

effected by Dr. Griesbach's prescription. He went under the arch to the back of the house, and under cover of the slight noise his coming made, Miss Austwicke produced her key, undid the gate, and let out her dreaded visitor into the churchyard. Once there, his fears of the dogs, and it may be the guns of the Hall, were quieted, and he laid his hand on Miss Austwicke's arm, and said—

"I cannot write what I have to say, madam. You must hear me now. Your servant is ill, did you say? What—"

He checked himself; it was no part of his policy to let Miss Austwicke suspect his knowledge of Ruth.

"Oh, merely the woman I have occasionally employed when you have come. I cannot now say."

As on all former occasions of her meeting Burke, Ruth had waited in the distance, the consciousness of that may have given Miss Austwicke a courage she did not feel at this time. Her teeth chattered so as to make her words almost unintelligible, as she continued nervously saying—"Go—go."

"No, madam; I've waited hours. You must grant me a moment. I considered I came by your appointment. Half a dozen minutes will do. The cheque you sent doesn't cover my expenses in what I have had to send abroad."

"Well, well; let me know what it is, and I'll send it. Don't detain me."

"Nay, my leddy, you detain me. You talk of final expenses. I've reason to believe, from some statements I've had from Scotland, that there's not only a certificate of the real marriage, but that it was as right as law could make it."

Miss Austwicke stretched out her hands, imploringly, reeled a moment, and would have fallen, but her fingers closed on the edge of a tomb, and the chill of the damp stone revived her. It was coming, then, this hidden thing in its worst form! Burke heard rather than saw her agitation, in the quick pants in which she took her breath, and he hastened to say—

"I can get every paper, silence every witness, for a sum of money—a small sum—say, merely—a thousand pounds. I'll go to Australia: I had thence the last letter from—"

"Don't name him!" hastily gasped Miss Austwicke; the pattering rain on the ivy leaves seemed to her like auditors.

"Well, I'll keep him, and the paper—everything, there; you'll be quit of the whole thing. That sponge, the small sum, will wipe it all off, once for all, and no more about it. If not, there's some things come to light." He spoke at random, merely to threaten; but her troubled conscience, already roused by the finding of the ghostly relics, gave meaning to his words.

"Is it she, then? is it that Isabel, my brother's wretched—?" She checked herself as the word wife came to her lips, and added—"Did she commit suicide?"

"Suicide!" he answered, perplexed, for he knew nothing of the discovery of the relics, but still bold and cunning.

"Those then, were her bones that have been found? But the child's—how was it that she came there? was she mad?"

"Mad and—dead!"

"Oh, horrible! committed suicide—leaped down that shaft!"

A blast of wind swept round the church with a moan so like a human voice, that both were awe-struck, and Miss Austwicke fell into the common error of supposing that her own words had been the answer given.

"It's no time nor place to tell about her death," said Burke, craftily; "only this I urge—a thousand pounds, and more than half the globe is between you and any further annoyance."

Miss Austwicke heaved a long sigh, as if the very thought enabled her to breathe more freely.

"But if I cannot give it?"

"Then I am sorry; but events must take their course. Better many a thousand than sacrifice the family honour."

"True; yes—I'll write. Where? Winchester?" She had felt uneasy at this being so near.

"No, madam; I go at once to my old address in London, thence to take my passage."

"Well, I'll write. Go!" She made a step or two away, and then returned, saying, "And she had Wilfred's ring?"

The man started, paused a moment in deep thought, and said, interrogatively—

"Ring? What, the one 'Keep faith till death,' and the date 1672?"

This quoting of motto and date convinced Miss Austwicke that the man knew all, and murmuring low, "I'll write, I'll write!" she crept away, leaving Burke nearly as perplexed as herself, and certain that there was no time to be lost in making himself acquainted with all that had transpired, and securing his booty. Ruth's illness at this juncture added to his disquiet. He resolved to hang about the village, and learn any particulars he could, before starting by an early train for London. He found an old cattle-shed in some neighbouring field, where he sheltered for the rest of the night, and was so far fortunate that one of the first persons he encountered the next morning on his journey to the station was the doctor's boy, going to the Hall with medicines. Burke contrived to get into conversation with him, and heard the boy's account how the upper housmaid at the Hall was struck speechless, three nights back.

"Speechless! well, there was some comfort in that. But Australia—that must be his destination—the quicker the better."

So he hastened off to his lair in London without delay.

The next few days were full of occupation to every one at Chace Hall. The squire resolved on going himself to Scotland. His wife wished to accompany him, which he by no means desired. A compromise was effected, by her resolving to return to her younger boys at Scarborough. Marian Hope's engagement had been formally announced at the Hall, and she was forthwith released from her duties to Gertrude; Dr. Griesbach's invitation for the latter being more eagerly received by Mrs. Austwicke than even by the young lady herself.

Ruth, whose dangerous symptoms had somewhat abated, was being, as Martin said, "patched up a bit, but never to be whole no more;" for Dr. Griesbach had, on his return to town, sent an experienced nurse down to take care of her, and attend her to London as soon as she could travel.

Rupert Griesbach seemed wonderfully inclined to shorten his stay at the parsonage when he heard that Gertrude was to be a guest at his own home. The only person who seemed to have no other occupation than the nursery of her own sad thoughts in solitude, was Miss Austwicke. Her gloom was so marked that Mrs. Austwicke whispered a word in her husband's ear—a word of all others the most alarming in any family circle—"Insanity!"

The squire, angrily silenced her; but she was by no means convinced that she had not the real clue to what had of late so altered her sister-in-law.

Gertrude, whose heart, amidst all her powerful hopes and affections, was saddened by the one secret trouble—her mother's coldness—had, by the influence of that hidden disquiet, a pre-sciency of how her aunt was suffering. She was willing to forego all the pleasure of a visit to her young friend, and remain to cheer and serve, if she might, the lonely woman locked up in a gloomy citadel of reserve; but her parents would not hear of this, and Miss Austwicke's decided negative of the proffer, when Gertrude hinted it, left her no alternative but to go to Ella Griesbach and try to forget in new scenes, all that had of late troubled the previously clear stream of her life.

Leaving the family at Chace Hall to their preparations, whether joyful or perplexing, we will take our readers back to Woodford, and see how it has fared all this time with Norman.

CHAPTER LV. REMOVALS.

"They that are merry, let them sing,
And let the sad hearts pray;
Let those still pip their cheerful wing,
And these their sober day." GEORGE HICKE.

In the time since we parted from Norman he had grown into manhood. Whether it might be

considered an advantage or the reverse, he certainly looked four or five years older than his real age. The necessity of thoughtfulness, the certainty that his present livelihood and future prospects depended on his own exertions, gave a prematurity to his manners which, even if his own exertions, gave a prematurity to his manners growth had not been rapid, and his frame large as well as tall, would have added to his apparent age. It was odd to see him in Professor Griesbach's laboratory, by the side of his master; the latter looked so feeble and shrunk by comparison with the youthful vigour and comeliness of his pupil. There was not much outward alteration in the manners of either the Professor or old Fritz to the youth; but a certain air of confidence in the one, and of respect for the other, before the first year of Norman's residence was over, marked the progress he had made in the good opinion of each. He fell with ready docility, and even interest, into all the oddities that pervaded the dwelling; gave his brief leisure hours to mechanics with the man, and his diligent days to science with the master; books filling up every interval. At the end of two years there was a short colloquy between old Fritz and the Professor, which had the youth for its subject.

"Mr. Driftwood, sir, is a doer," said Fritz.

"Doer and thinker—good at both!" curtly replied the master.

From his lips this was a high eulogium.

It so happened that some papers Dr. Griesbach supplied to a scientific journal contained the result of various valuable experiments on the medicinal properties of certain new preparations which were being tested by several men eminent in the medical profession; and some controversy, as usual, had ensued, which called the Professor out from his privacy, both as a writer and a speaker. He was frequently at the hospital, of which his relative, Dr. Griesbach, was the senior physician. The Professor read a course of chemical lectures to the Doctor's pupils, and at these his now really most efficient assistant was Norman. Dr. Griesbach naturally felt an interest in the youth he had benefited; for it is an immutable fact in human nature, that though the receiver of a benefit may not be won to gratitude, the bestower is generally led to affection.

Doctor Griesbach had been greatly pleased that he had found, for his clever and eccentric relative, the Professor, one who so well suited him, particularly as no youth ever had before been tolerated. All were idle or stupid, according to the verdict of the Professor and his man Fritz. Even Rupert, who had once tried three weeks there, and was permitted to revolt at the diet, being spoilt, as the Professor said, with luxuries—even he could not, or would not, remain; and as the Doctor had feared it would be a question of losing his friend, or persecuting his son, he wisely withdrew the latter before any great rupture occurred. So Norman's success was the more gratifying from others' failure.

The Doctor never, in any interview with Norman, but once alluded to the introduction he had given the youth, and then he said—

"I don't call myself your godfather, my lad, but I'm certainly your sponsor; and right glad you have not disgraced the name I gave you. I think, however, you've worn it long enough; it's time you cast it off."

"It's as good as any other, sir," said Norman. "I've no one to care what my name is."

The touch of melancholy in this answer, coupled with Norman's excellent character, confirmed Dr. Griesbach, and also the Professor, to whom he mentioned it, that the youth was really without kindred, or disowned or disgraced by them; so it was decided to say no more to him of the past.

Meanwhile old Fritz often amused himself on winter nights in carving pretty ornaments for Miss Ella, who, in her motherless childhood, had often been brought by her nurse to the forest, and, of course, visited what she there laughingly called "The Enchanted Den." Her infantine smiles had won, as nothing else could, both master and man from their absorbing pursuits to listen to her prattle and to provide for her amuse-