

relatives, out of some property he left. She came to this country, fell in with Johnston, and foolishly married him. I obtained from her a few papers, enclosed, about the child, a baptismal register, which you can verify, and I meant to question her farther, but I was called away a few days, and on my return found she was dead. Knowing you are at Austwicke, and that a family of the name resides there, I trouble you with this, as, from all I hear of the late Mr. Johnson, he was likely enough to have connived at fraud, even for the miserable consideration of a few pounds.

Apologising for troubling you, and with all good wishes, I am,

Yours faithfully,

ERNEST ELKINSHAW,

Incumbent of St. Lawrence, New Brunswick.

Mr. Austwicke was the first to break the pause after the letter was read. "Well, then," he said "my sister did no injury, at all events, to this girl. She has had a good education, and is provided with the means of maintaining herself in a respectable station."

"She is a young lady, father," cried Mr. Allan, vehemently, "who would adorn any station."

"She is as good as she is lovely," said Mr. Hope; "and, I doubt not, God's blessing will continue to rest upon her. At all events, while I and Marian live, she'll not want a father or a sister."

"Or a brother, added Norman. He looked round as he spoke, and missed one of the company from the room—Rupert had gone. They were all now preparing to depart, Mr. Austwicke saying to Mr. Hope—

"What I have heard has been too much for me to think over calmly; but be assured I will act justly, as I fully believe you have in this matter. More than justice I cannot promise. This young man has spoken, I will say generously; but he is young—a minor. Neither I nor my son could take advantage of sentiments and feelings that do him honour, but which maturity and the world will change."

"Never, sir, never," said Norman, solemnly, drawing near to Mr. Austwicke.

"I believe it, I fully believe it, from all I know of him," added Dr. Griesbach, placing Norman's hand in that of Mr. Austwicke.

Perhaps there were tears in more eyes than Norman's at that clasp of kinsmanship and recognition. But nothing more was said, and the company separated.

CHAPTER LXIII. CONNECTING LINKS.

"Yet grieve not I that Fate did not decree
Paternal acres to await on me;
She gave me more—she placed within my breast
A heart with little pleased, with little blest."
HENRY KIRKE WHITE.

THE terrible circumstances of Miss Austwicke's death supplied the neighbours with enough of matter for gossip to engross all their attention, and prevent any suspicion of the family difficulties and disclosures that had accompanied that event. Every one could attest how strangely Miss Austwicke had altered since she was summoned to Captain Wilfred's death-bed, and how her health had manifestly given way, though it was one of her peculiarities to deny it; so there was no difficulty about the verdict. "Insanity" was, in this instance, a true finding, though those who knew what troubles she had heaped up for herself, and bequeathed to others, were aware that she had overthrown her own mental faculties. Alas! in how many ways is it true, "He that pursueth evil, pursueth it to his own death."

In the faint light of the scarcely-risen sun, amid chilling mists and heavy morning dews, Miss Austwicke, with the utmost privacy, was borne to her grave, and laid beside the brother whose marriage she had concealed, and whose last request she had violated. In the blindness of a mind darkened by pride, while she was condemning his fault she committed a greater; and, while imagining she was upholding the family honour, she was doing her best to affix the stain of indelible disgrace. Truly, the human heart is deceitful above all things, and, most of all, in this, that it deceives none so much as its own possessor.

While the sympathies of all the circle were aroused, and their feelings softened, was the time for young and old to interchange confidences; and it was not long after the meeting recorded in the last chapter, before Mr. Austwicke knew the state of his son Allan's affections as fully as Dr. Griesbach had known Rupert's; and though it is probable he never would have consented to the heir of Austwicke bringing a portionless bride of humble birth to be the future mistress of the Hall, as it was—with the full knowledge of the real position of affairs, and with the lesson on the meanness which family pride will sometimes stoop to, fresh in his mind, he gave his consent to an engagement, conditionally, that Allan and Mysie should prove their affection by waiting two, or it might be three years, and promised to obtain Mrs. Austwicke's sanction.

As to Gertrude, Rupert had found means to obtain an interview with her while his father was engaged in the conference we have recorded. She was shattered in health and spirits, and commonplace words of love, just then would have been out of place, but it was soothing to her to feel that whatever change awaited her, one heart beat in unison with hers; that an honourable family sought her as their choicest treasure; that no bitterness on Mrs. Austwicke's part—and there was some and would have been more, but for dread of what the rightful heir of Austwicke might do—no such bitterness availed in any way to injure her—nay, nor increased the love of Ella Griesbach and the Doctor. Rupert's love could not be increased, neither could the fartherly tenderness of Mr. Austwicke. Whether as niece or daughter, she was his beloved child still; and though her real name of Mabel might never come pleasantly to the lips of any of them, it was not needed; she had the name they all said was characteristic—the dear pet name—Little True.

And Norman, in gaining one sister, did not need to thrust from her place in his heart the sweet companion of his childhood. It was from his lips, on the day of Miss Austwicke's funeral, that Mysie had learned the history of her infancy, and renewed from affection the ties they had so long believed were knit at birth.

If any distance and shyness prevented the expression of kindred affection between Norman and little True, these were feelings destined very soon to pass away; for was not this new-found sister—she whose deep, soft, expressive eyes were so like his own that all observers noted the resemblance, and also that strange similarity of expression so much more striking than mere likeness of feature—this twin sister was to be by marriage the sister of one who, in a timid, far-off way, Norman had thought of and loved as a devotee might love a star—Ella; and that union could not but bring the object of his unuttered homage nearer to himself. Nay, his vague hopes, his wild aspirations, grew to shape themselves into a distinct form—to loom nearer, and to seem tangible; for did not Dr. Griesbach treat him with distinguished regard; and when, after a fortnight's stay at Austwicke, he returned to Woodford, the Professor who had been apprised of all, welcomed him with what was high praise—

"You've acted nobly, Norman. Be thankful for brains; they're better than acres. Aye, and they'll win acres, without dispossessing anybody."

Norman was glad to have this openly-expressed approval of his one resolve, which, though uttered in a moment of impulse, was a settled purpose—a fixed determination. Neither Mr. Hope nor Dr. Griesbach had so definitely agreed with him. They both spoke of his age as incapacitating him from judging and acting in the matter, though, admitting he held to his resolution in his riper years, they deemed it very noble.

Meanwhile there is one personage of our story whom Mr. Austwicke wished to bring to justice—the wretched cheat and miser, Burke. From first to last, this man had been the mainspring of evil to all concerned with him. He had witnessed the marriage of poor Isabel Grant with Wilfred Austwicke. He had lent himself, solely for the purpose of gain, to the nefarious plan of deceiving her into the belief that her marriage was a mere sham. He had been Satan's prime minister

in craftily suggesting to Captain Austwicke what he knew to be false, merely from seeing Mrs. Basil in company with her brother-in-law. He had embittered Mrs. McNaughton, and got the wretched girl Isabel turned out of doors; had pretended to shelter her, and, if he shrank from actual murder, had, by mental torment, destroyed her mind. He made a tool of his wife's sister, Ruth, or Janet, subduing her to his purposes through her passion for and marriage with a man her kindred disapproved. He had seized the opportunity of her neglect of the child in her charge to suggest and aid the substitution of Norman's twin sister. He had permitted his wife and his sister to take the infant Mysie Grant on board ship from the dying mother; and then false to the last, had deceived the Johnstons as to the sum paid for the children. Love of money—the determination to make a profit out of Wilfred Austwicke's secret marriage—had been his sordid motive: a motive, in some low natures, the very strongest that assails debased humanity.

It had been necessary to keep a watch on the Austwicke family; and the fact of Ruth's husband being a deserter, and Burke knowing it, had given him the hold on her which led to his complicity in his schemes. Once only was he in danger of losing his nefarious gains, and that was when Captain Austwicke's health gave way, and he returned a dying man, to do tardy justice to his children. The letter he sent to Burke, a month before embarking for home, had terrified the wretch with dread both of loss and detection—a dread which Captain Austwicke's death, and his sister's subsequent conduct, had turned to triumph.

If Mr. Austwicke could not trace every link in the chain of sequences, he discovered enough to make him resolve to punish this incarnation of greed and craft. For this purpose he had engaged a detective, to be on the watch, and arranged as soon as all the details were clear, to go to London with Norman, who, knowing the lair of the creature, could track him. Mr. Austwicke would have liked to set the police openly on the man, and save himself any contact with him, except in a court of justice; but he resolved to proceed cautiously, to save exposure.

CHAPTER LXIV. THE END WITHOUT THE ENDS.

"They bought the gem of worldly wealth,
And paid their conscience and their health,
While the pedlar cried, 'Come, buy! come, buy!
Oh, the pedlar! the knavish pedlar!
The fiend in pedlar's guise was he,
Selling and buying, cheating and lying:
Maramatha and woe is me!'"

CHARLES MACKAY.

As soon as affairs at Austwicke permitted, on the conclusion of a gloomy day for the season, Norman was on his way back to Woodford. But first he conducted Mr. Austwicke and his son to the court in Church Street, Commercial Road. The house had lost its rank look of teeming life; it was shut up as if stifled in its dirt. They pulled each of the three bell-handles on the doorpost in turn, but the wires seemed cut, and the bells gone. They beat on the panels of the door, and a slipshod girl opposite called to them, that Mrs. Owen was gone, "had cut and run," as the girl phrased it, "a week ago. If the gents wanted her, vy so did the perlesse, and old Screw too, he wanted her vurst of hall."

"We do not want her," said Norman, "but a lodger, Mr. Burke. The girl shook her tumbled head and laughed vaguely. They were about to retreat, baffled, when Allan Austwicke thought he saw a gleam of light through a crevice in the dilapidated door, and they all renewed their knocking. Presently the door was partly opened, and Norman, at a glance, saw that the man they sought was holding it. Norman threw himself so suddenly forward that the door yielded instantly, and all three stood in the passage. The man who was holding a dim, guttering bit of candle, retreated to the stairs, as if at bay.

Allan shut the door—for already, the faces of some idlers of the court were peering in. Then looking round, they had an opportunity of noticing the place and person before them. Both were miserable, but the man intensely so. He had crouched down breathless on the stairs; and now as he panted, his eyes gleamed from under his shaggy brows, like those of a savage animal