

forward with the rest, Down at the bridegroom's feet there fell a little bunch of lilies of the valley that only last night had been fastened together in Covent Garden Market, and the next moment they were crushed—poor, innocent white blossoms!—beneath his heel.

And looking at his wife's face, cold, impassive, and almost despairing, Cis Travers, with a start, caught sight of a face beyond it, eager, yearning, wet with tears, and quivering with emotion, and in that moment the young bridegroom felt vaguely which it was of these two women that loved him best.

In another second Gretchen had shrunk back into her sheltering corner, and Cis was tucking his wife's white satin train into the carriage; whilst she, with her heart on the other side of the world, was saying to herself—

"It is too late now—too late! Oh, Hugh! Oh, my darling, why did you ever leave me?"

CHAPTER XIX.

FIVE YEARS AFTER.

FIVE years after! Oh blissful license of the story-teller, to whom it is allowed thus to make free with Father Time! Five years of weariness, of dullness, of disappointment! What would not some of us give to be rid of five years with as many words!

Only think of it. . . . Five hot stuffy summers, made unbearable perchance with toilings in close City rooms all day, and with harder toilings still in west-end ball-rooms by night—five biting winters of nipping frosts and Christmas bills—five backward springs of drizzling rains and driving east winds! Think of all the vexations, bodily and spiritual, that five years must inevitably bring to all of us, and then say whether you would not gladly shake them off your memory like a night's bad dream, and wake to begin afresh—whether you would not joyfully wipe off old scores, old griefs, old sins, and, with new hopes and new chances, begin again to write down the story of your life upon a blank and unruled page.

Oh Rip Van Winkle, most blessed among

men, how gladly would some of us follow your example, and outsleep, since we can scarcely manage to outlive, the unloveliness of some of the years of our lives!

Well, to the story-teller it is allowed to do this wonderful feat—to say that so many years out of the lives of those he has created shall be spirited away. Never mind how many—be it five, fifteen, or fifty—he has but to say the word, and hey, presto! it is done.

So it is that I begin again with—five years after!

Five years! during which my different characters have all been toiling painfully through the dullnesses and disappointments of uneventful lives, through which I will not condemn you, my reader, to follow them.

Now let us find them all out again, and see what changes these five years have worked in them.

It is five years, then—five years since Gretchen Rudenbach sat shivering in Sothorne parish church to watch a bridal party pass in and out, and to no one have these years brought greater changes than to the little music-teacher.

Gretchen is "Mdlle. Rudenbach" now, and well known to the fashionable and musical world. She has left the little house in Pimlico, and, carrying Miss Pinkin with her as companion and chaperone, has migrated to a semi-detached villa in Victoria villas, Notting Hill.

It is highly improbable that Gretchen's musical talents, which were very considerable, and her industry, which was untiring, would alone have wrought this great improvement in her worldly prospects.

Seldom, indeed, do talent and industry, if unaccompanied by luck and interest, lead to the summit of any professional tree.

Gretchen's rise of fortune came about in this way. There was a certain Lady Caroline Skinfint, who lived in Wilton Crescent, and who was an acknowledged leader of the fashionable world. Lady Caroline was a younger daughter of the late Duke of Belgravia, which sufficiently explains the undoubtedness of her position. In her unmarried days, being unattractive in person and unpleasing in manner, she had been nobody in particular, for the maiden aunt even of a duke is not accounted of great social importance; but when, at the somewhat advanced age of thirty-eight, she escaped