



"Ah! little mischief!" cried the elder cleric.—(See page 52.)

## THE WEDDING RING,

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### CHAPTER IV.

#### THE CLOUD BREAKS.

When, slowly, like a swimmer rising through deep, dark waters to the growing light above, Gillian came back to consciousness, phantom memories of the troubled visions which had haunted her through her long sleep so mingled with realities that it took some time to settle her impressions of the things around her.

She was in bed, in a large and lofty room, which was certainly not the room in which the last few moments of her life had been passed, though whose it might be, or how she had come there, were mysteries at which she could make no guess.

There were hushed voices speaking at a little distance, but she was so weak that when she tried to turn her face in that direction she found the effort beyond her strength. She lay and wondered, with a languid curiosity, till a step approached her

bed, and she saw, bending above her, the face of a young woman, with a cloud of fair hair arranged beneath a white cap.

A soft hand touched her forehead, and a voice asked:

"You are better, now?"

"Where am I?" Gillian would have asked in return, but her voice, like her strength, had gone, and the low and broken murmur which escaped her lips was scarcely audible to her own ears.

"You have been very ill," the girl said, in answer to the movement of her lips. "Do not try to talk, you are too weak. You are in St. Thomas' Hospital. You have been here over a week."

Memory flowed back on Gillian like a flood.

"Dora!" she panted, feebly.

No emotion less strong than that all-conquering one of maternity could have given her the strength to shape an intelligible word.

"Your little girl? She is well. She is in the country. Mr. Bream is taking care of her. You shall see her when you are well enough—to-morrow, perhaps, if the doctor will allow you. And now you must be very quiet, and not try to talk any more. You have been very ill, indeed, and in great danger! but that is over now."

Gillian was so weak that before the happy tears the woman's reassuring words had called to her eyes were dry upon her lashes, she had fallen asleep. When next she awoke the room was growing dark with shadows. The great bulk of the Palace of Parliament was dull purple against the rosy light of the western sky, and softened murmurs of voices and the clank of oars came up from the river below.

Presently, a voice was heard praying, and muffled responses came from the rows of beds which lined the ward. Then a hymn was sung:

"Abide with me, fast falls the eventide!"

and the guests of the great hostelry of the good St. Thomas addressed themselves peacefully for sleep.

She woke in the early morning, to find the gilded vane of St. Stephen's burning like a beacon in the bright dawn, and lazily watched the last thin