

congregation, as would be sure to be the case however quietly we might try to keep it, I should either faint from fright or run away."

"And if they married me to the sexton," added Violet laughing, "it would be all the same, for I should have but one thought to escape from so many eyes."

So as the months rolled round, the one came that was to witness the double marriage, and not one who had scoffed at the way of its celebration but were loud in praise of its success, as the young brides in their simple white robes adorned only with the priceless jewels of modesty and simplicity, looking to the eye as pure and sweet as the roses that were playing in the sunbeams of the sombre old chapel, now transformed into a very Eden of flowers. Few perhaps would have deemed the simple wedding (with guests only, who were there from real love, and interest, so were few in number) one to compete with those of modern usage, but not one there would have altered a single feature of it to have had, it one of these.

At this period in the history of lives it seems to be universally considered that interest is at a standstill, and it is up to this point volumes are written, and only such by the many read. Young lives are thus trained to centre all thought upon romantic situations, rarely ever realized in actual life, and their imaginations ever strained to follow with hopeful anticipation hair-breadth escapes of wondrous pathos on paper, but which in practical trial are cruelly stripped of the, fascinating colouring. The facts of every-day reality are not made for weeping heroines—they require the woman meant to battle with them, to be victorious first over self, and then to conquer them. If the lesson were learned *before* engaging in the contest, instead of believing the fight over before begun, many a pang would be saved, many a disappointment never felt, but which this fatally pleasant—ah! how pleasant!—on-look into life has created as its goal, and which is so willingly believed to be what existence is for. To know whether character is strong to overcome, you must watch to the end. It may have shoots of promise, develop purest buds of hopefulness, but lack the fruit anticipated. So the bright anticipations promising so much concerning Beatrice Fitzroy now Beatrice Brandon, and Violet Brandon now Violet Travis, could alone be developed or dwarfed in the new duties now devolving upon them. They had not the change of home surroundings usually following a change of name, for both were placed in exceptional circumstances.

The Holt was so large, that many families might have been parcelled off beneath its roof without let or hindrance to the comfort of any. So Noel was domiciled with Beatrice in one of its pleasantest quarters, and while one home, there were two households, and what a happy thankfulness was in the heart of Miss Fitzroy at not being bereft of her children, as she loved to call them, for Noel and Violet merely exchanged places, and as Uncle Ralph reminded Miss Barbara, he had got Violet after all her far-sightedness, though she as quickly threw back the ball, not without losing Noel. But Mr. Ralph Brandon was not going to exchange a son for a daughter, and lose the boy who was as the apple of his eye, for he alternated between the two homes, till it became the literal fact, Miss Barbara predicted, that to find him would be one continued game at hide and seek. So time went on, the world rolled round, people ate, drank, slept, had sorrows, had joys, disappointments, successes, just as they have had from creation, and will down to the end. These lives had nothing more startling, less matter-of-fact than those in every land and clime, yet to each how full of momentous doings. To look at such practically, with all the colouring possible to bring to bear artistically upon it, what can be said original or wonderful about young birds nestling in the once silent nest? The incidents common to childhood; the enlarging or narrowing of acquaintances; the busy round of domestic life; the bargaining, gaining, losing all, all over and over again; the perpetual treadmill always revolving; *the only difference is the exchange in the workers.* But though outside life goes on with so little variation, what untold inward changes take place in each and all! There must be either progress or declension—*no standing still*; nobler or more ignoble; more gentle and loving, or more selfish and callous; a ripper judgment from thought, or a loss of it from decay; a firmer faith in the unseen, or oblivion of what once was possessed.

That the tendency for the progress that stretches beyond time was a growing one in Noel and Beatrice their lives testified, words were superfluous to confirm. They had their sorrows, their trials, just as surely as those who had no higher aspirations than earth affords; indeed more often the disciple is called upon to witness "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," but the world, looking wonderingly off and asking, "What sin have these committed to be so corrected," know not the secret love-messages to the soul—such are like the angels going up and down the ladder Jacob saw.

Amidst her happiness, Violet felt a want, an undefined uneasiness. True to her soul's yearnings she clung to her Lord, but there was not the same consciousness of nearness once felt. She was realizing what leanness to the soul meant. Her discipline had begun.

The world looking on would have seen very little difference between the young men. Both were equally scrupulous in all outward attentions and devotions to the requirements of what is called religious life. To have detected any, one had to note down "principle" governed every act of Noel. He had but one chart to steer his course by; it was not *is this or that expedient*, but *is it right*. Never flinching, never temporising he stuck true to the answer, whether it demanded sacrifice of time, money, or self. Being a consistent follower of what he professed did not make Noel Brandon a dull man of business; not Brandon could excel him in clear-sighted bargains, in cool efficient dealings with his fellow men. "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as unto the Lord," and business he considered came under the "Whatsoever."

They were all spending one of many happy days together, but this one especially so, and as Miss Fitzroy gazed upon each face, her own grew sweetly sympathetic with the admiring pride of the young mothers over their little folk.

"Aunt Barbara," exclaimed Violet, "does it seem possible we have been married four years to-day?"

"It is not the first four I have thought pass so quickly as scarcely to be possible, and every four, Violet, will go more quickly."

"We shall be Grandmama's, Violet," laughed Beatrice, "before we have realized the fact we have done with girlhood, at Aunt Barbara's reckoning. I

should like, though, before then to have done some of the good she has. I never now seem to have a moment beyond our home."

"Violet was troubling the other day, until I laughed her out of it, that she was a cumberer on the earth, or something as suggestive, and lamenting over things in general," began Brandon, "but—"

"You would not have shown much sense if you had," said Miss Barbara dryly. "If you go weeding your neighbours's gardens, leaving your own to be choked with weeds, you have a philanthropic spirit I never wish to emulate."

A hearty appreciative laugh from Noel showed he did not need to make the enquiry his wife did when she said "I should not mind if I had weeded a quarter your number, though I am sure neither Violet nor I credit the need of attention to your own. What made you suggest such a supposition, Aunt Barbara? I was not alluding to myself; but when two mothers take to lamenting that their field of usefulness is not larger, I think they need to be reminded, to be sure that what is already under their care has the cultivation it demands. If I had been a wife and mother I should have considered the duties required at my hands demanded all the time I had. *It is not an occasional precept dropped here and there that constitutes home training, it needs an ever constant watchful supervision never to be delegated to another,* and there are plenty of women without such ties to whom this outside work is their mission, as I consider it mine."

"What pictures you call up, Aunt Barbara," said Brandon. "All single women have not the love for mission work, and I am sure it is too often a thankless office."

"Ah, Brandon, when there is other spirit than working for their Lord it may be so, but 'His' servants work for love not for pay; they do not look for gratitude, though it is gratefully appreciated when given; 'well done' will be their reward," said Miss Fitzroy with kindling eyes.

"Granted, Aunt Mary, but there are so few really good people, though plenty of religious ones, that but for one here and there doing what they profess, I am sure it is hard to distinguish where the difference lies between the men of the world and the men of the church. You want to be in business to find this out. I know if Noel were to confess the truth he would say, with me, the so-called worldly man would be ashamed to do the dishonourable actions these pious folks are so continually doing, and it injures the cause they advocate more than all the profanity in existence."

"Brandon, does the different attempts of the many copyists of Michael Angelo reflect their failure upon him, or upon their own want of artistic conception and want of study?" asked Miss Fitzroy quietly.

"Not upon him, certainly, Aunt Mary."

"Then, my dear, when you see poor humanity professing to imitate their Lord, and betray how unlike they are, do not blame the Master and say religion is a sham. Where there is the genius of the true artist, time and practice enables him to copy so faithfully that the mantle of the dead seems to have fallen upon him; and judge fairly, Brandon. Where there is the *genuine* spirit of heavenly aspirations, *the evil in every nature has to be softened*, and the good grows until the heavenly likeness is stamped on every act."

"Oh, Auntie," he answered, gently patting the slender hand he held, "you only need a pair of wings to be ready for flight. But what do you think of that fellow's conscientiousness?" he asked, squaring his fists in pugilistic attitude towards Noel. "Only yesterday came a proof his bump is too largely developed for action amongst the children of this world."

"You will convince Aunt Mary about as much as you did me I was wrong," laughed Noel, shying the sofa pillow dexterously at the fists.

"Come, come," interposed Miss Brandon, "none of that sort of business where there are breakables about. What has Noel been doing?"

"Doing!" echoed Brandon. "Let the finest opportunity slip through our fingers that was ever offered to a business man, and all through one of those scruples that infect every one of you, not excepting this wife of mine," he continued, coming behind her chair and taking her head in his hands kissed the upturned half-sad face, saying as he did so, "You do not deserve it for siding with him."

"What has he done, Brandon?" inquired Beatrice anxiously looking towards her husband, who returned her pleading look with one of mischievous mystery.

"Nothing more than put £10,000 into another man's pocket instead of his own, all through a practice I have condemned ever since Uncle Ralph gave over the supervision of affairs to him."

"Bless the boy," said Miss Barbara impatiently, "why do you not speak plainly instead of dealing in enigmas? What is it you have condemned?"

"Nothing more nor less than an absurd notion Noel has of not having business letters delivered on a Sunday. Now he sees his mistake, or rather will not see it, for had he done so he could have secured an offer not brooking delay."

"But surely," demanded Beatrice, "the sender of the offer must have known it would not be attended to on Sunday. Noel cannot be blamed for what he could not help."

"It really is laughable to see how Beatrice is up in arms if one speaks—nay, looks at her husband," Brandon said teasingly, "but you cannot defend him against the charge, or put it on the shoulders of others. The letter had been delayed or we should have got it on the Saturday, still there was time to have secured the bargain, seeing twenty-four hours were given for reply, which, if not received, gave the offer to another. Now, did he act as most sane people do, he would have his letters Sunday as well as any other day, and if there could have been any great evil in telegraphing the simple word 'Accepted,' I give up."

"I do not pretend to say I do not regret the mishap, or whatever you like to call it," said Noel good humouredly "but I do not regret I made the stand to leave everything relating to business out of Sunday. The simple reading of letters necessarily causes one to plan and arrange, and taking the body to church while you are in spirit in your counting-house is, to my mind, more dishonouring to God than to be there in the body. You are free from hypocrisy in the one case—in the other guilty of the act so solemnly rebuked by Isaiah when he said 'Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their