

"What a farce the words 'love, honour and obey' are? It sounds beautifully; but we can only promise to obey, honour is in their hands, and love is our master. We obey it."

Agnes was caught from this haze by Maxwell appealing to her upon the merits of a recently published book.

"The story was not properly rounded; was it, Ag?"

"It was true to nature. Nature is all angles; so many things are unknown; so many things have to be guessed at only."

"But if we guessed wrong," said Hugo.

Agnes was very pale.

"Then we must suffer for our short-sightedness."

"As you make your bed so you must lie on it," Maxwell quoted this with asperity. Then he smiled "I'm a splendid hand at making beds."

"Your own," replied Hugo, and then seemed sorry he had spoken.

But Maxwell still smiled good-temperedly, showing his even, white teeth.

"Every man for himself," is my motto, eh, Ag?" but Agnes seemed suddenly weary.

"I think," she said, after a slight pause, "It would be a lovely morning for a drive. Might I have the man, Maxwell, or will you be my charioteer?"

"I can't go, and the man is busy. Hugo, old chap, do you mind being bothered with my wife for an hour or two! You can have Claudius, and I promise you he will keep your hands full."

"Perhaps after all—" began Agnes in protest.

"Nonsense, Ag; the horses are eating their heads off in the stable. They ought to be exercised; this is the second day Claudius has not left his stall."

"And I shall be very glad to drive you."

Agnes smiled at Hugo as she went off for her hat.

She was glad, there was no good denying the truth to herself; she was outrageously happy; she was going for a drive with him, would be with him an hour; two. She was happy; tremulously so.

She felt the old sweet excitement she had felt when as a girl some unexpected pleasure appeared, and she rushed to get ready for it.

It was a lovely day; summer was upon the land, and the sky was dotted here and there with white clouds, which looked like flocks of sheep in a blue pasture.

It was very good to live and to enjoy things. Agnes felt this, and thrilled as Hugo's hand helped her into the low phaeton; hated herself for thrilling; and so a frown gathered between her eyes, and she kept them away from Hugo.

"I am going away to-morrow," he said presently.

"Are you?"

Again that cold feeling crept about her heart.

"Yes. You see I am an idle fellow, but active in that idleness. A good deal of the Bohemian beats in my blood, and this luxurious life wouldn't suit me. Only I wished to have a glimpse of you."

She heard very well what he was saying, and while he spoke, her own thoughts came with lightning speed.

"How jerkily he speaks, and a bit of dust has landed on his nose. It isn't a particularly handsome nose either. He has lost a tooth on this side. It shows when he smiles. And how old he has grown. Oh! God! I love him! I love him! I love him!" But these were only her thoughts. The words she utters were very different.

"Why should you pay us such a shabby visit? Maxwell thought you would stay some time. Men always need men's society."

"We were never particularly devoted, Maxwell and I. Perhaps it has been my fault."

"You are very different." Then quietly, "Your mother writes so cheerfully."

"Poor mother!" he said; then—"I fear I have never done her justice. She was very trying. In justice to herself, I must tell you what I know will be a secret in your keeping. My father drank himself to death."

"My mother's constant fear was that we might inherit the craving for it. She—" his voice sank—"it had overcome her."

Agnes said nothing, but her look told her astonishment and pity.

"I found it out years ago. She never forgave me for that. Can you imagine what she has endured. Her fear for her children. Her own craving, which she struggled to overcome, but could not. How she managed to get it at night unknown to anyone, and how she talked against it in the day time. Poor mother!"

"That explains many things; but I never dreamt of this."

"Do you believe in hereditary vice? I do. That night, I was a boy of twelve, I had been in the village with some older playmates. We had for a lark, as we called it, gone into the bar and taken a glass with some of the bigger chaps. When I crept into the house at midnight I noticed a light coming from under the store-room door. Thinking it was one of the servants up to some mischief, I stole softly up the stairs and pushed open the door. Then the whole thing was made clear to me. I saw my mother—my mother! like any low man with an accursed bottle to her lips. I gave a cry and she saw me, and I ran on to my room, locked the door, and vowed on my knees before God that no drop of the vile stuff would ever pass my lips again. Sometimes it has been a struggle. The hereditary poison is in my veins."

Agnes turned pale. "But you will keep your oath?"

"Die sooner than break it."

She was satisfied. "It is inexplicable. Does good al-

ways grow from evil as flowers from the filthy ground? Must our gain always be bought by another's misery? If you had not seen her that night?"

"Good and evil walk together. Did what I gained ever balance what I lost? I had thought my mother an angel! Do you know I grew to loathe her, heaven forgive me, when I heard her moral arguments against evil and her severe censure of those who had fallen beneath any temptation. But now, thank God, I feel nothing for her but pity."

"You are a good man," said Agnes simply.

He flushed under his sunburnt skin. "No man is good. But you—you are a saint."

"You hurt me," cried Agnes. "You don't know how wicked I am; how nothing seems worthy, sometimes; all holy things a hideous delusion—I have even thought with Cain, why should I thank God for a life he has given me unto eternity, without giving me the positive power of making it beautiful."

"An old clergyman once said 'a saint is not a perfect person, there are none such on earth; a saint is one who always wishes to do right.'"

"I do wish it," she cried; "but it is hard, very hard. We had better turn now; see how the clouds have gathered."

The clouds seemed to have gathered over them also, for as they drove homewards both were silent. Nature is a merciless creditor. We cannot escape her; but must pay to the full the debts we have contracted through carelessness, thoughtlessness, or even ignorance. The world looks on and sees our prosperity, and smiles and shrugs her massive shoulders, and envies and wonders. We have not got our due, for all is well with us.

Is all well?

Do they see our tears at night time, do they hear our heart cries in the morning? Do they know of the pain we endure in the place of pleasure? For pleasure consists in the way a thing vibrates through our system. The song of a bird may be a joy to us because our spirit is ready to receive it, but if our spirit is not ready, then it is a misery.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

"It is over."

The next day Hugo went away, and the summer passed on, slowly, surely. As the time drew near to her confinement Agnes seemed to fade. There seemed to be nothing to depress her in the way she was depressed. When her mother came she met her at the door, and as she laid her face against hers in the old tender way, burst into tears.

"I am so glad you have come, mother, so glad; there is nothing but a blank before me, and I am afraid."

"This is quite natural, dear."

Mrs. Power patted the golden head bent upon her shoulder. "Didn't I feel just so; and am I not alive to welcome my grandchild?"

"It's not that. Of course I am frightened about that; but there is more. I feel as if I hadn't the spirit to live."

"You are run down, darling; haven't you seen the doctor? Why didn't you send for me sooner?"

"Maxwell thought I was rather silly and frightened," she began, and stopped, but Mrs. Power knew what was left unsaid.

The doctor came the next day and spoke cheerfully, hopefully to her. She was run down; it was a pity he had not been called in before. But all would be well.

But still Agnes felt all would not be well with her. She felt, knew that her days were numbered, and with this knowledge the overpowering want of Hugo's presence came upon her.

She must see him; talk to him; touch him.

She fought against this cruel feeling of want, but still it lay within her heart and ached through all her being.

Death was coming upon her. What would it be? What would it bring her? Oblivion, peace, torment?

Anything would be better than this. Ah! but she was dying, and she must see him. Death would be total separation from him. Would he follow her into that shadowy region unknown to all that live? While she is living, while she has consciousness what a comfort to see him, speak to him, just for the last time.

She was paler and weaker after this war with herself. The doctor shook his head when he saw her again, and left the room hurriedly.

Maxwell came in a moment afterwards with pain stricken face.

"You are not well, darling?"

"I never will be well." She was crying quietly. "I have tried to do the right, Maxwell. I have tried to be a good wife to you."

Maxwell was shaken with sobs. "You have always done what was right, Agnes. But I have been a selfish brute. Say you forgive me, dearest."

A look of mental pain passed over her pale face. He was suing for her forgiveness. Did she not need his? She was his wife. She bore his child. And yet she loved another man—his brother.

"Oh! Maxwell," she said, "I do forgive you. I need forgiveness myself for many things. We are all so weak and so faulty. It should teach us to be kind to every one who does any wrong." \* \* \* \* \*

Hugo read in the next day's papers the birth of Agnes's boy. Further down amongst the deaths was an item which meant nothing to the multitude, but all to him.

"The wife of Maxwell Melville, aged twenty-three."

He started up. He must go at once and have a last look

at her loved face. By the side of her whom he had loved! so well light was given him. Maxwell had gone with him into that dim, flower scented room.

"I loved her, upon my soul, Hugo. But she was too good for me. If it had been you."

"Hush," said Hugo.

"But I must tell you. Listen. I was afraid she might care for you, and so I—I let her think you had led Alminere wrong."

A glance of passion passed over Hugo's face. But here his glance fell on the pure, pale features of Agnes, and in her presence that passion paled.

"It is over," he said. But the dead face was no whiter than his living one.

THE END.

#### FIRST CROAK.

Northward, crow, Croak and fly! Tell her I Long to go,—	Lark or thrush Someday, you Up the blue Cleave the hush
Only am Satisfied Where the wide Maples flame,	O the joy Then you feel, Who shall steal Or destroy?
Over those Hills of fir, Flooding her Morning snows.	Have not I Known how good, Field and wood, Stream and sky?—
Thou shall see, Break and sing Days of Spring, Dawning free.	Longed to free Soul in flight, Night by night, Tree to tree?
Northward, crow, Croak and fly,— Strive, or die Striving so!	Northward, crow, Croak and fly You and I,— Striving, go.
Darker hearts, We, than some Who shall come When Spring starts.	Still through fail Singing, keep Croaking deep Strong and hale!
Well I see, You and I By and by Shall get free.	Flying straight, Soon we go Where the snow Falls late.
Only now, Beat away As we may Best know how!	Yet the Spring Is—how sweet! Hark that beat; Goldenwing!
Never soar We, nor float; But one note, And no more.	Good for all Faint of heart, What a start In his call!
Northward, crow, Croak and fly! Would that I Too might go!	Northward, crow, Croak and fly, Through the sky Thunder No!

BLISS CARMAN.

#### GOLDEN GRAINS.

Faith is the sun of life.  
Dreams are true while they last.  
There is much pain that is quite noiseless.  
On God and God-like men we build our trust.  
Often in a wooden house a golden room we find.  
Homeward and heavenward we haste on our way.  
Dead fish swim with the stream, living ones against it.  
A millstone and the human heart are driven ever round.  
More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.  
Sweet April! Many a thought is wedded unto thee as hearts are wed.  
Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.  
Every duty, even the least duty, involves the whole principle of obedience.  
If the living may not speak to the dead, the dead are always speaking to the living.  
An indiscreet person is like an unsealed letter, which everyone may read, but which is seldom worth reading.  
The commonest life may be full of perfection. The duties of home are a discipline for the ministries of heaven.  
Love, the last best gift of heaven;  
Love, gentle, holy, pure.  
An old philosopher says: "The firefly only shines when on the wing; so it is with the mind; when once we rest we darken."  
Life is a road that we travel but once, so that we must be sure to do all we can as we go, because we never pass that way again.  
The secret of success in life is to keep busy. The busy ones may now and then make mistakes, but it is better to risk these than to be idle and inactive.