

what?—I should have said Hopeful any other day, but this morning you look like—let me see—like Mr. Ready-to-Halt. The celestial city lies behind that fog—doesn't it, Christina?"

"I don't like to hear you talk so, Charley," said his sister, smiling in his face.

"They ain't in the Bible," he returned.

"No—and I shouldn't mind if you were only merry, but you know you are scoffing at the story, and I love it—so I can't be pleased to hear you."

"I beg your pardon, Mary—but your celestial city lies behind such a fog, that not one crystal turret, one pearly gate of it was ever seen. At least we have never caught a glimmer of it; and must go tramp, tramp—we don't know whither, any more than the blind puppy that has crawled too far from his mother's side."

"I do see the light of it, Charley dear," said Mary sadly—not as if the light were any great comfort to her at the moment.

"If you do see something—how can you tell what it's the light of? It may come from the city of Dis, for anything you know."

"I don't know what that is."

"Oh! the red-hot city—down below. You will find all about it in Dante."

"It doesn't look like that—the light I see," said Mary quietly.

"How very ill-bred you are—to say such wicked things, Charley!" said Clara.

"Am I? They are better unmentioned. Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die! Only don't allude to the unpleasant subject."

He burst out singing: the verses were poor, but I will give them.

Let the sun shimmer!  
Let the wind blow!  
All is a nothing—  
What do we know?  
Let the moon glimmer!  
Let the stream flow!  
All is but nothing—  
To and fro!

Let the rose wither!  
Let the stars glow!  
Let the rain batter—  
Drifts of snow!  
Bring the tears hither!  
Let the smiles go!  
What does it matter?  
To and fro!

To and fro—ever,  
Motion and show!  
Nothing goes onward—  
Hurry or no!  
All is one river—  
Seaward, and so—  
Up again onward—  
To and fro!

Pendulum sweeping,  
High, and now low,  
That starts us, flits it!  
Too, let it go!  
Time he is reaping  
Hay for his mow!  
That flower—'he's got it!  
To and fro!

Such a—say the swinging,  
Mighty and slow!  
Ripping and claying—  
Hey, rotary no!  
Black Ribs is singing—  
Chorus—Hey, he!  
What is he saying?  
To and fro?

Singing and saying  
"Grass is hay—ho!  
Love is a longing,  
Water is snow,  
Swinging and swaying,  
Toll the bells go!  
Dining and dinging  
To and fro!"

"Oh, Charley!" said his sister, with suppressed agony, "what a wicked song!"

"It is a wicked song," I said. "But I meant—it only represents an unbelieving, hopeless mood."

"You wrote it, then?" she said, giving me—as it seemed, involuntarily—a look of reproach.

"Yes, I did; but—"

"Then I think you are very horrid," said Clara, interrupting.

"Charley!" I said, "you must not leave your sister to think so badly of me! You know why I wrote it—and what I meant."

"I wish I had written it myself," he returned. "I think it splendid. Anybody might envy you that song."

"But you know I didn't mean it for a true one."

"Who knows whether it is true or false?"

"I know," said Mary; "I know it is false."

"And I hope it," I adjointed.

"What ever put such horrid things in your head, Wilfrid?" asked Clara.

"Probably the fear lest they should be true. The verses came as I sat in a country church once, not long ago."

"In a church?" exclaimed Mary.

"Oh! he does go to church sometimes," said Charley, with a laugh.

"How could you think of it in church?" persisted Mary.

"It's more like the churchyard," said Clara.

"It was in an old church in a certain desolate sea-forsaken town," I said. "The pendulum of the clock—a huge, long, heavy, slow thing, hangs far down into the church, and goes swing, swung over your head, three or four seconds to every swing. When you have heard the *tic*, your heart grows faint every time between—waiting for the *tac*, which seems as if it would never come."

We were ascending the acclivity, and no one spoke again before we reached the top. There a wide landscape lay stretched before us. The mist was rapidly melting away before the gathering strength of the sun; as we stood and gazed we could see it vanishing. By slow degrees the colours of the autumn woods, dawned out of it. Close under us lay a great wave of gorgeous red—beeches I think—in the midst of which, here and there, stood up, tall and straight and dark, the unchanging green of a fir tree. The glow of a hectic death was over the landscape, melting away into the misty fringe of the far horizon. Overhead the sky was blue with a clear thin blue that told of withdrawing suns and coming frosts.

"For my part," I said, "I cannot believe that beyond this loveliness there lies no greater. Who knows, Charley, but death may be the first recognizable step of the process of which you despair?"

It was then I caught the look from Mary's eye, for the sake of which I have recorded the little incidents of the morning. But the same moment the look faded, and the veil or the mask fell over her face.

"I am afraid," she said, "if there has been no progress before, there will be little indeed after."

Now of all things, I hated the dogmatic theology of the party in which she had been brought up, and I turned from her with silent dislike.

"Really," said Clara, "you gentlemen have been very entertaining this morning. One would think Polly and I had come out for a stroll with a couple of undertaker's men. There's surely time enough to think of such things yet! None of us are at death's door exactly."

"Sweet remembrance!"—Who knows?" said Charley.

Now I, to comfort him, "I followed, quoting Mrs. Quickly concerning Sir John Falstaff, 'bid him, a should not think of God: I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet.'"

"I beg your pardon," said Mary—"there was no word of Him in the matter."

"I see," said Clara; you meant that at me, Wilfrid. But I assure you I am no heathen. I go to church regularly—once a Sunday when I can, and twice when I can't help it. That's more than you do, Mr. Cumberlande, I suspect."

"What makes you think so?" I asked.

"I can't imagine you enjoying anything but the burial service."

"It is to my mind the most consoling of them all," I answered.

"Well, I haven't reached the point of wanting that consolation yet, thank heaven."

"Perhaps some of us would rather have the consolation than give thanks that we didn't need it," I said.

"I can't say I understand you, but I know you mean something disagreeable. Polly, I think we had better go home to breakfast."

Mary turned, and we all followed. Little was said on the way home. We divided in the hall—the ladies to breakfast, and we to our work.

We had not spoken for an hour, when Charley broke the silence.

"What a brute I am, Wilfrid!" he said.

"Why shouldn't I be as good as Jesus Christ? It seems always as if a man might. But just look at me! Because I was miserable myself, I went and made my poor little sister twice as miserable as she was before. She'll never get over what I said this morning."

"It was foolish of you, Charley."

"It was brutal. I am the most selfish creature in the world—always taken up with myself. I do believe there is a devil, after all. I am a devil. And the universal self is the devil. If there were such a thing as a self always giving itself away—that self would be God."

"Something very like the God of Christianity, I think."

"If it were so, there would be a chance for us. We might then one day give the finishing blow to the devil in us. But no; he does all for his own glory."

"It depends on what his glory is. If what the self-seeking self would call glory, then I agree with you—that is not the God we need. But if his glory should be just the opposite—the perfect giving of himself away—then—"

"Of course I know nothing about it. My uncle used to say things like that."

He did not reply, and we went on with our work. Neither of the ladies came near us again that day.

Before the end of the week, the library was in tolerable order to the eye, though it could not be perfectly arranged until the commencement of a catalogue should be as the dawn of a consciousness in the half-restored mass.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A STORM.

So many books of rarity and value had revealed themselves, that it was not difficult to make Sir Giles comprehend in some degree the importance of such a possession; he had grown more and more interested as the work went on; and even Lady Brotherton, although she much desired to have at least the oldest and most valuable of the books rebound in

red morocco first, was so far satisfied with what she was told concerning the worth of the library, that she determined to invite some of the neighbours to dinner, for the sake of showing it. The main access to it was to be by the armoury; and she had that side of the gallery round the hall which led thither, covered with a thick carpet.

Meantime Charley had looked over all the papers in my chest, but, beyond what I have already stated, no fact of special interest had been brought to light.

In sending an invitation to Charley, Lady Brotherton could hardly avoid sending me one as well; I doubt whether I should otherwise have been allowed to enjoy the admiration bestowed on the result of my labours.

The dinner was formal and dreary enough: the geniality of one of the heads of a household is seldom sufficient to give character to an entertainment.

"They tell me you are a buyer of books, Mr. Alderforpe," said Mr. Mollet to the clergyman of a neighbouring parish, as we sat over our wine.

"Quite a mistake," returned Mr. Alderforpe. "I am a reader of books."

"That of course! But you buy them first—don't you?"

"Not always. I sometimes borrow them."

"That I never do. If a book is worth borrowing, it is worth buying."

"Perhaps—if you can afford it. But many books that book-buyers value, I count worthless—for all their wide margins and uncut leaves."

"Will you come and have a look at Sir Giles's library," I ventured to say.

"I never heard of a library at Moldwarp Hall, Sir Giles," said Mr. Mollet.

"I am going to understand there is a very valuable one," said Mr. Alderforpe. "I shall be glad to accompany you, sir," he added, turning to me, "if Sir Giles will allow us."

"You cannot have a better guide than Mr. Cumberlande," said Sir Giles. "I am indebted to him almost for the discovery—altogether for the restoration of the library."

"Assisted by Miss Brotherton and her friends, Sir Giles," I said.

"A son of Mr. Cumberlande, of Lowdon Farm, I presume?" said Alderforpe, bowing interrogatively.

"A nephew," I answered.

"He was a most worthy man.—By the way, Sir Giles, your young friend here must be a distant connection of your own. I found in some book or other lately, I forget where at the moment, that there were Cumberlandes at one time in Moldwarp Hall."

"Yes—about two hundred years ago, I believe. It passed to our branch of the family some time during the troubles of the seventeenth century—I hardly know how—I am not much of an historian."

I thought of my precious volume, and the name of the title-page. That book might have once been in the library of Moldwarp Hall. If so, how had it strayed into my possession—alone, yet more to me than all that was left behind?

We betook ourselves to the library. The visitors expressed themselves astonished at its extent, and the wealth which even a glance revealed—for I took care to guide their notice to its richest veins.

"When it is once arranged," I said, "I fancy there will be few private libraries to stand a comparison with it—I am thinking of old English literature, and old editions; there is not a single volume of the present century in it, so far as I know."

I had had a few old sconces fixed here and there, but as yet there were no means of really lighting the rooms. Hence, when a great flash of lightning broke from a cloud that hung over the park right in front of the windows, it flooded them with a dazzling splendour. I went to find Charley, for the library was the best place to see the lightning from.

As I entered the drawing-room, a tremendous peal of thunder burst over the house, causing so much consternation amongst the ladies, that, for the sake of company, they all followed to the library. Clara seemed more frightened than any. Mary was perfectly calm. Charley was much excited. The storm grew in violence. We saw the lightning strike a tree which stood alone a few hundred yards from the house. When the next flash came, half of one side seemed torn away. The wind rose, first in fierce gusts, then into a tempest, and the rain poured in torrents.

"None of you can go home to-night, ladies," said Sir Giles. "You must make up your minds to stop where you are. Few horses would face such a storm as that."

"It would be to tax your hospitality too grievously, Sir Giles," said Mr. Alderforpe. "I daresay it will clear up by and by, or at least moderate sufficiently to let us get home."

"I don't think there's much chance of that," returned Sir Giles. "The barometer has been steadily falling for the last three days. My dear, you had better give your orders at once."

"You had better stop, Charley," I said.

"I won't if you go," he returned.

Clara was beside.

"You must not think of going," she said.

Whether she spoke to him or me, I did not know, but as Charley made no answer—

"I cannot stop without being asked," I said, "and it is not likely any one will take the trouble to ask me."

The storm increased. At the request of the ladies, the gentlemen left the library and accompanied them to the drawing-room for tea. Our hostess asked Clara to sing, but she was too frightened to comply.

"You will sing, Mary, if Lady Brotherton asks you, I know," said Mrs. Osborne.

"Do, my dear," said Lady Brotherton; and Mary at once complied.

I had never heard her sing, and did not expect much. But although she had little execution, there was, I found, a wonderful charm both in her voice and the simplicity of her mode. I did not feel this at first, nor could I tell when the song began to lay hold upon me, but when it ceased, I found that I had been listening intently. I have often since tried to recall it, but as yet it has eluded all my efforts. I still cherish the hope that it may return some night in a dream, or in some waking moment of quiescent thought, when what we call the brain works, as it were, of itself, and the spirit allows it play.

The close was lost in a louder peal of thunder than had yet burst. Charley and I went again to the library to look out on the night. It was dark as pitch, except when the lightning broke and revealed everything for one intense moment.

"I think sometimes," said Charley, "that death will be like one of those flashes, revealing everything in hideous fact—for just one moment and no more."

"How for one moment and no more, Charley?" I asked.

"Because the sight of the truth concerning itself must kill the soul, if there be one, with disgust at its own vileness, and the miserable contrast between its aspirations and attainments, its pretences and its efforts. At least, that would be the death fit for a life like mine—a death of disgust at itself. We claim immortality; we cringe and cower with the fear that immortality may not be the destiny of man; and yet we—do things unworthy not merely of immortality, but unworthy of the butterfly existence of a single day in such a world as this sometimes seems to be. Just think how I stabbed at my sister's faith this morning—careless of making her as miserable as myself! Because my father has put into her mind his fancies, and I hate them, I wound again the heart which they wound, and which cannot help their presence!"

"But the heart that can be sorry for an action is far above the action, just as her heart is better than the notions that haunt it!"

"Sometimes I hope so. But action determines character. And it is all such a muddle! I don't care much about what they call immortality. I doubt if it is worth the having. I would a thousand times rather have one day of conscious purity of heart and mind and soul and body, than an eternity of such life as I have now.—What am I saying?" he added, with a despairing laugh. "It is a fool's comparison; for an eternity of the former would be bliss—one moment of the latter is misery."

I could but admire and pity my poor friend both at once.

Miss Pease had entered unheard.

"Mr. Cumberlande," she said, "I have been looking for you to show you your room. It is not the one I should like to have got for you, but Mrs. Wilson says you have occupied it before, and I daresay you will find it comfortable enough."

"Thank you, Miss Pease. I am sorry you should have taken the trouble. I can go home well enough. I am not afraid of a little rain."

"A little rain!" said Charley, trying to speak lightly.

"Well, any amount of rain," I said.

"But the lightning!"—expostulated Miss Pease, in a timid voice.

"I am something of a fatalist, Miss Pease," I said. "Every bullet has its billet; you know. Beside, if I had a choice, I think I would rather die by lightning than any other way."

"Don't talk like that, Mr. Cumberlande. Oh! what a flash!"

"I was not speaking irreverently, I assure you," I replied. "I think I had better set out at once, for there seems no chance of its clearing."

"I am sure Sir Giles would be distressed if you did."

"He will never know, and I dislike giving trouble."

"The room is ready. I will show you where it is, that you may go when you like."

"If Mrs. Wilson says it is a room I have occupied before, I know the way quite well."

"There are two ways to it," she said. "But of course one of them is enough," she added, with a smile. "Mr. Osborne, your room is in another part quite."

"I know where my sister's room is," said Charley. "Is it anywhere near hers?"

"That is the room you are to have. Miss Osborne is to be with your mamma, I think. There is plenty of accommodation, only the notice was short."

I began to button my coat.

"Don't go, Wilfrid," said Charley. "You

Whether she spoke to him or me, I did not know, but as Charley made no answer—

"I cannot stop without being asked," I said, "and it is not likely any one will take the trouble to ask me."

The storm increased. At the request of the ladies, the gentlemen left the library and accompanied them to the drawing-room for tea. Our hostess asked Clara to sing, but she was too frightened to comply.

"You will sing, Mary, if Lady Brotherton asks you, I know," said Mrs. Osborne.

"Do, my dear," said Lady Brotherton; and Mary at once complied.

I had never heard her sing, and did not expect much. But although she had little execution, there was, I found, a wonderful charm both in her voice and the simplicity of her mode. I did not feel this at first, nor could I tell when the song began to lay hold upon me, but when it ceased, I found that I had been listening intently. I have often since tried to recall it, but as yet it has eluded all my efforts. I still cherish the hope that it may return some night in a dream, or in some waking moment of quiescent thought, when what we call the brain works, as it were, of itself, and the spirit allows it play.

The close was lost in a louder peal of thunder than had yet burst. Charley and I went again to the library to look out on the night. It was dark as pitch, except when the lightning broke and revealed everything for one intense moment.

"I think sometimes," said Charley, "that death will be like one of those flashes, revealing everything in hideous fact—for just one moment and no more."

"How for one moment and no more, Charley?" I asked.

"Because the sight of the truth concerning itself must kill the soul, if there be one, with disgust at its own vileness, and the miserable contrast between its aspirations and attainments, its pretences and its efforts. At least, that would be the death fit for a life like mine—a death of disgust at itself. We claim immortality; we cringe and cower with the fear that immortality may not be the destiny of man; and yet we—do things unworthy not merely of immortality, but unworthy of the butterfly existence of a single day in such a world as this sometimes seems to be. Just think how I stabbed at my sister's faith this morning—careless of making her as miserable as myself! Because my father has put into her mind his fancies, and I hate them, I wound again the heart which they wound, and which cannot help their presence!"

"But the heart that can be sorry for an action is far above the action, just as her heart is better than the notions that haunt it!"

"Sometimes I hope so. But action determines character. And it is all such a muddle! I don't care much about what they call immortality. I doubt if it is worth the having. I would a thousand times rather have one day of conscious purity of heart and mind and soul and body, than an eternity of such life as I have now.—What am I saying?" he added, with a despairing laugh. "It is a fool's comparison; for an eternity of the former would be bliss—one moment of the latter is misery."

I could but admire and pity my poor friend both at once.

Miss Pease had entered unheard.

"Mr. Cumberlande," she said, "I have been looking for you to show you your room. It is not the one I should like to have got for you, but Mrs. Wilson says you have occupied it before, and I daresay you will find it comfortable enough."

"Thank you, Miss Pease. I am sorry you should have taken the trouble. I can go home well enough. I am not afraid of a little rain."

"A little rain!" said Charley, trying to speak lightly.

"Well, any amount of rain," I said.

"But the lightning!"—expostulated Miss Pease, in a timid voice.

"I am something of a fatalist, Miss Pease," I said. "Every bullet has its billet; you know. Beside, if I had a choice, I think I would rather die by lightning than any other way."

"Don't talk like that, Mr. Cumberlande. Oh! what a flash!"

"I was not speaking irreverently, I assure you," I replied. "I think I had better set out at once, for there seems no chance of its clearing."

"I am sure Sir Giles would be distressed if you did."

"He will never know, and I dislike giving trouble."

"The room is ready. I will show you where it is, that you may go when you like."

"If Mrs. Wilson says it is a room I have occupied before, I know the way quite well."

"There are two ways to it," she said. "But of course one of them is enough," she added, with a smile. "Mr. Osborne, your room is in another part quite."

"I know where my sister's room is," said Charley. "Is it anywhere near hers?"

"That is the room you are to have. Miss Osborne is to be with your mamma, I think. There is plenty of accommodation, only the notice was short."

I began to button my coat.

"Don't go, Wilfrid," said Charley. "You