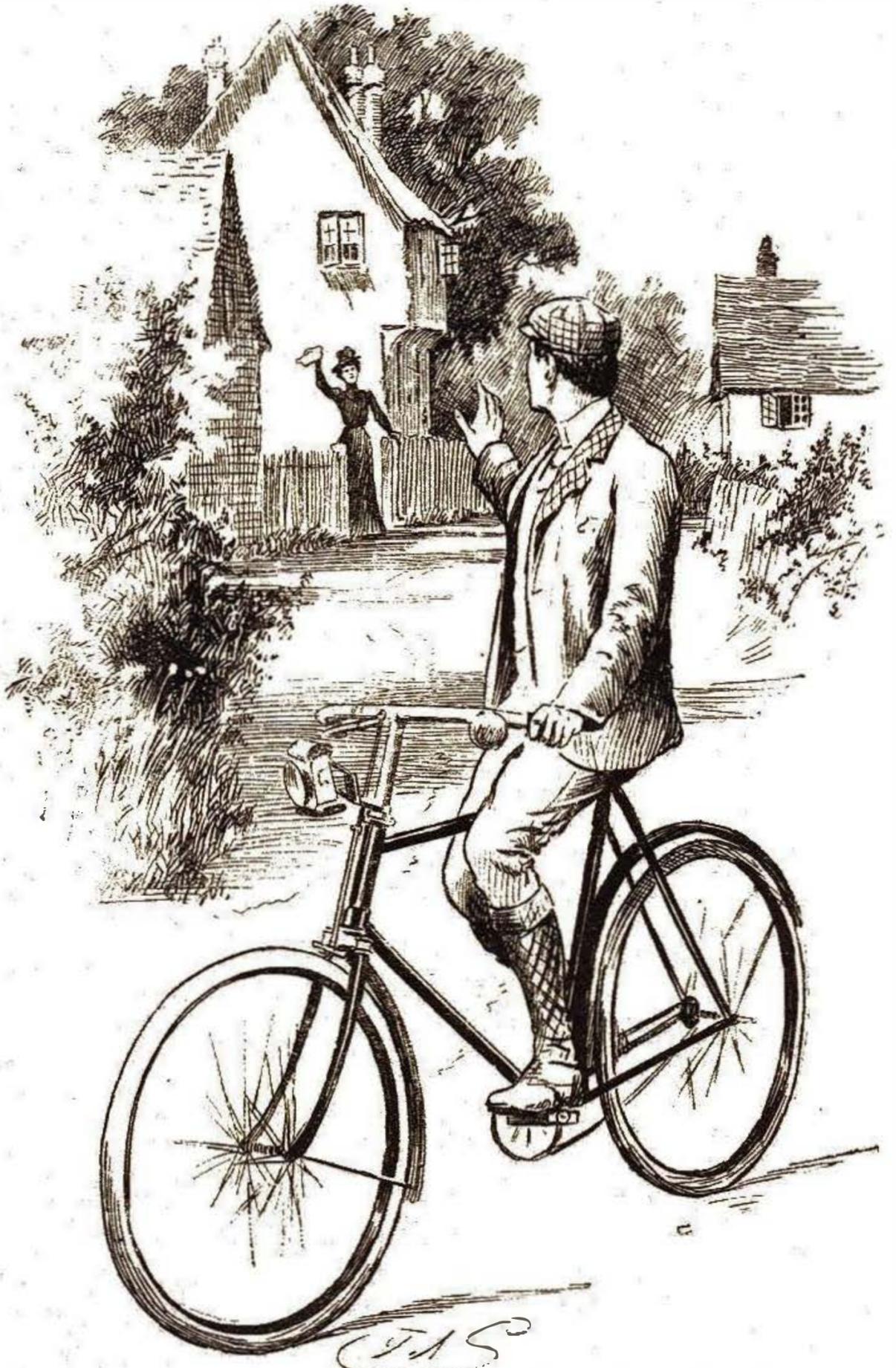
To his dismay, he found in his uncle vehement opposition to his plans. Grief had, apparently, unbinged the old man's mind. He refused to give his sanction to the

course Hugh had marked out for himself, or to his doing anything of a serious nature.

"Be a gentleman, honest and honourable, and take the good things fortune offers you. Let the men who have brains and no money do the dirty jobs of the world. I won't have you soiling your hands, or making yourself an old man before your time!"

"But, uncle," the young fellow had protested, "life was not given us for mere pleasure. I feel that, with my new convictions, I should sin deeply against God if I refused to serve Him and my fellow-men."

It the course of a few weeks the relations between the two had become strained. Neither would give way, and



Hugh Annesley carried away with him the exalted look on Thirza's face.

in the end Hugh found himself homeless, disinherited, with wild, passionate reproaches ringing in his ears, stilled now and again by the music of a Divine utterance which had floated down the ages—"If any man will be My disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."

A few hundred pounds, left to him by his mother, stood to his credit at the bank. The amount was sufficient to pay his college fees, and to support him until he had qualified for a doctor, and entered upon his work as Dr. Sherwell's assistant. He had been quite content with his position, affording him as it did an opportunity of study-

ing the needs of the poorest of the poor in a busy town, and ministering to them freely, with the full consent of the kind-hearted man whom he served.

He had meant to remain single all his life, and to devote himself to the service of the sick poor as far as opportunity offered; but the coming of Thirza, who loved the poor and suffering even as he did, had changed his determination. He would not forsake the cause which he had championed; but he must work for it hand-in-hand with Thirza. How that blessed state of affairs was to be brought about he could not see. All he could do just then was to love in silence, and wait for the dawning of a brighter day.

After his interview with Dr. Sherwell he cycled out into the country, made the arrangements he had hoped to make for the reception of Janie, and, before the July evening had lost its sunshine, had superintended the removal of the girl to the cottage, and installed Thirza there as nurse.

He carried away with him the exalted look on Thirza's pale, sweet face. He had taken to her loving messages from the doctor and Effie; but he had also told her that she had lost her home, for, though her uncle would never close his door to her, he knew that the girl would not consent to be the cause of a quarrel between husband and wife.

She had received the news gravely, but with a sweet, fearless courage which could only be born of a perfect trust in her God.

"To-day's duty lies to my hand," she said. "I will do it as well as I can, and leave the future with my Heavenly Father. He will not fail me."

Her sacrifice met with the only reward she asked for. The invalid began to recover almost with the first breath of country air and the first taste of the nourishing food she had pined for in vain.

At first Hugh Annesley came every day; but when Janie grew stronger, and his presence was not needed, he came less often, but his coming always brought new sunshine to Rose Cottage; and when the days passed, and he did not come, Thirza learned how much his presence and companionship meant to her.

Once Dr. Sherwell drove over, "to see Annesley's wonderful patient," as he put it, bringing delighted Effie with him.

One day in late September Effie came in Hugh's charge, her mother's consent having been given, only because, as Effie said, her father had "put his foot down."

"I'm going to stay with Janie," she announced, "and you two people are to go for a long walk. I prescribe it as necessary for your health. I mean to be a doctor some day, so I might as well be learning to prescribe at once."

So the two had wandered out into the golden beauty of the autumn afternoon, and, without having meant to do it, Hugh Annesley found himself telling the story of his love. Love was all he had to offer, and the offering of it came as a surprise. Hugh watched a new light come into the blue eyes, and a new beauty to the quiet face, which was already the most beautiful in the world to him, and knew that his love was returned before the tremulous lips were courageous enough to tell him so.

"I come to you with empty hands," he said. "Once they were full, and I could have showered earth's greatest gifts upon you; but had I kept what they held I should have had to turn traitor to my Master."

Then he told her the story of his life. She had honoured him always; after the telling she revered him. A man who could sacrifice so much for Christ was worthy of all love and honour.

They talked of the future. Their love would make it bright; and they would fill the waiting-time—the years that might elapse before they could belong to each other—with earnest work, and they would work the better because they loved so well.

They walked back through the golden silence and beauty of the autumn day, full of gladness, their hearts singing a song of thanksgiving.

They told their secret to Effie, who loved them both; but for the present they did not mean to take the rest of the world into their confidence.

Effie's delight made them smile.

"You said God had something for you to do when He sent you to our house," she said, "and you bore everything so beautifully. Just think! If you'd gone away when you were treated so badly, this lovely thing wouldn't

have happened; and"—Effie's voice sank almost to a whisper—"I should, perhaps, never have learnt to love God, and to want to please Him. Oh, I am so glad about everything!"

She was a picture of happy, innocent girlhood as she stood facing the two among the autumn flowers in the pretty garden; and no one who saw her there could have guessed at the big purpose cherished in the girlish heart.

"I think, when you are married, you will have to adopt me," she said. "I'm not going in for parties and things, like Laura. I mean to be a doctor; and mother will be so horrified that she won't want to live in the same house with me. I shall have to fly to you. Will you take me in, and help me to be what I want? I shall have a thousand pounds when I am twenty-one. Aunt Jemima left it me; and I think a thousand pounds will make a doctor, won't it? I don't mean ever to be married, but just to work to make people well—especially poor people. And—perhaps God will help me to tell them about the white robe."

Mrs. Sherwell was entertaining an old friend to afternoon-tea—a garrulous lady, fond of reminiscences and the affairs of her neighbours. She had recently come to live in Westchurch, and this was her first visit to Grosvenor Street.

"Fancy young Annesley drifting here!" she said. "I was amazed when I saw him coming out of your house with the doctor one day. A quixotic sort of fellow, my dear. How do you get on with him?"

"We have very little to do with him," said Mrs. Sherwell. "He's only the assistant, you know, and a decidedly inferior young man. I'm sure I don't know where my husband picked him up. Do you know him?"

"Oh, not personally, my dear; but I used often to see him when he was in his teens, riding about with his uncle. But inferior—is he really? I am surprised! Old Sir Griffith is considered such a perfect gentleman—so high-bred, and all the rest of it—and young Hugh was almost his constant companion. Dear me, I'm sorry to hear what you say."

"Sir Griffith?" said Mrs. Sherwell questioningly.

"Yes; his uncle, Sir Griffith Annesley. My dear Mrs. Sherwell, you don't mean to say you do not know of the relationship?"

"I know nothing whatever."

"Dear me! And his story is so romantic! Young Annesley would be a doctor, reason or none, because of some religious conviction or other, and Sir Griffith, who couldn't bear anything that wasn't quite—er—aristocratic, just washed his hands of him, and vowed he wouldn't leave him a penny. He's ill now, they say. If he dies, his nephew will be Sir Hugh. He can't rob him of the title, and a good many people think he'll change his mind about leaving him penniless. The old man seemed to go wrong when his wife died; if he had kept in his senses he wouldn't have let his heir leave him, for he fairly idolised him at one time. What do you think of that for a pretty story, Miss Laura?"

Laura did not reply. Her head was bent over a lapdog she was caressing. Mrs. Sherwell could not conceal her surprise and chagrin.

"A prospective baronet, and we didn't know!" she exclaimed. "It was mean of him not to tell us. How could we know what was due to him if he chose to hide his light under a bushel in that extraordinary way? You see, we thought he had low tastes, poor fellow! when, after all, his fads were such as any aristocrat might indulge in and be thought none the worse of. Most young men in high life have idiosyncrasies of some kind. I feel quite angry with myself for my want of sympathy with him, and I must certainly do my best to atone for it."

When she was alone with Laura, she was full of lamentation and regret.

"If we had only known! And you have been so horrid to him, Laura!"

"At your instigation, mother," said the girl coldly. "I told you what my opinion of Dr. Annesley was, and you know what advice you gave me."

"With the best intentions it is easy to make mistakes," said Mrs. Sherwell. "The only thing now is to try to rectify them."

"Do not ask me to help you!" said Laura passionately. "I am sick of scheming! I feel as if I were sacrificing my womanhood to petty ends!"

"Hush! hush! my dear!" said her mother soothingly. "You are overwrought by this disappointment. Leave it all to me. I know you have a warm corner in your heart for this young man. I have known it all along, but I wanted to do what I thought best for you—indeed, I did. Trust your mother to put things right, my dear!"

She rang the bell, and Jessie appeared.

"Is Dr. Annesley in?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then say that Miss Sherwell and I will be glad if he will come and have a cup of tea."

The maid disappeared, and presently Hugh's tall form had settled itself into an easy-chair.

"I'm afraid I have a very unprofessional weakness for tea," he said, laughing. "I never disobey you when you bid me to 'the cup that cheers, but not inebriates.'"

"And I hope you never will," said Mrs. Sherwell graciously. "And, Dr. Annesley, Laura and I want to ask your forgiveness for the words we spoke the other day. We were excessively rude to you, but something had happened to put us out, and you were so unfortunate as to be near enough to suffer for it. Do you forgive us?"

"Certainly, if there is anything to forgive."

"That is very generous of you. We shall try not to run the risk of forfeiting your friendship. How is the interesting invalid you are so good to?"

"Janie is improving every day, thanks to Miss Lee's kind and skilful nursing." He handed back the cup. "Thank you, Mrs. Sberwell; that was refreshing."

He went off to his work, wondering at the change in the lady's manner. He wondered still more as the days went by, and grew more weary of her friendliness and graciousness than he ever had been of her hostility.

One snowy day in December a telegram reached him. The evening of the same day found him by his uncle's bedside, and a complete reconciliation took place between the two who had been so long parted.

The old man, shivering on the brink of the river of death, found himself unable to do without either Hugh or Hugh's God, and he found that when he called upon them in the eleventh hour neither of them failed him.

He had never altered the will he had made after his wife's death, and so, when Hugh had seen him laid in the

family vault, he found that he was not only a baronet, but a rich man as well.

He wrote the news to Dr. Sherwell, who communicated it to his wife, and, a day or two later, after a very precious hour spent with the woman he loved, Hugh went back to Westchurch, and was greeted with effusive congratulations by Mrs. Sherwell.

"And now I suppose you will leave the profession of which you are so bright an ornament?" she said.

Hugh smiled.

"Oh, no; I shall still be a doctor. I am glad to be able to remain in the profession now that I have the means to benefit the suffering poor who need me."

"That is very noble of you, Sir Hugh!"

"And," he went on, not heeding her flattery, "my wife that is to be is of one mind with me in my purpose."

"Your wife?"

"Yes—your niece Thirza! Did you never guess that I cared for her?"

"Thirza! Thirza Lee!"

Mrs. Sherwell's face was full of incredulity, disappointment, and chagrin. The news seemed to take from her the power of speech after she had spoken the hated name.

Before she recovered herself, Laura, who had been sitting apart, rose suddenly, and came to Hugh with outstretched hand. Her face was pale, but there was a smile on it.

"May I congratulate you, Sir Hugh—you and Thirza?" she said. "I hope you will be very happy. And will you ask Thirza to let me beg her forgiveness for the hateful way in which I treated her? I—I think I should be a better woman if I could have the friendship of Thirza Lee."

That was the death-blow to Mrs. Sherwell's ambition; but it was not till her hair was white that she owned that the things she had struggled for were valueless, and that her daughters had chosen "the better part."

THE END.

The next story (No. 382), "A LITTLE YANKEE COUSIN," by Bessie Reynolds, illustrated by W. Buckley, will be published on Tuesday, January 8th.

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By the Editor.

Most heartily and sincerely I wish every one of my readers a happy and prosperous New Year. May it be a year of blessing to us all; and whatever it brings of joy or sorrow, gain or loss, may we feel that always and through all things our Father is with us, helping and upholding us with His mighty power.

We shall be blessed through the coming days only in so far as we rely on His guidance and direction in all we do. Every day, then, let us commit ourselves and all that concerns us to Him; and through His enabling grace let us go boldly forward, strong to dare and to do in the might of Him who loves us, and died for us, and lives for us. So, and only so, can be realised the wish that is in the hearts of us all, that this may indeed be "A Happy New Year."

"Do you know of any society that would let me have some tracts to distribute?" asks "Constant Reader," who is anxious to give them away amongst people who never hear the Gospel.

You might apply to the Religious Tract Society, Paternoster Row, London, or the Drummond Tract Depot, Stirling, N.B., for grants of tracts. But the best tracts I know are HORNER'S PENNY STORIES. Why not lend your back numbers for a week at a time, and then collect them and lend them again? In this way you might do an immense amount of good for very little outlay.

"Earnest One" and a friend have been keeping company with two young men, but the friend and her lover have quarrelled, and "Earnest One" asks: "Would it be a wise plan for me to give up the other young man, so that they could be as they were before they met us?"

What an extraordinary question! You must not allow your friend's quarrel to have any effect whatever on your own love-affair, "Earnest One," except to make you even more loving than you have been; and then, perhaps, when your friends see how happy you are they will make up their quarrel and return to the old order of things. But, give up the man whom you love because two other lovers can't agree?—Oh dear no!

"Through bad health I have been advised by my doctor to use alcoholic drinks," L. T. S. (Walthamstow) tells me; and as she is a total abstainer, she has some scruples about acting on the doctor's advice. What is she to do?

Change your doctor, L. T. S. In very rare cases, it may be necessary to take alcohol as a medicine, but the most eminent physicians are agreed that it is quite unnecessary to use strong drink in any form as a beverage for health's sake.

"Do you think there is any chance of me ever going to heaven?" asks "Mary," who then goes on to tell me that she has bought various books to the value of ten shillings, and cannot pay for them. "I dare not tell my parents," she adds.

But you *must* tell them, Mary. You will have no peace of mind until you do. You have acted very foolishly, as doubtless they will tell you; but the mischief can be remedied with their help, I dare say. I see no reason why you should not go to heaven if you believe on the Lord Jesus, and ask God, for His sake, to forgive you all the wrong you have ever done.

"Is pork more injurious than beer?" "What is the proper price for a pound of genuine tea?" "Is it wise or not to eat large quantities of pickles?" "What shall I have

to give for an illustrated herb-book?" These are some of the questions asked me by A. H. (Nottingham), who is evidently of an inquiring turn of mind. I suppose I had better deal with them in their order.

No. 1.—I certainly do not think that pork is more injurious than beer. No. 2.—The proper price for a pound of tea depends upon the depth of your purse, A. H. You can, if you wish, pay 5s. for a pound of tea, or you can get the same quantity, just as genuine, for 1s. 6d.; but, of course, you would not expect the same quality for the latter as the former sum. A fair price nowadays for tea of average quality is from 2s. to 2s. 6d. per pound. No. 3.—I should say that it is not wise to eat "large quantities of pickles." No. 4.—I don't know; but I will make inquiries, and pass on to you any information I may be able to get.

Frankness is evidently a strong point in the character of one of my correspondents—E. A. C. (Chelmsford)—who says, "I am writing to see if 'Under the Evening Lamp' is true!"

Very true indeed, E. A. C., as you will have found for yourself when you have seen this answer to your own letter. And this page is literally written under an "evening" lamp burning at this moment (11.45 p.m.) on my study table, whereon are many letters besides yours waiting for attention. With regard to the Swiss Orphanage, I cannot do better than refer you to the English branch of the Institution (15, Mecklenburg Square, London, W.C.), for the information you require.

"There is a young man whom I love, and I think he loves me," writes W. M. (Hampstead). "He seems to like to be with me, and kisses me, and makes a great fuss of me, but he doesn't ask me to marry him. Do you think it is inmodest in me to allow these things without some understanding?"

Not inmodest, perhaps, if, from your knowledge of the young man, you have reason to believe his intentions to be honourable. But you ought not to allow the present state of affairs to continue. Take your parents into your confidence, and ask them to quietly hint to the young man that he is taking things rather too much for granted.

"Do you accept pieces of poetry for publication in HORNER'S?" asks M. M. (Brunswick), who encloses her first attempt at versification for my criticism.

No, I do not accept poetry for this paper, M. M.—as you would know if you were a regular reader—and I am afraid you will have to study much and write a very great deal before you will be able to find a publisher or purchaser for your verses.

"I want to know if you can tell me the best way to be a Christian girl," writes C. B. (Leamington). "I always used to think I was one, but lately I feel as though I can't do or think right."

The best and, indeed, the only way to be a Christian is to follow Christ in all things, C. B. If you are truly trying to serve Him, and seeking in His strength to do always the things that please Him, you will soon cease to feel as though you "can't do or think right." The very fact that you desire to serve Christ is proof that the Holy Spirit is influencing you, and if you will only do your part, be sure your Saviour will do His, and He will give you the joy of knowing that you are a Christian—that is, a *Christ's one*—one who belongs to Him.

[We invite our readers to write to us concerning any religious or social difficulties they may have to meet. We shall be glad to advise them as God gives us guidance; and we trust that our Evening Lamp may shed a helpful light on many of the perplexities and worries of daily life. Letters should be addressed "Lamp," "Horner's Penny Stories," 2, Carmelite Street, Temple, London, E.C.]





MARK STRATHMORE'S RENUNCIATION

By FANNIE EDEN, Author of "The Sins of the Fathers," &c.

CHAPTER XII. (continued).

Dr. Gustave left some directions as to the treatment of the ankle, promised to call in the morning, and, with a warm pressure of the hand, and a full, bright smile, he was gone. And Kathleen, as she remembered afterwards, had scarcely thanked him!

"But he is coming to-morrow," she said. And she wondered why the thought filled her horizon with perfect satisfaction.

That night she lay too happy for sleep, her heart stirred with delicious fancies. For, oh! that day had been so beautiful, she told herself, a very pearl of days, set in a long row of dull, melancholy ones, for it had brought her a friend such as she had never known before, one who understood her so well, and who would not let her feel lonely and desolate, but who would come in, at times, and talk delightfully, as he had done to-night, and break up the stagnant gloom of her life, and make it bright with the charm of his warm, genial presence.

Kathleen knew not the meaning of the strange compound of unspeakable feelings that moved her heart, and filled her mind with visions that made the future seem full of dim splendour and glorious possibility. She knew not that the mystery of love had touched her heart, and had already transformed her world into Eden.

Meanwhile Kenneth Gustave and Black Prince were speed up to a remote hamlet some miles away, for the busy country doctor would have to make up in the darkness and gloom of night for the time he had given to the rescue of the young girl he had so opportunely found on the moors.

His practice extended over a wide area, and his patients were very numerous just now, for the autumn had set in, with its usual increase of sickness.

With unflagging zeal he fulfilled his every duty, the poorest sufferer receiving the same unremitting care and thoughtful attention that he vouchsafed to his wealthier ones—nay, to these his professional gravity and somewhat brusque alertness of manner gave place to a very human tenderness that led him to linger with untiring patience and gentleness beside the bed of a lonely or forsaken one, performing offices of ministration quite outside and beyond the pale of his professional functions.

But at last his day's work was done. As far as lay in his power he had brought rest and comfort to the patients who looked to him for help and succour, and now Black Prince, with a neigh of pleasure, turned his face towards home.

Dark was the way and often treacherous the road; but Kenneth Gustave, laying the bridle on his horse's neck, left him to his own devices, knowing that by so doing he was best consulting both his own and his horse's safety, for never had the instincts of the brave, wise creature been at fault.

At length, however, they struck a well-known road, and then, with a shake of the bridle and a word to his ear, Kenneth gave Black Prince to understand that their going must be quicker.

With a cheerful whinny and a toss of his head, the animal responded. Stretching out his shapely neck and laying back his ears, away he went, and took the last mile and a half of their journey at a splendid gallop.

He drew up at the gate of a grey-stone house. A man, who had evidently been awaiting his master's return, immediately came forward, and took the bridle.

"I am late, Jackson," said the doctor. "You must be tired."

The man touched his hat. "Nay, master, but it is you as must be that. We were fair anxious about you."

"I have been delayed. Look well to Prince; he has had a long and hard day."

"Never fear, master, he shall be well cared for."

And he walked off, the horse's nose laid caressingly on his shoulder.

The front door had opened, and the light of the hall streamed on to the pathway. Kenneth strode hastily forward to greet the figure that awaited him there—a sweet and stately lady, with a manner of gracious dignity.

As their hands clasped and as they stood together under the lamp, it was easy to see that they were mother and son.

To be sure, the hair of the one was silver, while that of the other was a rich dark-brown; but there was the same firm, proud, yet very sweet, curve of the lips, the same expression of alertness and subdued fire in the quick glance of the dark eyes; but above and beyond this they had in common the same undefinable stamp of power that denoted individuality and strength of character.

"Mother, you have been troubling about me? Now, that was wrong. How often have I told you to go to bed and rest when I am delayed!"

She was not one to express her feelings much by words, and now she received his kiss and tender embrace with only her usual calm smile of love.

"Nay, my son," she said, "it would not be like your mother to sleep when her boy is wandering she knows not where. See, I have the fire bright for you in the dining-room, and your sapper is waiting nice and hot. Now let me see my tired boy rest and eat."

And then, with her own gentle, soothing manner, she drew him to his armchair, gave him his warmed slippers. With her own hand she prepared his coffee exactly to his taste, and attended to his every want, hovering near and about him with the sweet, loving zeal and delight in her ministrations that only a tender mother can know.

To her surprise, he seemed to care little for his supper. Usually, after such a long fast, he enjoyed his meal with a healthy appetite.

Moreover, she noticed that instead of regaling her, as was his wont, with a humorous or interesting account of his doings, he was strangely silent, relapsing ever and anon into profound reveries.

Seeing this, with her usual tact she forbore to question him; and when, after a time, he pushed aside his food, almost untasted, she was careful not to appear to notice it.

But when she stooped to kiss him good-night, he suddenly drew her to him with unusual fondness.

"Mother," he whispered—"mother, I never loved or revered you so much as I do now, and I never felt before what an infinite debt of gratitude I owe you, because in the treacherous and slippery days of my youth your pure and holy influence held me as by a spell, and kept me from wandering into paths of shame and dishonour. Mother sweet and true, to you, under God, I give the thanks that to-night I can look into your pure eyes and say, 'Your son has never defiled his manhood or rendered himself unworthy of the place he holds within your spotless hearth.'"

Then, as if abashed by this unwonted display of feeling, he turned quickly, and passed from the room.

Mrs. Gustave was touched and pleased even to tears with this sudden outburst of gratitude on her son's part, and for this special tribute he had paid to her tender care and love; but she was also conscious of a vague wonder as to what had caused his feelings to reach a point of culmination just at this particular time. Did some dim surmise of the truth dawn upon her as she sat and mused, pondering, as another mother of old had done,

all these things in her heart? It may have been so, for deep and long were her spirit wrestlings before God as she knelt in prayer that night.

Kenneth Gustave had gone to his room, and had shut to and locked the door.

He put out his light, drew up the blind, and flung high the window.

"At last!" he cried. "At last I can be alone with my thoughts!"

He leaned out into the cool, still night, and drew in deep breaths of its dewy air; then lifted his eyes to where the quiet stars shone with their calm and steadfast light.

"I wondered what it meant," he mused, "that strange stir of feeling that passed over me when I first saw her in church, her sweet girl-face leaning against a pillar. I was dull, inanimate, absorbed with all the interests of my life, and did not know; but my heart knew, and pulsed suddenly because it had found its queen."

"To-day, when I looked down at her, lying helpless in the heather, and met her eyes and felt the touch of her hands outstretched to me in perfect trustfulness, I knew what only my prophetic instinct had felt before—that I had come to that for which I have been waiting all my life. Thirty years? Have I lived thirty years without her? How strange! And yet life without her now seems only an empty mockery. Shall I ever win her?"

He drew a deep breath, and his heart stood still, then beat like a hammer against his breast. To call her his own; to see the love-light burn for him in her pure, sweet eyes! Dare such a dream be his?"

"I know not," he said. "It may never be. She seems as far beyond me as those stars up there; but I love her—I love her! This alone makes life glorious and full of a dim, delicious mystery."

"Even if she never loves me in return, I can thank God that she has stirred my heart with this deep and serious passion. It is a gift from Heaven. It makes me abhor my meaner self and all within me that is small and vile. Already I feel lifted from earth and nearer to that which is pure and holy."

It was hours before Kenneth had any wish for sleep, and his musings were sweet and long.

He heeded not that a storm came up from the sea, and broke with tumult over the earth. It fell in somehow with his mood, and he rejoiced in the voice of the breakers thundering against the rocks, and in the clear cry of the wind shrilling over their roar.

It passed, and the sky grew serene again; yet still he waited. Down the steps of heaven he watched the stars wander and pass, until the last one fell beneath the low rim of the sky, and the east grew luminous, preparing for the day.

Then out from the springs of the morning flashed arrows of light, and the young sun sprang laughing from his rose-red couch, all on fire for his flight.

He thrilled as the joy of the morning entered into his being, and he told himself that never day had broken so fair as this that would bring him into the presence of his love.

CHAPTER XIII.

Kathleen was reclining on a couch drawn up to the window of the parlour that commanded a view of the white road that led from the village.

It was growing dusk, and the long, low room lay in shadow, except where it was bathed in the warm glow of the fire, that the chill of the autumn evening made acceptable.

Kathleen lay back, her hands clasped in easy grace behind her head, her eyes fixed on the golden gates of the west, that had just swung-to upon the departing sun.

The lines of her face were restful, the sweet curve of her lips full of peace. Ever and anon a dreamy smile would flit over her face, as though her thoughts were very happy ones; and if a soft sigh sometimes escaped her lips it seemed born more of bliss than sorrow.

Books were on a table near her, some open, marked, and lined, as those are that we love. One lay upon her knee. There were flowers near her, too—flowers that did not grow in the garden of Werneth Low. At times she bent over them, as if their fragrance pleased her.

But now she draws her table close to her, and writes

rapidly. Let us approach, bending unseen over her, and follow the quick flight of her pen.

September 24th, 18—.

It is three weeks and more since I sprained my ankle on the moor, and most of that time I have been a prisoner.

A very, very happy one, for my doctor has not let me be dreary or lonely.

I always call him "my doctor" in my heart. "My doctor," gentle and kind to me always.

It is not that I have seen very much of him. He is too busy to give me more than a flying visit every day; but sometimes he lingers for about twenty minutes or so, and these minutes seem the most precious of my life. For he has such a power of uplifting me, and filling me with an inward irradiation, a fine exhilaration, that stirs heart and brain like wine!

I feel always at my best before him. Fancy is quickened, and memory made richer. A few words from him fire my imagination, and troops of gentle thoughts sweep through my mind, and the dumb spirit that nearly always takes possession of me before strangers flies away, and conversation flows easily.

Our talk ranges over numberless topics. It soars high, it sinks deep; its themes are drawn from many sources.

Of course, we discuss our different authors, and we are pleased to find that we have so many favourites in common. I have been charmed, too, to discover that he has hidden away in his heart many precious bits and quotations that I have also made mine.

And yet we are so dissimilar in many, many ways—in fact, notably opposite in our views. Yet this only constitutes a greater charm, and I like that in him best that is not myself. Who is it that says: "You must be very two to be very one"?

He knows all my history. Before I knew, I had told him everything. I do not mean about that strange vow which binds me to Mark Strathmore, that is sacred between me and the man who one day is to be my husband; but everything else I have told my friend, and the great ache in my heart left by my father's death seems healed by his gentle touch of sympathy.

I think it is his perfect sympathy, and his calm, grave, protecting care, that inspire me with such confidence and rest.

I do thank God for this dear friend. Each morning I say: "Bountiful God, I am grateful. I take this great gift from Thee. I thank Thee for the nobleness of my friend, for his truth. I thank Thee for the sweet sincerity of joy and peace which I draw from communion with this brother soul."

One night, when I was sitting thinking of all these things, I said suddenly to Margot, who was doing something in my bedroom:

"Margot, do you know much of Dr. Gustave? You seem to do so, and I notice he always calls you by your Christian name."

"Know the doctor?" she said, with an indignant snort that I should doubt it. "Is there a man, woman, or child in the village—ay, or far beyond—as does na?"

"What do you mean?" I said.

"Why, did na he just offer up his very life for us all when th' village was stricken with cholera, and we were cut off from all help, as though we were a plague-spot?"

"Did he do that?"

"Ay, did he; and worked fit to kill anybody ten times over, and would have done him, what wi' pestilence and all, if the angel of the Lord hadna stood near him all the time, with a drawn sword."

Never had I seen old Margot so full of feeling, and I loved her for it. I was not surprised. I knew he was heroic and great.

"I can't help wondering," I said, after a time, speaking more to myself than Margot, "why one so full of power and character did not seek a wider sphere for his energies. Why is he hidden away in this little place, when he is fitted for so much grander an arcua?"

"Indeed, and it's just because he is the great unselfish creature as he is!" she burst out. "Didna you hear how it come about he settled down here?"

"No, Margot. Oh, tell me!" I said eagerly.

(To be continued.)

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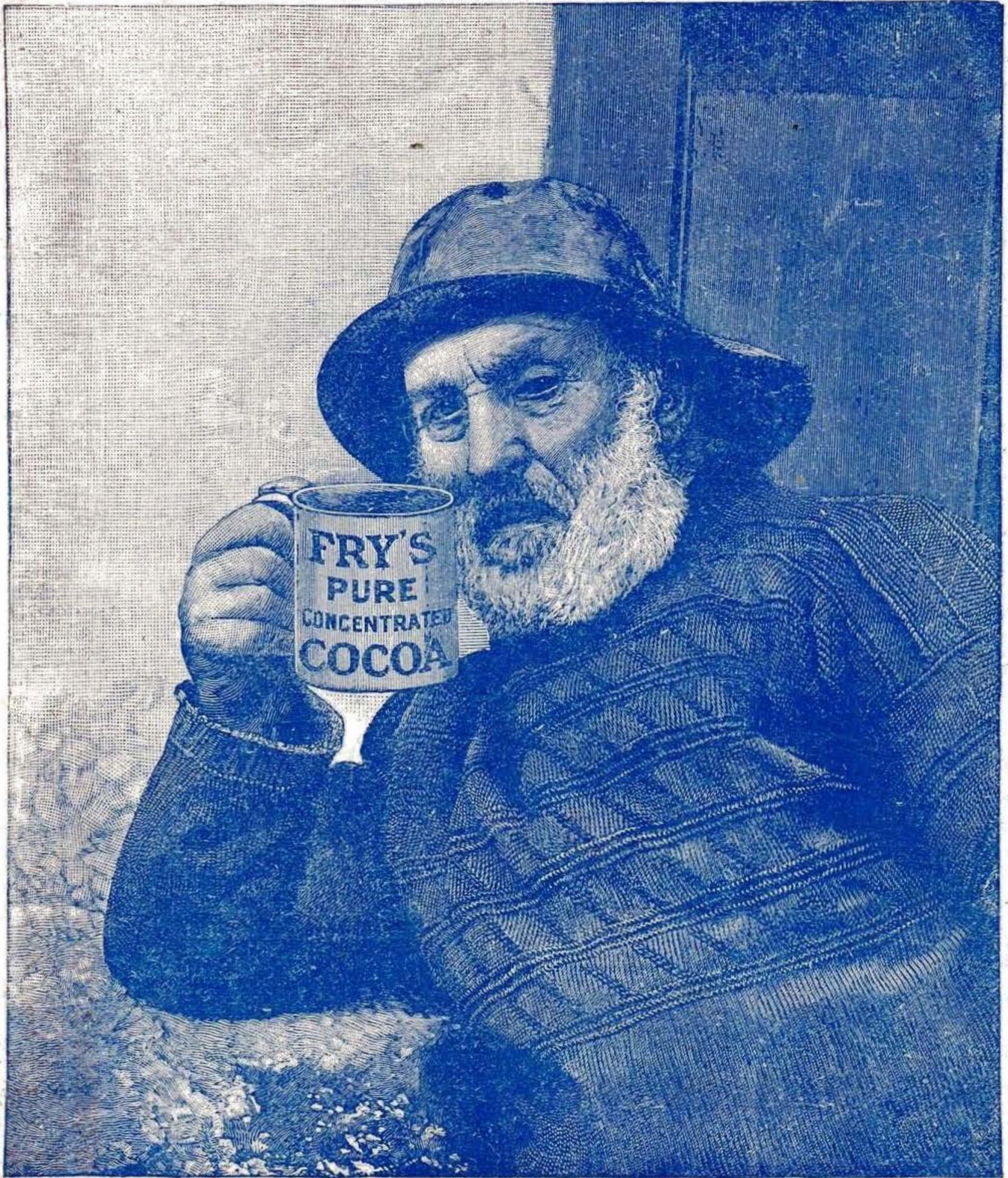
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