

had been so great, that malice could detect nothing to magnify or report; but on this night of Susan's mission, Charles, the under-butler, who was also the valet of Mr. Delamere, picked up, in the little reception-room, a bit of crumpled paper from the floor, which Susan had dropped when fumbling in her pocket for the letter she gave Mabel. It was the torn half of a letter, and amply repaid the scrutiny bestowed on it by the curious reader:—

"Give the enclosed to Miss A. I know she will be glad to receive it. It's all a fancy of her's about being a teacher. The governor himself says so. And you tell her she may be the peace-maker if she will; and that, as to living at the 'Tun and Noggin,' in Racket Row, I never meant it, any more than she does—not while there's villas from Brixton to Shooter's Hill. As my poor mother's confidential servant, and my nurse, I can trust you, Susan; and I hope you'll do this message first-rate."

To submit this to the inspection of Gabb, the lady's-maid, then to smooth it out, and put it on Mr. Delamere Burnish's desk in his dressing-room, was done that evening. "Our young blade is a day after the fair," said Charles. "No chance, Gabb; 'Tun and Noggin' both agen him."

The plan, in one sense, succeeded. Delamere's eye as he seated himself listlessly at his writing table, after he had dismissed his man for the night, fell on the strange paper. He read it over and over, and could make nothing of it, and was just about ringing to ascertain how it came there, when the word 'Susan' struck him. 'Yes, that was the name Miss Alerton uttered when she came in to see the odd-looking messenger of that evening;' then it seemed all plain. It was a love affair; and Mabel was so far engaged that even a future residence was talked of. Delamere put the scrap back with all the annoyance that an honorable mind must feel at even involuntarily becoming aware of a matter concerning others not intended for his knowledge. Concluding that his man had thought the paper belonged to him, he tried to shut the incident from his mind; but that was beyond his efforts. For the first time he found how much his thoughts had been occupied by Mabel, when he felt the pang that darted through him at the idea of her been engaged. Then the business, 'The Tun and Noggin!' He knew the place well—it was on their books. Mabel a landlady of a tavern! There was profanation in the thought. One phrase, and one only gave him comfort—'She may be a peace-maker if she will.' There was difficulty and doubt supplied in that sentence. But what was all this to him? Nothing. Ah! would that it had been nothing. Then came the natural yearning of the young heart for sympathy. No mother's love had he ever known; for Mrs. Burnish's civil performances of her duties towards him had but very slenderly concealed her repugnance for him from his childhood. True, he had never known his own mother, never remembered any but the present Mrs. Burnish in that office. Still, he had felt a hidden want even in her kindest moments. He had no sister who could be a companion; and all in that stately house seemed so cold, such outside show and glitter—the surface so bright, the substance so hard—that the vision of a home lighted by the smiles of Mabel, rose and took his heart and imagination captive. In these, and similar quiet fancies, the night passed feverishly away. He rose betimes from his sleepless pillow, and consuming at a taper the scrap of a letter that had caused him such annoyance, he went to the library, determined to occupy the quiet of the early morning with reading, and thus dismiss the annoyances of the night. Taking up a favorite critical journal, he ensconced himself in the recess of a window that was filled with flowers, and tried to be absorbed by his magazine. He might have succeeded, for all things are possible to perseverance, but he had not been long there when a light footstep attracted his attention, and he saw Miss Alerton enter the room, and, without perceiving him, for the folds of the curtains concealed his retreat, she replaced two books in their places, and commenced a tour of inspection in search of others. Her choice seemed to fix on some volumes on the upper shelves, and, unfolding an ottoman that contained a set of library steps, she mounted them, and commenced dislodging the books, when, as they were tightly wedged, and still rather above her reach, she managed to pull them down about her head; and was nearly falling herself with surprise, when she heard the voice of Mr. Delamere Burnish exclaim, as he ran towards her, "Let me assist you, Miss Alerton." Her self-possession played her false at that moment. She was awkwardly conscious of being, in every sense, in a false position, balancing there on the steps, the heavy folds of her rich brown hair loosened from the fillet that bound them by the fall of the volumes, the debris of books and dust around her, the flushing of her cheeks, and flutter palpable to herself, the young man below evidently forgetting everything but her presence.

"How unfortunate!" said Mabel, as, in her confusion, she accepted his hand, and descending hastily, hid her blushing face by stooping to pick up the fallen books.

"I cannot think so," said Delamere Burnish, a slight tremor in his voice making the simple words sound important. "Let me give you the books you want," he added. At that instant their eyes met. There needed no declaration—not a word! Youth and love are their own interpreters, and have their own electric telegraph.

Mabel, hardly knowing what she did, hastily withdrew the hand that had met Delamere's on the cover of a book each at the same time lifted

from the floor, clasped the volumes given without knowing that she had them, and retreated with a run that was more girlish and natural than dignified and stately. When she reached her room, and rushed forward towards the chair at her toilet table, her glass gave her the reflection of a face so crimson, eyes so humid, hair so disordered, that the usually quiet Mabel stood a moment in surprise of herself, tossed the books on a low sofa near her, sinking on a chair, covered her flushed cheeks with her trembling hands, and burst into tears. 'How absurdly, how abominably I have acted! what a simpleton, to be startled out of all propriety,' were the first words of self-censure that she uttered, as she dried her eyes, and proceeded to arrange her hair. 'How unfortunate, how truly unfortunate, he was there; and how wholly unexpected,' she added—and truly, for this was not the first by many times of her visiting the library early. We should be faithless chroniclers if we were to say these, and the like, were Mabel's only thoughts. The look—the meaning of the look—that rapid daguerreotype of the heart, as it were, that she had seen—that electric flash in which the soul had leaped forth—were present to her mind, and mingled trouble and triumph with her feelings. Trouble, for Mabel had a high sense of duty; triumph, for when was the susceptible youthful heart insensible to the first awakening of that passion, which shapes for good or evil so much of human life?

As the tumult of her emotions subsided, a secondary feeling presented itself, in the very natural gratification that no one had encountered her on her return, or seen her agitation. Ah, Mabel, be not too sure of that! Mrs. Gabb had risen to do some millinery job for herself, and, hearing a slight sound in the house, had looked over the staircase, and seen the rapid return of Miss Alerton to her room. Every item of flushed cheek, flying hair, and disordered garb, was duly noted. Gabb's instinct prompted her to watch yet further; and, while Mabel was gaining composure, and congratulating herself on having her secret safe, Mr. Delamere Burnish was watched leaving the library; and the disarranged books, and library steps, were all so many witnesses, furnishing testimony for the charitable comments of Gabb, and the gentry of the second table.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Victims of Society.

"We met a girl, her dress was loose,
And haggard was her eye;
And, with the wanton's hollow voice,
She lured the passer by.

I asked her what there was in guilt,
That could her soul allure
To shame, disease, and late remorse?
She answered—she was poor.

—Southey.

It was a wet morning, and the children required to see the family dentist, so Mrs. Burnish resolved to take them herself, and to drop Mabel, on the way, at the — Penitentiary, and to call for her when her morning's affairs and shoppings were over. Mabel did not need an introduction to Mrs. Basil, the matron, for she had already seen her, when some needlework from the Institution was brought home to Portland Place. A quarter of an hour's drive brought the carriage to the front gate of a house with outside shutters, like rough Venetian blinds, covering all the windows. It was not a large establishment. The Burnish family subscribed to the Magdalen, and the Female Refuge for the Destitute (doubtless, helped to keep up both establishments, in a very extended sense), but Lady Burnish had founded this, and members of the family maintained it.

Nothing could exceed the cleanliness and quiet of the little hall into which a decent-looking woman ushered Mabel, locking the gate and the street door after her as she entered. The matron's best parlor, used also as a committee-room, opened out of the hall,—an orderly, homely-looking place, with its round centre table, neat book-case, filled with good books, its dark green carpet and curtains, well rubbed mahogany chairs, and bright fire place, just decorated for the summer season, all telling of industry and cleanliness. Mabel felt the surprise of inexperience that a house, consecrated by such sorrows to woman as a loss of virtue implied, should look so tranquil and homely, and, though she rebuked the thought as folly, it occurred again and again during the morning.

The matron, a motherly woman, with a considerate look upon her placid face, was, in all respects, worthy of esteem. She was a widow, with a small income. Her attention had been turned to the condition of the exposed and degraded of her own sex. She had neither children nor relatives to make demands on her time, and she resolved to devote herself to attempting the rescue of some of the outcasts or victims of society, that are to be found in every large, aye, and small, town of our kingdom. Mrs. Basil had not wealth, but she had what wealth cannot purchase—a kind heart, a loving spirit, and true Christian principle regulating these. Lady Burnish found the most of the money, and had the praise—for, doubtless, "money answereth all things." Mrs. Basil gave time, labor, suggestions, and arrangements, and had the recompense of a good conscience.