

still it was so, proving to the full the instability of women's hearts.

Far away over the broad ocean a different scene was being enacted. Stretched upon a bed a man lay, to all appearance sick unto death. Females are scarce in the Australian bush; therefore one of the man's own shepherds was his sole help in this his dire need. It was weary work, the sitting there with nothing to do but to listen to the restless moans and broken sentences of his delirious charge. Then it was winter time as well, and for the last day or so it had been raining almost incessantly. Sometimes the man wandered into the other apartments for change. The house was rude in its outward appearance, but the inside seemed as though much care had been bestowed upon its general arrangements. One room was especially pretty. A bedstead hung with white stood there, together with toilet requisites equally dainty; and to hide as far as possible the rough board partition, some bright prints had been framed and hung, then here and there brackets were fastened, one of which was actually wreathed with evergreens, as though some one had wished to see the effect. So the weary nurse went from room to room, sometimes sighing heavily, but more out of pity for his sick master than for his own loneliness; indeed, he really cared naught for the latter, so long as the sick man recovered. But as the days passed by without improvement he began to lose heart and grow more melancholy than ever. The nurse did not know that the turning-point was near; still he was very tender and pitiful to the man who lay helpless as a child before him; and oh! he hoped and prayed earnestly in his poor way that it might not be death which was coming on. The rain ceased at last, but the master was no better, and the watcher grew fearful in the dark hours of the night, and sighed anxiously for the morning. It came by-and-by, and the sun shone gloriously forth; then later in the day one of the shepherds arrived laden with necessities which he had been to the town to fetch, and the other man had half a mind to ask him to stay with him and share this night's watch. Among the things, however, which the new-comer had brought was a letter, which took Harvey's (the nurse's) attention at once. He took it up carefully, as his master might have done, "Poor fellow! all through the beginning of his illness he wor a axin' for letters; but I'm afraid now he'll never come to enough to read this 'un."

"Is it so bad?" questioned his fellow.
"Aye, come and see;" and together they stole on tip-toe to the inner apartment. Both men started back. Was he dead? No, not dead, and Harvey murmured a "Thank God" under his breath, for to all appearance the fever had spent itself out; at any rate the man whom they had spoken of as dying lay sleeping as quietly as a little child.

A month or two later, and the sick man was almost himself again. Careful nursing, a good constitution, and, above all, the blessing of God, had rescued him from the gates of death; yet he seemed strangely different in his ways, and his face appeared older than his years warranted. Spring came, and trees and plants unfolded their buds, while here and there bright patches of colouring appeared, rendering the scene glorious to behold. The skies, too, grew more and more intensely blue, and one day out in the deep solitude he so much sought, George Hallem came to a determination—he would return to England.

Down in Cornwall stands an old-fashioned manor-house, whose grounds slope down to the very sea. It is out of repair now, and it was out of repair then, for what I am about to relate happened in the self-same summer in the which Hugh Endor had trifled away his precious time amongst the Cumberland lakes—the same summer, too, which, being winter in the Antipodes, had witnessed George Hallem's illness and subsequent recovery. In a vine-covered arbour sat an ancient lady, and, as her eyes wandered over the calm sea, a tenderness seemed to engross her whole being. Once or twice she sighed deeply, and when a slight noise caused her to withdraw her gaze, and she beheld at a distance a tiny, girlish figure, she raised her weak, quivering voice, and called, "Olive! Olive!"

Instantly the girl was at her side. Oh! she was so small, and looked so woe-begone as well, that no one could have helped pitying her.

Then came pining from the girl's lips the oft-repeated tale of love which has not been love; of how she had waited day after day, hungering for some little word; how that she had given her whole heart's store and could not recall it, and that

life now seemed to her but as one long trial and disappointment. Yet, as is generally the case, hope was still alive within her; so at the end she said, as though hoping that granny would endorse her words, "But, oh, granny, he will come! he must! Don't you think he will, granny dear?"

"My child, I cannot tell. You must hope and trust, dear; and, in the meantime, strength will come to bear it, even should the worst be as you say."

But as the summer grew old and autumn tints began to glow and kindle, no word came; and the old woman and the young sat for hours apart from the others of the household, while granny told over and over again of a disappointment of her own early youth, and of how as time passed it had cured her aching heart, and that, after all, "grandfather had been very kind, and the best husband in the whole world."

But Olive never smiled nor took heart, her cry was still the same: "If he does not come my heart won't ache, granny, it will break. I almost think it is broken now."

It was pitiful to see how weak, thin, and spiritless she had grown; and yet she had used to be the light and life of the whole country for miles round. Everyone knew Olive Bright. "Bright Olive" her friends had been wont to call her; now, however, the name seemed but as a mockery; and when they called to see her, in the hope of wooing her back to her old self, she but craved to be left alone—alone with granny. Granny was so soon to leave earth, and was, withal, so unearthly in her way of receiving the girl's confidence, that somehow the two were well-nigh inseparable; and all the while time and events were hastening—events of which they were in utter ignorance, but which were, nevertheless, connecting them in the long chain of life to others whom on earth they were destined never to know.

So Christmas drew on apace, and among the lakes, as in other places, preparations were being made to keep the festive season. So beneath the genial glow of "Father Christmas's" friendly smile hearts beat high with expectant joy, and Rose Drummond's tongue chattered blithely of the great things which he was working for her happiness alone.

It was Christmas Eve at last, and Hugh had just arrived; so amid the bustle and confusion which followed, Belle slipped quietly away. A sort of restlessness had engrossed her whole being during the day, so out into the quiet moonlight she stepped, and there, pacing backward and forward, strove to nerve herself into a kindly feeling for the new comer. All at once, somewhere out of the shadow, a tall figure advanced, and, hearing his footstep, Belle turned sharply round. A stifled cry burst from her lips, then she went forward, although the pain at her heart was well-nigh unbearable.

"George, I did not expect you," was all she said; nevertheless she held his hand tightly within her own, as though either to give or receive strength.

"I arrived in London last evening, and have run down here to-day to spend Christmas with you. Why don't you bid me welcome?" His tone was light, and he seemed anxious to leave her and go on to the house.

She guessed of whom he was thinking, and passing her arm through his, said, "Don't go in yet, George. I have much to tell you; so we will first walk up and down out yonder, then you shall please yourself."

She led him, against his will, to the moonlit lane beyond, and while he inwardly chafed at the delay, she cast over in her mind how and in what way she had best tell her sad tale. At length she began. "I did not think you would have come after receiving my letter, George."

He could feel how she trembled, although her voice was steadfast and true. Nevertheless, his tone was sharp and harsh, as he replied, "Did you, then, expect me to believe what you had written? Pardon me, Belle, but it cannot be true! I will not believe it of her!"

"Has Rose written at all?" Her voice was scarce above a whisper.

"Not since you; indeed, I had started for England before another mail was due. Her last reached me while I was ill." Belle looked up quickly. "Yes, I have been ill, very ill; has not Rose told you? I wrote her a long letter as soon as I was able; but, as I was saying, her last reached me during that time, and, poor darling, she said that she was losing heart, that the engagement had better be broken off, as so long waiting was hurtful to us both. As though I had not written for the last six months past, saying that I had now prospered sufficiently to warrant my offering you both a home as soon as you liked to come. You see, Belle"—he was growing earnest, as though to talk away the slight mistake which had