

his respectful devotion was gradually winning her; and when, at last, he declared his love, she awoke to the knowledge that to reject it would be to destroy her own happiness.

There was nothing to prevent their union but the children, and against these innocents he had contracted a lasting hatred. In his estimation, they were the means of having so long kept their mother's love from him; and they were, also, the offspring of a man he considered beneath himself.

Mrs. Ellerton did not suspect the state of her lover's feelings towards her children, nor did he allow her to do so, until he had so completely won her love that she would have resigned life itself for him; and then he cast aside the mask, and signified his wishes.

"You will not let your children be obstacles in the way of our marriage?"

"No."

"Then listen. I cannot bear a single human being to share my affections with me."

"And what is it you wish me to do?"

"You must let me have the exclusive care of your family."

"I will not forsake my children," she promptly replied. "What can you mean, Lord Huntly?"

"What I say, madam," was the haughty reply, "These are the alternatives. Choose between me and them!"

His brow was stern; his determined lips were compressed.

"I am wretched; I know not what to do!" faltered the unhappy lady.

The deep despair depicted in her voice and attitude touched him a little.

"You don't love me, Maud. I have no business here." And he rose to go.

She threw herself on her knees before him, and caught his hands in hers.

"Oh, don't leave me like this, Ernest, or I shall die! Don't be angry with me, but I cannot desert my children—I cannot!"

"Then we part!" he coldly said. "You know my conditions! To-morrow I shall expect your reply! Good-bye!"

He stooped carelessly, kissed her forehead, and retired.

Maud Ellerton had never dreamt of the possibility of having to make such an election—to separate from the children she loved, or the lover she idolized. Many were the conflicting emotions which arose in her mind as she restlessly paced her chamber—at one moment vowing, come what would, she would never desert her children; then the lover was too terrible to contemplate. Surely he would not always require this sacrifice, she thought. She would trust her children to him, and, by her confidence, win him over to love them as she did. And this was the resolution to which she at length arrived.

Very often during that night did she seek the nursery, and bending over the little couches, kissed the sleepers, while her tears fell fast on the coverlet.

Lord Huntly knew the extent of her love for him too well to be surprised at the result of her deliberations.

"Maud, my darling," he said, "I shall not forget this proof of your confidence in me. I will never deceive or forsake you."

How his words came back to her, and seemed a cruel mockery, in after-years.

Before departing with her lover, Maud went into the studio to deposit a note and a purse for Vane. As she turned to go, she cast a glance at the picture of her husband.

To her excited imagination, the features which her own hands had painted gazed down sternly and reproachfully upon her, and she felt her strength failing, so, covering her face with her hands, she tottered from the room.

A carriage was in waiting. Lord Huntly handed her in, seated himself by her side, and the prancing horses dashed away in the direction of Huntly Castle.

Yes, she was gone. Through love for this man she had forgotten her duty, and bitter was the punishment that followed. His lordship's chaplain was in readiness to receive them, and they were married by special license in the Castle chapel.

Vane, a quiet, affectionate boy, on his return from school, entered the studio in search of his mother. He wondered to find her absent, and to see a letter addressed to himself. He tore it open, and read the tear-stained, incoherent words:—

"Vane, my beloved son, I am going away for a little while. Don't hate me. I shall be married to Lord Huntly when you get this letter. Be good to Ronald and my Lina. It breaks my heart to part from you, my children; but I shall soon see you. Don't hate me, my son."

"Oh, mother! how could you go away without bidding me good-bye!" he went; but consoled himself in some degree with the thought she would return; and he commenced the sad task of comforting his little brother and sister. But week after week passed, and Lady Huntly did not come, nor did her husband take any measures to provide subsistence for the children.

The landlord was a hard man, and averse to troubling his head about other people's affairs; but he knew the circumstances of the case, and having had the pictures and furniture sold to meet his demands for rent, he called Vane to him, and handed him the balance.

"Do you know the value of a pound?" he asked.

"I think I do, sir."

"Well, I fancy so too, for you're a clever little fellow; but you'd better be sure of it. This is the proceeds of your property. Mend shoes, or

do something to aid to the store. It's all you have to buy food with for I know not how long."

Left at so tender an age self-dependent, Vane settled in the cheapest lodgings the servant could procure him; and, a world of trouble in his young heart, began life, in company with his tiny charges.

Ronald was a merry child. His new home afforded him amusement. Nothing could cheer Lina. She was continually calling for her mother. Illness attacked her. The little hands were burning in fever, the weak brain was wandering, and "Mamma—mamma, take me up!" was the burden of her cry.

Vane determined to brave the cruel man who had carried off his mother, and bring her home. With this intent he set out, one morning, and took the road to Huntly Castle. It was difficult to reach it, and a night had fallen when he got there.

There was a carriage at the front door. A lady and gentleman, attired in ball costume, were in the hall; and in the lady, poor, shivering Vane recognised his mother.

He ascended the steps, and stood in the brilliant light. She saw him, and stretched forth her arms to embrace him. He sprang into them, and was once again clasped to his mother's breast.

Lord Huntly advanced in a towering passion, and dared, by force, to separate the mother from her child.

"Place this boy beyond the gates!" he shouted to a footman, who promptly obeyed, and dragged the lad to the door. "Beware!" he spoke to Vane, as the boy turned a plying gaze towards his parent. "If ever you come trespassing here again, you shall be imprisoned as a vagrant!"

The carriage passed the wanderer at full speed, while he retraced his steps, weary, desolate and heart-sick.

Lady Huntly neither wept nor lost her senses, although she heard, above the roll of the carriage wheels, the cry, "Mother, come to Ethel; she is dying!" She played her part at the ball. Some of the guests remarked her unnatural pallor, but she did not complain of languor; and when it was her husband's pleasure, she went home. But the veriest beggar might have pitied the tortured heart beating so fitfully beneath the robe of velvet and lace.

Thanks to his courageous spirit and persevering industry, Vane, on reaching his twenty-second year, was a rich man. He had not followed his landlord's recommendation "to mend shoes." But he inherited his mother's talent for painting. This he had assiduously cultivated. His pictures sold rapidly, and made for him influential friends, who encouraged the young artist in his career. His fame was established. Out of evil sometimes springs good. Only for his mother's desertion, his fortune might have been otherwise. She had marked out another path for him to tread, which was not congenial to his taste.

Thrown upon his own resources, he discovered that he possessed a gift of which none could deprive him. The helpless little brother and sister dependent on him were incentives to action. One of his first cares was for the future of his brother and sister. Ronald was destined for the bar; Ethelinda became an accomplished girl. She was the image of her mother, of whom the discarded children had but a dim recollection. Vane did not deceive them as to her conduct. He would tell them some day; but he deferred the sad story as long as he could, fearing they would despise her if they knew the truth.

The Ellertons were restored to their old home; Vane had re-purchased. It was one of his few idle days. He sat in an easy chair, reading the newspaper. He was silent.

Ethel and Ronald exchanged glances. "Vane has the paper upside down. He has been reading backwards this last hour," she remarked.

"Is it a peculiarity of genius, not to read like common people," observed Ronald.

"It is so, Vane?" asked Ethel, laughing. "Pray teach me to be above the vulgar."

She drew aside the paper, and was startled to see his trouble-laden features.

"What is it, Vane—are you ill?" she asked.

"Yes—no," he replied with confusion. "Don't be uneasy, Ethel; I want a quick walk in the open air, that's all."

He put the newspaper in his pocket, and was leaving the room, when Ronald called after him. "Won't you let us see the news, like a good fellow?"

"Pardon me," said Vane. And throwing the newspaper, upon the table, he went out.

"Possibly an adverse criticism on his picture has annoyed him," suggested Ronald, unfolding it.

"I fear he is ill," replied Ethel. "Vane's fame is established and an ill-natured notice would be of slight consequence to him."

"I have it, Ethel," presently said Ronald.

"Here it is—'Elopement in High Life.'"

Listen:—  
"It is our painful duty to record an elopement which had caused considerable noise in Springshire. Miss Sylvan, only daughter of Sir Hanby Sylvan (a much esteemed baronet), whose marriage was arranged to take place the fourteenth of next month, with an Italian nabob, quitted her father's house on Friday night, in company with Lord Huntly, a married man."

Sir Hanby has used every means to discover the whereabouts of the fugitives, but without success. It is believed they have sailed

for Italy. Much sympathy is felt for the afflicted father, and the forsaken wife of the errand lord."

"This is the only stirring event in the columns. And Vane wanted to prevent your seeing it, lest it should put run-away notions into your head, Ethel. And he would awaken some day from his dream of immortality, and find you had vanished with that handsome friend of his, Clifford Maunsell."

Ethel hid her face with one hand, as she answered. "What nonsense you do talk, Ronald! It is far more likely he would find you vanished with Clifford's sister Mary."

This was an indisputable point. And Ronald flushed crimson; while Ethel added, "I pity Lady Huntly. I wonder if Vane knows anything of the family? We are quite close to their seat here. I must ask him this evening."

Vane returned late. His face had the same haggard look it had worn in the morning. The battle had been fierce between filial love and duty; but he decided to seek out his mother, and bring her home.

It was the same day as she learned the full extent of her husband's perfidy. She was used to neglect and harshness through all those years, and received the blow in silence.

She had sat for hours, her hands clasped in her lap, without uttering a word. At last she rose, and entered the picture gallery. She took down her portrait from her husband's side, drew it out of its gilded frame, and deliberately cut it into shreds.

"Visitors at Huntly Castle shall not stop opposite a picture which wrought me so much woe, and sneeringly say, 'Behold the portrait of a silly woman who deserted her children for a man who became the instrument of her punishment!'"

And Lady Huntly asked herself where they were now whom, twelve years before, she cruelly left to their fate, to follow the fortune of a reprobate. As she gazed fitfully at his lordship's portrait on the wall memory reverted to the night of the ball, and the pleading voice of her son rang in her ears, "Mother, come to Ethel; she is dying!" and that lord cast the boy as a vagrant from his sight.

She laughed bitterly as she repeated his words. "I will never forsake you!" How they mocked her to-night!

Full of these painful recollections, she resolved that not another hour should roof of his shelter her head. She put on a bonnet, muffled herself in a shawl, and went down stairs. The white-haired butler met her in the hall. He came towards her, pity and respect pervading his demeanor.

"Oh, my lady! don't go out!" he cried, giving way to his feelings of terror, and wringing his hands.

The sight of the old man's grief brought the tears of sympathy to her.

"I am not unmindful of your fidelity," she received; "but I must go. Be under no apprehension; I shall not throw away my life. I have sinned mortally; my punishment is just."

She put out her hand; the servant's tears fell upon it; and the next moment she was crossing the greensward, heedless whither she went. And the gates of Huntly Castle opened, and closed behind her, shutting her out for ever.

She approached a dark, gurgling stream; stillness reigned around her; but the resplendent firmament was reflected in the water, and in its silent grandeur and purity rebuked her, and forbade her to hope for rest in a suicide's grave. She bowed her head, murmured a prayer, and pursued her solitary way.

When opposite her former home, the direction which she had mechanically taken, she halted to examine it; and, leaning against a pillar, kept a fixed gaze upon the drawn blind. The shadows of the figures within were visible. "Were those people as happy as she was once?" was the question she asked herself.

By-and-by, the door opened, and Vane stood on the threshold. The apparition in the moonlight attracted his attention. He had just revealed the history of their mother to Ethel and Ronald. He was then thinking of her.

Some secret power impelled him to go to the weary wanderer. He led her into the house. Though years of sorrow had lined her face, he had still a vivid remembrance of the stately form and magnificent figure. Vane recognised his mother. How glad he was! He felt rewarded for all his exertions; they would have such a happy home.

"Mother," he said, "you have come to us at last!"

Her looks were riveted upon him. She knew she was with her children. The suddenness of the reaction overcame her, and she fainted.

In his strong arms Vane bore her to Ethel and Ronald. They did not despise her. Their hearts yearned towards their parent. Tended with the assistance of gentle hands and loving hearts, Lady Huntly soon recovered. She obtained peace, but her constitution was shattered, and day by day her strength declined. The truth flashed upon her children that she had come home only to die.

She was most anxious about Ethel, though Clifford Maunsell, her betrothed lover, was an especial favorite with her.

It was a balmy summer evening. Ronald had wheeled the invalid's couch to the window, and taken up his position beside it, along with his brother and sister.

"Do you feel pain, mother?" he asked.

"No, my son, except here." And she pressed her hand to her side. "Breaking hearts take a

long time to kill; but I deserved my fate; I was guilty of a great crime."

"Dearest mamma, not guilty. Don't use the horrid word in connexion with yourself," said Ethel.

"It is true, darling. I forsook you all in your infancy, and erected an idol which I worshipped. Alas! it has fallen. Life is nearly over. What a trying one it has been! But mercy has come to me. I am permitted to see my children, and even to possess their love. Ethel I have a favor to ask; will you grant it?"

"Tell me, mamma, what it is?"

"If ever you meet him—you know who I mean—tell him I have prayed that he might be forgiven, as I have been. Is it too hard for you, dear child?"

"No, mamma; I will. I promise."

Lady Huntly laid her thin hands upon Ethel's golden hair, and raised her dying gaze upwards. She whispered, "Lead her not into temptation, but deliver her from evil." And with this petition on her lips, she expired.

Lord Huntly arrived at Huntly Castle. Tired of dissipation abroad, he determined to remain for the future at home, and seek a reconciliation with his wife. Pre-occupied with these thoughts, his lordship walked through the churchyard which separated one part of his demesne from another. He came to a white marble monument right in his path. Though not given as a rule to the perusal of epigrams, he stopped to read the inscription on this. It was his wife's. Her remains did not rest in the vault of the Huntlys, but near the grave of her first husband.

If Lord Huntly was capable of feeling remorse, he must have experienced it at this moment, while standing by the tomb of one he had so deeply injured.

Sad of heart, he stood and gazed at the pedestal of woe, and was full of regrets, when a girlish form, in mourning, approached. She had seen him wending his way thither, and remarking his commanding person, was informed by Vane that the wayfarer was no other than the destroyer of her early home and happiness, Lord Huntly.

She looked at him, and despite his miserable appearance, could not help a feeling of loathing stealing over her. But she had a duty to perform, and, however unpleasant the office, she must not shrink from it.

"Lord Huntly, I presume?" she said, interrogatively.

His lordship started, gently raised his hat, and bowed.

"I am the daughter of the lady whose memory that monument is raised to commemorate."

The astonished nobleman was about to speak—she motioned him to silence.

"My mother, on her dying bed, wished me to tell you, if I ever met you, that with her last breath she forgave you the wrongs you did her and hers."

Her voice faltered, and in broken accents she concluded.

"And she prayed that you might be pardoned, as she had been."

Relieved from a burden, Ethel turned to go.

"Stay!" exclaimed the conscience-stricken nobleman. "Can you not also forget?"

"Impossible. Can you restore my mother?—recall the weary, wasted years of the past?"

But the pitying angel came to her aid as she strode away. Turning she said, "We must meet no more, yet I forgive you."

There were two weddings in the village church shortly after. Ronald and Mary Maunsell were united; Clifford and Ethel following suit. The sun shone brightly on the brides at the altar. Vane gave them away; but he never married. The shadow of his youth remained upon his pathway; he was "wedded to his art."

## CHRISTIE'S BRAVERY.

The breeze blew freshly off the bay—too fresh, indeed, for Mrs. Dayton and Christie St. John, who sauntered in to the fire in the drawing-room, that sparkled and crackled merrily that frosty November morning.

Mrs. Dayton and Christie St. John went in, and Mr. Dayton and Frank Orme remained without, on the balcony, scenting the cold, nipping air, with the keen relish of their young, healthy constitutions.

"It is wonderful that Mrs. Dayton elects to remain at Bayside so late—wonderfully complimentary to her good sense."

Mr. Orme nodded towards the drawing-room windows where Mrs. Nora Dayton's gay, piquant face was seen so plainly through the plate-glass panes.

"Yes. We have taken such a fancy to our summer residence, you see; and Nora assures me housekeeping is just as convenient, and the cubs are certainly better and rolier here."

Frank Orme glanced at the window again, while Mr. Dayton was speaking—glanced purposely to see what he did see—Christie St. John's fair face, relieved so admirably against the dark crimson curtains, and folled so rarely by Mrs. Dayton's dark, brunette beauty.

A very attractive girl she was; not pretty at all; not even good-looking, as one looked casually at her; but with regular features, a little hard and stern for a woman when in perfect repose, but with such a capability of passion in her large, dark-grey eyes, with their heavy jet-