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THE MONCTONS:

A NOVEL.

BY

SUSANNA MOODIE,

AUTHOR OF

"ROUGHING IT IN THE BUSH," "FLORA LINDSAY,"

"MATRIMONIAL SPECULATIONS," &c.

What—dost thou think I'll bend to thee?
The free in soul are ever free:
Nor force, nor poverty can bind
The subtle will—the thinking mind.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1856.

LONDON:
Printed by Schulze and Co., 13, Poland Street.

TO

JOHN LOVELL, ESQ.,

OF MONTREAL,

WHO WAS ONE OF THE FIRST AND MOST SUCCESSFUL

PIONEERS IN ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL LITERATURE IN THE

CANADIAN COLONIES,

THIS WORK,

WHICH OWES ITS EXISTENCE TO HIS GENEROUS CARE,

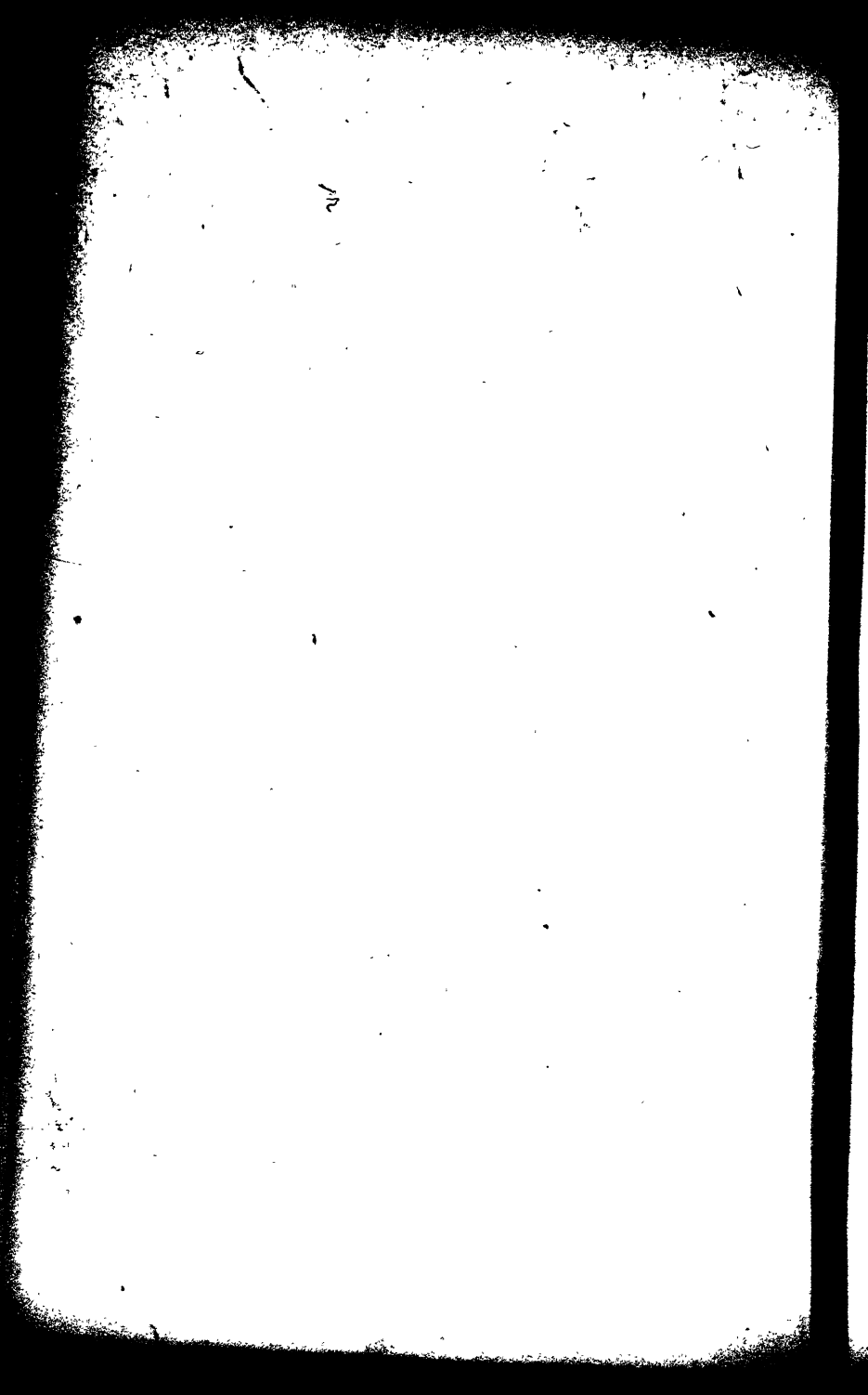
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,

BY HIS GRATEFUL AND OBLIGED FRIEND,

SUSANNA MOODIE.

DECEMBER, 1855.

L



THE MONCTONS.

CHAPTER I.

MY GRANDFATHER AND HIS SONS.

THERE was a time—a good old time—when men of rank and fortune were not ashamed of their poor relations; affording the protection of their name and influence to the lower shoots of the great family tree, which, springing from the same root, expected to derive support and nourishment from the main stem.

That time is well-nigh gone for ever. Kindred love and hospitality have decreased with the increase of modern luxury and exclusiveness, and the sacred ties of consanguinity are now regarded with indifference; or if recognized, it is only with those who move in the same

charmed circle, and who make a respectable appearance in the world: then, and then only, are their names pronounced with reverence, and their relationship considered an honor.

It is amusing to watch from a distance, the eagerness with which some people assert their claims to relationship with wealthy and titled families, and the intrigue and manœuvring it calls forth in these fortunate individuals, in order to disclaim the boasted connexion.

It was my fate for many years to eat the bitter bread of dependence, as one of those despised and insulted domestic annoyances—
A Poor Relation.

My grandfather, Geoffrey Moncton, whose name I bear, was the youngest son of a wealthy Yorkshire Baronet, whose hopes and affections entirely centered in his first-born. What became of the junior scions of the family-tree was to him a matter of secondary consideration. My grandfather, however, had to be provided for in a manner becoming the son of a gentleman, and on his leaving college, Sir Robert offered to purchase him a commission in the army.

My grandfather was a lad of peaceable habits, and had a mortal antipathy to fighting. He

refused point blank to be a soldier. The Navy offered the same cause for objection, strengthened by a natural aversion to the water, which made him decline going to sea.

What was to be done with the incorrigible youth? Sir Robert flew into a passion—called him a coward—a disgrace to the name of Moncton.

My grandfather, who was a philosopher in his way, pleaded guilty to the first charge. From his cradle he had carefully avoided scenes of strife and violence, and had been a quiet, industrious boy at school, a sober plodding student at college, minding his own business, and troubling himself very little with the affairs of others. The sight of blood made him sick; he hated the smell of gunpowder, and would make any sacrifice of time and trouble rather than come to blows. He now listened to the long catalogue of his demerits, which his angry progenitor poured forth against him, with such stoical indifference, that it nearly drew upon him the corporeal punishment which at all times he so much dreaded.

Sir Robert, at length named the Church, as the profession best suited to a young man of

his peaceable disposition, and flew into a fresh paroxysm of rage, when the obstinate fellow positively refused to be a parson.

"He had a horror," he said, "of making a mere profession of so sacred a calling. Besides, he had an awkward impediment in his speech, and he did not mean to stand up in a pulpit to expose his infirmity to the ridicule of others."

Honour to my grandfather. He was not deficient in mental courage, though Sir Robert, in the plenitude of his wisdom, had thought fit to brand him as a coward.

The bar was next proposed for his consideration, but the lad replied firmly, "I don't mean to be a lawyer."

"Your reasons, sir?" cried Sir Robert in a tone which seemed to forbid a liberty of choice.

"I have neither talent nor inclination for the profession."

"And pray, sir, what have you talent or inclination for?"

"A merchant," returned Geoffrey calmly and decidedly, without appearing to notice his aristocratic sire's look of withering contempt. "I

have no wish to be a poor gentleman. Place me in my Uncle Drury's counting-house, and I will work hard and become an independent man."

Now this Uncle Drury was brother to the late Lady Moncton, who had been married by the worthy Baronet for her wealth. He was one of Sir Robert's horrors—one of those rich, vulgar connections which are not so easily shaken off, and whose identity is with great difficulty denied to the world. Sir Robert vowed, that if the perverse lad persisted in his grovelling choice, though he had but two sons, he would discard him altogether.

Obstinacy is a family failing of the Monctons. My grandfather, wisely, or unwisely, as circumstances should afterwards determine, remained firm to his purpose. Sir Robert realized his threat. The father and son parted in anger, and from that hour, the latter was looked upon as an alien to the old family stock; which he was considered to have disgraced.

Geoffrey, however, succeeded in carrying out his great life object. He toiled on with indefatigable industry, and soon became rich. He had singular talents for acquiring wealth, and they

were not suffered to remain idle. The few pounds with which he commenced his mercantile career, soon multiplied into thousands, and tens of thousands; and there is no knowing what an immense fortune he might have realized, had not death cut short his speculations at an early period of his life.

He had married uncle Drury's only daughter, a few years after he became partner in the firm, by whom he had two sons, Edward and Robert, to both of whom he bequeathed an excellent property.

Edward, the eldest, my father, had been educated to fill the mercantile situation, now vacant by its proprietor's death, which was an ample fortune in itself, if conducted with prudence and regularity.

Robert had been early placed in the office of a lawyer of eminence, and was considered a youth of great talents and promise. Their mother had been dead for some years, and of her little is known in the annals of the family. When speculating upon the subject, I have imagined her to have been a plain, quiet, matter-of-fact body, who never did or said anything worth recording.

When a man's position in life is marked out for him by others, and he is left no voice in the matter, in nine cases out of ten, he is totally unfitted by nature and inclination for the post he is called to fill. So it was with my father, Edward Moncton. A person less adapted to fill an important place in the mercantile world, could scarcely have been found. He had a genius for spending, not for making money; and was so easy and credulous that any artful villain might dupe him out of it. Had he been heir to the title and the old family estates, he would have made a first rate country gentleman; for he possessed a fine manly person, was frank and generous, and excelled in all athletic sports.

My Uncle Robert was the very reverse of my father—stern, shrewd, and secretive; no one could see more of his mind than he was willing to show; and, like my grandfather, he had a great love for money, and a natural talent for acquiring it. An old servant of my grandfather's, Nicholas Banks, used jocosely to say of him: "Had Master Robert been born a beggar, he would have converted his ragged wrap-rascal into a velvet gown. The art of making money was born in him."

Uncle Robert was very successful in his profession ; and such is the respect that men of common minds pay to wealth for its own sake, that my uncle was as much courted by persons of his class, as if he had been Lord Chancellor of England. He was called the *honest lawyer* : wherefore, I never could determine, except that he was the *rich lawyer* ; and people could not imagine that the envied possessor of five thousand per annum, could have any inducement to play the rogue, or cheat his clients. The dependent slave who was chained all day to the desk, in Robert Moncton's office, knew him to be a dishonest man ; but his practice daily increased, and his reputation and fortune increased in proportion.

The habits and dispositions of these brothers were so different, so utterly opposed to each other, that it was difficult to reconcile the mind to the fact that they were so closely related.

My uncle had a subtle knowledge of character, which was rendered more acute by his long acquaintance with the world ; and he did not always turn it to a righteous account. My father was a babe in these matters—a cunning child might deceive him. While my uncle had

a knack of saving without appearing parsimonious, my father had an unfortunate habit of frittering his money away upon trifles. You would have imagined that the one had discovered the secret of the philosopher's stone ; and the other had ruined himself in endeavouring to find it out. The one was economical from choice, the other extravagant from the mere love of spending, My uncle married a rich merchant's daughter, for her money. My father ran off with a poor curate's penniless girl, for love. My father neglected his business and became poor. In the hope of redeeming his fortune he frequented the turf and the gambling-table ; and died broken-hearted and insolvent in the prime of manhood ; leaving his widow and her orphan boy to the protection and guardianship of the brother, who had drudged all his life to become a millionaire.

My dear mother only survived her handsome, reckless husband six short months ; and, bereaved of both my natural protectors, I was doomed at the early age of eight years to drink the bitter cup of poverty and dependence to its very dregs.

CHAPTER II.

MY MOTHER'S FUNERAL.

I NEVER saw my Uncle Robert Moncton until the morning of my mother's funeral; and the impression that first interview made upon my young heart will never be forgotten. It cast the first dark shadow upon the sunny dial of my life, and for many painful years my days and hours were numbered beneath its gloomy influence.

It was a chill, murky November day, such a day as London or its immediate vicinity can alone produce. The rain fell slowly and steadily to the ground; and trickled from the window-frames in one continuous stream. A thick mist hung upon the panes of glass like a gauze veil, intersected by innumerable channels

or water, which looked like a pattern of open work left in the dingy material. The shutters of our once populous parlour were half-closed ; and admitted into the large, deserted apartment only a portion of this obscure light. The hearse destined to convey the remains of my dear mother to their last, long resting-place, was drawn up at the door. I saw it looming through the fog, with its tall, black shadowy plumes, like some ghostly and monstrous thing. A hitherto unknown feeling of dread stole over me. My life had been all sunshine up to the present moment—the sight of that mournful funeral array swept like a dark cloud over the smiling sky, blotting out all that was bright and beautiful from my eyes and heart. I screamed in terror and despair, and hid my face in the lap of my old nurse to shut out the frightful vision, and shed torrents of tears.

The good woman tried to soothe me while she adjusted my black dress, as I was to form one in that doleful procession as chief mourner—I was my mother's only child. The only real mourner there.

The door which led into the next room was partly open. I saw the undertaker's people re-

moving the coffin in order to place it in the hearse. This was a fresh cause for anxiety. I knew that that black, mysterious-looking box contained the cold, pale, sleeping form of my mother; but I could not realize the fact, that the beautiful and beloved being, who had so lately kissed and blessed me, was unconscious of her removal from her home and weeping boy.

“Mamma!—dear mamma!” I cried, struggling violently with nurse. “Let me go, nurse! those wicked men shall not take away mamma!”

Two gentlemen, attracted by my cries and struggles, entered the room. The foremost was a tall, portly man, whom the world would call handsome. His features were good, and his complexion darkly brilliant; but there was a haughty, contemptuous expression in his large, prominent, selfish-looking eyes, which sent a chill to my heart. Glittering and glassy, they sparkled like ice—clear, sarcastic and repelling—and oh, how cold! The glance of that eye made me silent in a moment. It fascinated like the eye of a snake. I continued to shiver and stare at him, as long as its scornful gaze remained riveted upon my face. I felt a kindred feeling springing up in my heart—a feeling of

defiance and resistance which would fain return hatred for hatred, scorn for scorn ; and never in after-life could I meet the searching look of that stern cold eye, without experiencing the same outward abhorrence and inward revulsion.

He took my hand, and turning me round, examined my countenance with critical minuteness, neither moved by my childish indignation nor my tears. A strong-limbed straight-made fellow, this. I did not think that Edward could be the father of such an energetic-looking boy. He's like his grandfather, and if I mistake not, will be just as obstinate and self-sustained."

"A true Moncton," returned his companion, a coarse-featured, vulgar-looking man, with a weak, undecided, but otherwise kindly countenance. "You will not be able to bend that young one to your purpose."

A bitter smile was the reply, and a fixed stare from those terribly bright eyes.

"Poor child ! He's very unfortunate," continued the same speaker. "I pity him from my very soul !" He placed his large hand kindly upon my head, and drawing me between his knees held up my face and kissed me with an air of parental tenderness. Touched by the un-

expected caress, I clasped my arms about his neck, and hid my face in his bosom. He flung himself into a large chair, and lifted me upon his knee.

"You seem to have taken a fancy to the boy," said my uncle, in the same sarcastic tone. "Suppose you adopt him as *your* son. I would gladly be rid of him for ever; and would pay well for his change of name and country. Is it a bargain?" and he grasped his companion by the shoulder.

"No. I will not incur the responsibility. I have done too much against the poor child already. Besides, a man with ten children has no need of adopting the child of a stranger. Providence has thrown him into your hands, Robert Moncton; and whether for good or evil, I beseech you to treat the lad kindly for his father's sake."

"Well, well, I must, I see, make the best of a bad bargain. But, Walters, you could so easily take him with you to America. He has no friends by his mother's side, to make any stir about his disappearance. Under your name his identity will never be recognized, and it would be taking a thorn out of my side."

“To plant it in my own heart. The child must remain with you.”

I did not pay very particular attention to this conversation at the time, but after events recalled it vividly to my recollection.

The undertaker put an end to the conference by informing the gentlemen that “all was ready, and the hearse was about to move forward.” My nurse placed me in a mourning coach, beside my uncle and his companion, in order that I might form part of that dismal procession, to the nearest cemetery. I shall never forget the impression that solemn scene made on my mind. My first ideas of death and decay were formed whilst standing beside my mother’s grave. There my heart received its first life-lesson; and owned its first acquaintanceship with grief—the *ideal* vanished, and the hard, uncompromising *real* took its place.

After the funeral was over, I accompanied my Uncle Robert to his house in Hatton Garden. At the door we parted with Mr. Walters, and many years elapsed, before I saw his face again.

CHAPTER III.

MY AUNT REBECCA.

Mrs. MONCTON welcomed the poor orphan with kindness. She was a little, meek-looking woman; with a sweet voice, and a very pale face. She might have been pretty when young, but my boyish impression was that she was very plain. By the side of her tall, stern partner, she looked the most delicate, diminutive creature in the world; and her gentle, timid manner made the contrast appear greater than it really was.

“God bless you! my poor child,” said she, lifting me up in her arms and wiping the tears from my face. “You are young, indeed, to be left an orphan.”

I clasped her neck and sobbed aloud. The

sound of her voice reminded me of my mother, and I began to comprehend dimly all I had lost.

“Rebecca,” said my uncle, in a deep, clear voice, “you must not spoil the boy. There is no need of this display.”

His wife seemed as much under the influence of his eye as myself. She instantly released me from her arms, and quietly placed me in a chair beside the fire, and in the presence of her husband, she took no more notice of me than she would have done of one of the domestic animals about the house. Yet, her eyes rested upon me with motherly kindness, and she silently took care to administer liberally to all my wants; and when she did speak, it was in such a soft, soothing tone, that I felt that she was my friend, and loved her with my whole heart.

My uncle was a domestic tyrant—cruel, exacting, and as obstinate as a mule; yet, she contrived to live with him on friendly terms; the only creature in the world, I am fully persuaded, who did not hate him. Married, as she had been, for money, and possessing few personal advantages, it was wonderful the influence she had over him in her quiet way. She never

resisted his authority, however harshly enforced ; and often stood between him and his victims, diverting his resentment without appearing to oppose his will. If there existed in his frigid breast one sentiment of kindness for any human creature, I think it was for her.

With women he was no favourite. He had no respect for the sex, and I question whether he was ever in love in his life. If he had ever owned a tender passion, it must have been in very early youth, before his heart got hardened and iced in the world. My aunt seemed necessary to his comfort, his convenience, his vanity : however he might be disliked by others he was certain of her fidelity and attachment. His respect for her was the one bright spot in his character, and even that was tarnished by a refined system of selfishness.

The only comfort I enjoyed during my cheerless childhood, I derived from her silent attention to my wants and wishes, which she gratified as far as she dared, without incurring the jealous displeasure of her exacting husband.

In private, Mrs. Moncton always treated me as her own child. She unlocked the fountains of natural affection, which my uncle's harshness

had sealed, and love gushed forth. I dearly loved her, and longed to call her mother; but she forbade all outward demonstration of my attachment, which she assured me would not only be very offensive to Mr. Moncton, but would draw down his displeasure upon us both.

The hours I spent with my good aunt were few: I only saw her at meals, and on the Sabbath-day, when I accompanied her to church, and spent the whole day with her and her only son—a cross, peevish boy, some four years older than myself—but of him anon. During the winter, she always sent for me into the parlour, during the dark hour between dinner and tea, when I recited to her the lessons I had learned with my cousin's tutor during the day. My uncle was always absent at that hour, and these were precious moments to the young heart, which knew no companionship, and pined for affection and sympathy.

My worthy aunt! it is with heartfelt gratitude I pay this slight tribute to your memory. But for your gentle love and kind teachings, I might have become as cold and tyrannical as your harsh lord—as selfish and unfeeling as your unnatural son.

How I delighted to sit by your side, in the warm, red light of a cheerful fire, in that large, dusky room, and hold your small white hand in mine, while I recounted to you all the beautiful and shadowy reminiscences of my happy infancy—to watch the pensive smile steal over your lips, as I described the garden in which I played, the dear little white bed in which I slept, and where my own dear mother nightly knelt beside me, to hear me repeat my simple prayers and hymns, before she kissed and blessed me, and left me to the protecting care of the great Father in Heaven.

“ Ah ! ” I exclaimed one evening, while sitting at my aunt’s feet, “ why did she die and leave me for ever ? I am nobody’s child. Other little boys have kind mothers to love them, but I am alone in the world. Aunt, let me be your boy—your own dear little boy, and I will love you almost as well as I did my poor mamma ! ”

The good woman caught me to her heart, tears were streaming down her kind, benevolent face, she kissed me passionately, as she sobbed out,

“ Geoffrey, you will never know how much I love you—more, my poor boy, than I dare own.

But rest assured that you shall never want a mother's love while I live."

Well and conscientiously did she perform her promise. She has long been dead, but time will never efface from my mind a tender recollection of her kindness. Since I arrived at man's estate, I have knelt beside her grave, and moistened the turf which enfolds that warm, noble heart with grateful tears.

She had, as I before stated, one son—the first-born and only survivor of a large family. This boy was a great source of anxiety to his mother; a sullen, unmanageable, ill-tempered child. Cruel and cowardly, he united with the cold, selfish disposition of the father, a jealous, proud and vindictive spirit peculiarly his own. It was impossible to keep on friendly terms with Theophilus Moncton: he was always taking affronts, and ever on the alert to dispute and contradict every word or opinion advanced by another. He would take offence at every look and gesture, which he fancied derogatory to his dignity; and if you refused to speak to him, he considered that you did not pay him proper respect—that you slighted and insulted him.

He was afraid of his father, for whom he en-

retained little esteem or affection ; and to his gentle mother he was always surly and disobedient ; ridiculing her maternal admonitions, and thwarting and opposing her commands, because he knew that his opposition pained and annoyed her.

Me—he hated ; and not only told me so to my face, both in public and private, but encouraged the servants to treat me with insolence and neglect. This class of individuals are seldom actuated by high and generous motives ; and anxious to court the favour of their wealthy master's heir, they soon found that the best way to worm themselves into his good graces, was to treat me with disrespect. The taunts and blows of my tyrannical cousin, though hard to bear, never wounded me so keenly as the sneers and whispered remarks of these worldly, low-bred domestics. Their conduct clenched the iron of dependence into my very soul.

It was vain for my aunt to remonstrate with her son on his ungenerous conduct : her authority with him was a mere cipher, he had his father upon his side, and for my aunt's sake, I forebore to complain.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TUTOR.

MY uncle did not send us to school, but engaged a young man of humble birth, but good classical attainments, to act in the capacity of tutor to his son, and as an act of especial favour, which fact was duly impressed upon me from day to day, I was allowed the benefit of his instructions.

Mr. Jones, though a good practical teacher, was a weak, mean creature, possessing the very soul of a sneak. He soon discovered that the best way to please his elder pupil was to neglect and treat me ill. He had been engaged on a very moderate salary to teach *one* lad, and he was greatly annoyed when Mr. Moncton introduced me into his presence, coldly remarking,

“ that I was an orphan son of his brother—a lad thrown upon his charity, and it would add very little to Mr. Jones’s labours to associate me with Theophilus in his studies.”

Mr. Jones was poor and friendless, and had to make his own way in the world. He dared not resent the imposition, for fear of losing his situation, and while outwardly he cheerfully acquiesced in Mr. Moncton’s proposition, he conceived a violent prejudice against me, as being the cause of it.

He was spiteful, irritable, narrow-minded man; and I soon found that any attempt to win his regard, or conciliate him, was futile: he had made up his mind to dislike me, and he did so with a hearty good will which no attention or assiduity on my part could overcome.

Theophilus, who, like his father, professed a great insight into character, read that of his instructor at a glance; and despised him accordingly. But Theophilus was vain and fond of admiration, and could not exist without satellites to move around him, and render him their homage as to a superior luminary. He was a magnificent paymaster

to his sneaks; and bound them to him with the strongest of all ties—his purse-strings.

Mr. Moncton, allowed this lad a handsome sum monthly for his own private expenses; and fond as he was of money, he never inquired of the haughty arrogant boy, the manner in which he disposed of his pocket-money. He might save or spend it as inclination prompted—he considered it a necessary outlay to give his son weight and influence with others; and never troubled himself about it again.

Theophilus soon won over Mr. Jones to his interest, by a few judicious presents; while he fostered his dislike to me, by informing him of circumstances regarding my birth and family, with which I never became acquainted until some years afterwards. At this distance of time, I can almost forgive Mr. Jones, for the indifference and contempt he felt for his junior pupil.

Influenced by these feelings, he taught me as little as he could; but I had a thirst for knowledge, and he could not hinder me from listening and profiting by his instructions to my cousin. Fortunately for me, Theophilus did not possess either a brilliant or inquiring mind. Learning was very distasteful to him; and Mr. Jones

had to repeat his instructions so often, that it enabled me to learn them by heart. Mr. Jones flattered and coaxed his indolent pupil; but could not induce him to take any interest in his studies, so that I soon shot far ahead of him, greatly to the annoyance of both master and pupil; the former doing his best to throw every impediment in my way.

I resented the injustice of this conduct with much warmth, and told him, "that I would learn in spite of him; I had mastered the first rudiments of Latin and Mathematics, and I could now teach myself all I wanted to know."

This boast was rather premature. I found the task of self-instruction less easy than I anticipated. I was in Mr. Jones's power—and he meanly withheld from me the books necessary to my further advancement. I now found myself at a stand-still. I threatened Mr. Jones that I would complain to my uncle of his unjustifiable conduct. The idea seemed greatly to amuse him and my cousin—they laughed in my face, and dared me to make the experiment.

I flew to my aunt.

She told me to be patient and conceal my

resentment ; and she would supply the books and stationery I required, from her own purse.

I did not like this. I was a blunt straightforward boy ; and I thought that my aunt was afraid to back me in what I knew to be right. I told her so.

“ True, Geoffrey. But in this house it is useless to oppose force to force. Your only safe course is non-resistance.”

“ That plan I never can adopt. It is truckling to evil, aunt. No ultimate good can spring from it.”

“ But great trouble and pain may be avoided, Geoffrey.”

“ Aunt, I will not submit to Mr. Jones’s mean tyranny ; I feel myself aggrieved ; I must speak out and have it off my mind. I will go this instant to Mr. Moncton and submit the case to him.”

“ Incur his displeasure—no trifle at any time, Geoffrey—and have Theophilus and Mr. Jones laughing at you. They can tell your uncle what story they please : and which is he most likely to believe, your statement or theirs ?”

“ He is a clever man. Let them say what they like, it is not so easy to deceive him ; he

will judge for himself. He would know that I was in the right, even if he did not choose to say so; and that would be some satisfaction, although he might take their part."

My aunt was surprised at my boldness; she looked me long and earnestly in the face.

"Geoffrey, your argument is the best. Honesty is the right policy, after all. I wish I had moral courage to act up to it at all times. But, my dear boy, when you are the slave of a violent and deceitful man, your only chance for a quiet life is to fight him with his own weapons."

"Wrong again, aunt," I cried vehemently. "That would make me as bad as him. No, no, that plan would not do for me. I should betray myself every minute, and become contemptible in his eyes and my own. It strikes me, although I am but a boy of twelve, and know little of the world, that the only real chance you have with such men is, to show them that you are not afraid of them. They are all cowards, aunt; they will yield to courage which they feel to be superior to their own. So much I have learnt from the experience of the last four years."

Aunt made no reply; she smiled sadly and

kindly upon me, and her tacit approval sent me directly to my uncle. He was in his private office. I knocked gently at the door.

“Come in.”

I did so; and there I stood, not a little confused and perplexed before him, with flushed cheeks and a fast-throbbing heart. It was the first complaint I had ever made to him in my life—the first time I had ever dared to enter his *sanctum sanctorum*; and I remained tongue-tied upon the threshold, without knowing how to begin. I thought he would have looked me down. I felt the blood receding from my face beneath his cold gaze, as he said—

“Geoffrey, what do you want here?”

“I came, sir,” I at last faltered out, “to make a complaint against Mr. Jones.”

“I never listen to complaints brought by a pupil against his teacher,” he cried, in a voice which made me recoil over the door-step. “Begone, sir! If you come into my presence again on such an errand, I will spurn you from the room.”

This speech, meant to intimidate me, restored my courage. I felt the hot blood rush to my face in a fiery flood.

"Hear me, sir. Did not you place me under his care in order that I might learn?"

"And you refuse to do so?"

"No, sir: the reverse is the case: he refuses to teach me, and deprives me of my books, so that I cannot teach myself."

"A very *probable* tale," sneered Mr. Moncton; then rising from the table at which he was seated, he cried out hastily, "Is Mr. Jones in the study?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, my new client, come along with me. I will soon learn the truth of your case."

He clutched me by the arm, which he grasped so tightly that I could scarcely resist a cry of pain, and hurried me out. In the study we found Theophilus and Mr. Jones: the one lounging on two chairs, the other smoking a cigar and reading a novel. Mr. Moncton stood for a moment in the door-way, regarding the pair with his peculiar glance.

"Gentlemen, you seem *pleasantly* and *profitably* employed!"

"Our morning tasks are concluded," said Theophilus, returning the stare of scrutiny

with a steady lie. " 'Too much work would make Jack a dull boy.' "

His father smiled grimly. How well he understood the character of his son.

" Here is a lad, Mr. Jones, who complains that you not only refuse to teach him, but deprive him of his books. "

" He tells the truth, sir, " returned that worthy, casting upon me a spiteful, sidelong glance, which seemed to say more eloquently than words, " You shall see, master Geoffrey, what you'll get by tale-bearing. I'll match you yet. " " I have withheld his books, and refused my instructions for the past week, as a punishment for his insolent and disrespectful conduct to your son and me; to say nothing of his impertinent speeches regarding *you*, sir, who are his guardian and benefactor. "

" Do you hear that—sir ! " said my uncle, giving me a violent blow on my cheek, and flinging me from him. " When next you come to me with such tales, you shall not leave your bed for a week. "

I sprang from the floor, where his blow had sent me; and stood erect before him. It was a pigmy confronting a giant; but my blood was

boiling. I had lost all control over myself. "It's a lie!" I cried, shaking my fist at Mr. Jones. "A monstrous falsehood! He knows it is. Theophilus knows it is. I have been falsely accused and unjustly punished; I will remember that blow to my dying day. I will never forget nor forgive it."

"And who cares, my hero, for your impotent rage?" My uncle seized me by my thick curling hair, and turned round my face, hot with passion and streaming with tears of rage, to the gaze of my sneering enemies. "I will make you know, that you are in my house and in my power—and you *shall* submit to my authority, and the authority of those I choose to place over you."

I struggled desperately in his herculean grasp in order to free myself. He laughed at my impotent rage and then threw me on the floor—and this time, I was quiet enough.

When I recovered my senses, I found myself lying upon the bed in the garret, allotted to my use. My aunt was sitting beside me, bathing my temples with vinegar and water. "Oh, aunt," I sighed, closing my eyes, "I wish I were dead!"

"Hush! Geoffrey. You brought this on yourself. I told you how it would be."

"It was so unjust," I replied with bitterness.

"And you were so rash. You will be wiser another time."

"When I am as wicked as my persecutors."

"No need of quoting others, my son, while you suffer such violent passions to master you. Listen to me, my child. I have known your uncle for years—have seen him in his darkest and stormiest moods; and contrived to live peaceably with him. Nay, he respects me more than he does any one else in the world. But I never *opposed his will*. He is not a man to be trifled with—tears and complaints are useless. You cannot touch his heart. He *will* be obeyed. Left to himself, he may become your friend, and even treat you with a certain degree of kindness and consideration. But if you anger him, he will never forgive, and can be a dreadful enemy. If you love me, Geoffrey, follow my advice and submit to his authority with a good grace."

"I will try not to hate him for your dear sake. I can promise no more!"

I kissed her hand and fell back exhausted on

my pillow. My head ached dreadfully from the ill-treatment I had received ; and wounded pride made my heart very sore. It was only on her account that I could control the deadly and revengeful feelings I cherished against him. Theophilus and Mr. Jones, I considered beneath contempt.

CHAPTER V.

A CHANGE IN MY PROSPECTS.

THE next day, I was surprised at receiving a message from Mr. Moncton desiring me to attend him in his private office. I went to him in fear and trembling. I was ill, nervous and dispirited, and cared very little as to what in future might become of me.

I found him all smiles and affability. "Geoffrey," said he, holding out his hand, as I entered, "I trust you have received a useful lesson. You will be wise to lay it to heart. Mr. Jones tells me that you write a good bold hand. Give me a specimen of it. Sit down at the table, and direct that letter to Messieurs Hanbury and Company, Liverpool."

I did as I was commanded, but my hand

trembled with excitement: I found some difficulty in steadying the pen. He took the letter and looked at it carefully, muttering as he did so—

“How like my father’s hand. Ay, and how like in obstinacy of purpose; more like him in every respect than his own sons.” Then turning to me, who was lost in wonder at this sudden change in his manner towards me, he said, “This is well; you write a fair, legible hand for a boy. I want a lad in my office to copy writs and other law papers. I think you will just do for that purpose. If you are diligent and industrious, after two years trial, I will article you to myself. How old are you?”

“Thirteen, next August.”

“It is young; but you are tall and manly for your age. You and Theophilus are never likely to agree; it is best for you to be apart. You have no fortune of your own. I will give you a profession, and make an independent man of you, if you will try for the future to be a docile and obedient boy.”

I promised to do my best. He then bade me follow him, and leading the way through a narrow arched passage, he introduced me into the

public office, where the large business in which he was engaged was carried on. Though I had been four years in the house, I had never seen the inside of this office before. It was a spacious, dark, dirty, apartment, lighted by high, narrow windows of ground glass; so that no time could be wasted by the junior clerks in looking out into the street. Several pale, melancholy men were seated at desks, hard at work. You heard nothing but the rapid scratching of their pens against the parchment and paper on which they were employed. When Mr. Moncton entered the office, a short, stout, middle-aged man swung himself round on his high stool and fronted us; but the moment he recognized his superior, he rose respectfully to receive him.

Mr. Moncton took him apart, and they entered into a deep and earnest conversation: of which, I am certain, from the significant glances which, from time to time, they directed towards me, I formed the principal topic.

At length the conference was over, and my uncle left the office without giving me a parting word or glance. When he was fairly out of hearing, all the clerks gathered round me.

“Who is he?”

“Mr. Moncton’s nephew,” was the short man’s reply to the eager questioners.

“Is he sent here to be a spy?”

“To learn the profession.”

“*That babe!* Is the man mad. It will kill the child to chain *him* to the desk all day.”

“Poor fellow; he is the orphan son of his brother,” said another. “I have seen him at church with Mrs. Moncton.”

“Well, Robert Moncton is a hard man,” said a third.

“Hush! gentlemen,” interposed Mr. Bassett, the senior clerk. “It is not right to make such remarks in the lad’s hearing. Mr. Moncton doubtless does for the best. Come, my little fellow, you and I must be good friends. Your uncle has placed you under my charge, to initiate you into all the mysteries of the law. I have no doubt we shall get on famously together. But you must be diligent and work hard. Your uncle hates idlers; he is a strict master, but one of the ablest lawyers in London. Let me tell you, that to be articled to him is a fortune in itself.”

A far-off, indistinct hope of freedom through

this channel, presented itself to my bewildered mind. I thanked Mr. Bassett warmly for his proffered aid, and told him that I would do my best to deserve his good opinion.

From that day, I became an office drudge, condemned to copy the same unintelligible, uninteresting law forms, from early morning until late at night. Mr. Bassett, a quiet, methodical, business man, was kind in his own peculiar way. He had a large family, and perhaps felt a paternal sympathy in my early introduction to the labours and cares of life. He often commended my diligence, and mentioned me in very handsome terms to Mr. Moncton ; but from that gentleman I never received a word of praise—weeks and months often passed without his speaking to me. I was even debarred from spending with my dear aunt that blessed twilight-hour, which had proved the chief solace of my weary life.

Constant confinement to that close office preyed upon my health and spirits. I became fretful and irritable, the colour left my cheeks, and my eyes looked dull and heavy. The clerks, generally kind to me, all pitied me, though they dared not openly show their regard.

They brought me presents of fruit and sweetmeats, and one who lived in the suburbs used to delight my heart, every now and then, with a rich bouquet of flowers. Their beauty and perfume brought back a glimpse of the old times—dim visions of lawns and gardens, of singing-birds and humming-bees ; of a fair smiling creature who led me by the hand through those bowers of enchantment, and called me her Geoffrey—her darling boy.

When such thoughts came over me, my hand trembled, and I could not see the parchment I was copying through my tears ; but for all that, the sight of the flowers was always inexpressibly dear, and I prized them beyond every other gift.

I had been about eighteen months in the office, when my good Aunt Rebecca died—an event sudden and unexpected by all. I was allowed to see her in her last moments ; to sob out my full heart by her death-bed. Her last words were an earnest request to her husband to be kind to poor Geoffrey, for her sake : she died—and I felt myself alone and friendless in the world.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SORROWS OF DEPENDENCE.

MY heart sickens over this dreary portion of my life. I have heard childhood called the happiest season of life. To me it had few joys. It was a gloomy period of mental suffering and bodily fatigue; of unnatural restraint and painful probation.

The cold, authoritative manner of my uncle, at all times irksome and repelling, after the death of his good wife became almost insupportable; while the insolence and presumption of his artful son, goaded a free and irascible spirit like mine almost to madness. The moral force of his mother's character, though unappreciated by him, had been some restraint upon his unamiable, tyrannical temper. That restraint

was now removed, and Theophilus considered that my dependent situation gave him a lawful right to my services, and had I been a workhouse apprentice in his father's house, he could not have given his commands with an air of more pointed insolence. My obstinate resistance to his authority, and my desperate struggles to emancipate myself from his control, produced a constant war of words between us; and if I appealed to my uncle, I was sure to get the worst of it. He did not exactly encourage his son in this ungenerous line of conduct, but his great maxim was to *divide and rule*; to exact from all who were dependent upon him, the most uncompromising obedience to his arbitrary will; and he laughed at my remonstrances, and turned my indignation into ridicule.

I was daily reminded, particularly before strangers, of the domestic calamities which had made me dependent upon his cold, extorted charity; while I was reproached with my want of gratitude to a cruel master.

Passion and wounded pride drew from me burning tears. I felt that I was growing fierce and hard like my persecutors, and my conscience, yet tender, deplored the lamentable change.

My heart, crushed beneath the sense of injustice and unmerited neglect, was closed against the best feelings of humanity, and I regarded my fellow men with aversion and mistrust.

These bitter and desponding feelings deprived my nights of rest—my days, of hope. When the morning came and I took my stand at the accursed desk, I wished the day gone ; and when night released me from the abhorrent task, and I sought my humble garret, I sat for hours at the open window, brooding over my wrongs.

The moonbeams glittered in the tears that anguish wrung from my upturned eyes. The stars seemed to look down upon me with compassionate earnestness. Sometimes my young spirit, carried away by the intense love I felt for those beautiful eyes of heaven, forgot for awhile the sorrows and cares of life and soared far, far away to seek for sympathy and affection in those unknown regions of light and purity.

I had few opportunities of religious instruction in this truly Godless household. My uncle never attended church when he could avoid the obligation, and then, only to keep up appearances—a religion of the world ; in which the heart had no part. There was always a Bible in the

office, but it was never used but in the way of business to administer oaths. Whenever I had a moment's leisure I had turned over the pages with eager and mysterious curiosity, but the knowledge that should have brought peace and comfort, and reconciled me to my dreary lot, not being sought for in the right spirit, added to my present despondency, the dread of future punishment.

Oh, that awful fear of Hell. How it darkened with its unholy shadow, all that was bright and beautiful in the lower world. I had yet to learn, that perfect love casteth out fear, that the great Father punishes but to reform, and is ever more willing to save than to condemn. I dared not seek Him, lest I should hear the terrible denunciation thundered against the wicked: "Depart from me, ye cursed!"

A firm trust in His protecting care would have been a balm for every wound which festered and rankled at my heart's core. Had the Christian's hope been mine, I should no longer have pined under that dreary sense of utter loneliness, which for many years paralyzed all mental exertions, or nurtured in my breast the stern unforgiving temper which made me regard

my persecutors with feelings of determined hate.

Residing in the centre of the busy metropolis, and at an age when the heart sighs for social communion with its fellows, and imagines, with the fond sincerity of inexperienced youth, a friend in every agreeable companion, I was immured among old parchments and dusty records, and seldom permitted to mingle with the guests who frequented my uncle's house, unless my presence was required to sign some official document.

Few persons suspected that the shabbily-dressed silent youth who obeyed Mr. Moncton's imperious mandates was his nephew—the only son of an elder brother; consequently I was treated as nobody by his male visitors, and never noticed at all by the ladies.

This was mortifying enough to a tall lad of eighteen, who already fancied himself a man: who, though meanly dressed, and sufficiently awkward, had enough of vanity in his composition to imagine that his person would create an interest in his behalf and atone for all other deficiencies, at least in the eyes of the gentler sex—those angels, who seen at a distance, were daily becoming objects of admiration and worship.

Alas! Poor Geoffrey. Thou didst not know in that thy young day the things pertaining to thy peace. Thou didst not suspect in thy innocence how the black brand of poverty can deform the finest face, and dim the brightest intellect in the eyes of the world.

Among all my petty trials there were none which I felt more keenly than having to wear the cast-off clothes of my cousin. He was some years older, but his frame was slighter and shorter than mine, and his garments did not fit me in any way. The coat sleeves were short and tight, and the trowsers came half-way up my legs. The figure I cut in these unsuitable garments was so ludicrous that it was a standing joke among the clerks in the office.

“When you step into your cousin’s shoes, Geoffrey, we hope they will suit you better than his clothes.”

I could have been happy in the coarsest fustian or corderoy garment which I knew was my own. I believe Robert Moncton felt a malicious pleasure in humbling me in the eyes of his people.

My uncle had fulfilled his promise, and I had been articled to him when I completed my four-

teenth year ; and I now eagerly looked forward to my majority, when I should be free to quit his employ, and seek a living in the world.

My time had been so completely engaged in copying law papers, that I had not been able to pay much attention to the higher branches of the profession ; and when night came, and I was at length released from the desk, I was so overpowered by fatigue that I felt no inclination to curtail the blessed hours of sleep by reading dull law books. Yet, upon this all-important knowledge, which I was neglecting, rested my chance of independence.

My cousin Theophilus was pursuing his studies at Oxford, and rarely visited home, but spent his vacations with some wealthy relatives in Yorkshire. This was a happy time for me ; for of all my many trials his presence was the greatest. Even Mr. Moncton was more civil to me in the absence of his hopeful heir.

Thus time glided on until I was twenty years of age, and full six feet in height, and I could no longer wear the cast-off suits of my cousin. Mr. Moncton, in common decency, was a length obliged to order my clothes of his tailor ; but he took good care that they should be of the

coarsest description, and of the most unfashionable cut. The first suit which was made expressly for me, ridiculous as it must appear to my readers, gave me infinite satisfaction. I felt proud and happy of the acquisition.

The afternoon of that memorable day, my uncle sent for me into the drawing-room to witness the transfer of some law papers. His clients were two ladies, young and agreeable. While I was writing from Mr. Moncton's dictation, I perceived, with no small degree of trepidation, that the younger was regarding me with earnest attention; and in spite of myself my cheeks flushed and my hand trembled. After my part of the business was concluded Mr. Moncton told me to withdraw. As I left the room, I heard Miss Mary Beaumont say, in a low voice to her sister—my uncle having stepped into the adjoining apartment :

“What a handsome young man! Who is he?”

“Oh, the clerk, of course.”

“He looks a gentleman.”

“A person of no consequence, by his shabby dress and awkward manners.”

I closed the door, and walked hastily away.

How I despised the new suit, of which a few minutes before I had felt so proud. The remarks of the younger lady tingled in my ears for weeks. She had considered me worth looking at, in spite of my unfashionable garments ; and I blessed her for the amiable condescension, and thought her in return as beautiful as an angel. I never saw her again—but I caught myself scribbling her name on my desk, and I covered many sheets of waste paper with indifferent rhymes in her praise.

This confession may call up a smile on the lip of the reader, and I am content that he should accuse me of vanity. But these were the first words of commendation which had ever reached my ears from the lips of woman, and though I have since laughed heartily at the deep impression they made on my mind, they produced a beneficial effect at the time, and helped to reconcile me to my lot.

It was about this period, that Mr. Bassett left the office, and went into the profession on his own account. The want of means, and an imprudent marriage in early life, had hindered him from entering it sooner. For twenty years he had worked as a clerk, when he was fully qualified

to have been the head of the firm. The death of an uncle who left him a small property unchained him from the oar, and as he said, "made a man of him at last."

Poor little man. I shall never forget his joy when he got that important letter. He sprang from his desk, upsetting the high stool in his haste, and shook hands with us all round, laughing and crying alternately.

He was a great favourite in the office, and we all rejoiced in his good fortune, though I felt sincerely grieved at parting with him. He had been a kind friend to me when I had no friends; and I had spent some quiet, happy evenings with him at his humble lodgings, in the company of a very pretty and amiable wife. My occasional visit to him was the only indulgence I had ever been allowed, and these visits were not permitted to be of too frequent recurrence.

He saw how much I was affected at bidding him good-by.

"Geoffrey," said he, taking me by the hand and drawing me aside: "one word with you before we part. I know your attachment for me is sincere. Believe me, the feeling is reciprocated in its fullest extent. Your uncle is not

your friend. Few men act wickedly without a motive. He has his own reasons for treating you as he does. I cannot enter into particulars here. Nor would I, even if time and opportunity warranted, for it would do no good. Keep your eyes open, your head clear—your temper cool, and your tongue silent, and you will see and learn much without the interference of a second person. I am going to open an office in Nottingham, my native town, and if ever you want a friend in the hour of need, come to Josiah Bassett in the full confidence of affection, and I will help you.”

This speech roused all my curiosity. I pressed him eagerly to tell me all he knew respecting me and my uncle, but he refused to satisfy my earnest inquiries.

The departure of Mr. Bassett, which I regarded as a calamity, proved one of the most fortunate events in my life.

His place was supplied by a gentleman of the name of Harrison, who was strongly recommended to Mr. Moncton by his predecessor as an excellent writer, a man well versed in the law, sober and industrious, and in whose integrity he might place the utmost reliance. He

had no wish to enter into the profession, but only sought to undertake the management of the office as head clerk.

Mr. Moncton was a man who never associated himself with a partner, and regarded despotic rule as the only one that deserved the name.

When Mr. Harrison was introduced *in propria persona*, he did not seem to realize his employer's expectations—who, from Mr. Bassett's description, had evidently looked for an older and more methodical person, and was disappointed in the young and interesting individual who presented himself. But as he required only a moderate salary for his services, he was engaged on trial for the next three months.

CHAPTER VII.

GEORGE HARRISON.

GEORGE HARRISON was not distinguished by and remarkable talents ; or endowed with that aspiring genius which forces its way through every obstacle, and places the possessor above the ordinary mass with whom he is daily forced to associate. Yet, his was no common character; no every-day acquaintance, with whom we may spend a pleasant hour, and care not if we ever meet again in our journey through life.

The moment he entered the office my heart was drawn towards him by an irresistible, mysterious impulse, so that looking upon him I became attached to him, and felt confident that the friend whom I had ardently wished to obtain

for so many hopeless years, was now before me.

This impression was strengthened by the simple, unaffected, frank manner in which he met the advances of the other clerks. There was a charm in his smile, in the rich tones of his deep, mellow voice, which made me anxious to catch the one, and hear the other again, though both were marked by quiet, subdued sadness.

His face, strictly speaking, could not be called handsome; and his general appearance was more remarkable for a refined and gentlemanly demeanour, than for anything particularly striking in form or feature. A good head, fine intelligent hazel eyes, and a profusion of curling dark brown hair, redeemed his countenance from mediocrity; but its careworn, anxious expression, showed too clearly, that some great life-sorrow, had blighted the early promise of youth and hope.

It was some days before I had an opportunity of becoming better acquainted with him. We were preparing for the spring assizes, and there was work enough in the office to have employed twice the number of hands. Nothing was heard

but the scratching of pens upon paper, from early day until midnight.

At last the hurry was over, and we had more leisure to look about us. Mr. Moncton was attending a circuit in the country, and his watchful eye was no longer upon us. The clerks were absent at dinner; Mr. Harrison and I were alone in the office, which he never left till six, when he returned to his lodgings in Charlotte Street to dine; and unless there happened to be a great stress of business which required his presence, we saw him no more that night.

After regarding me for some minutes with an earnest scrutiny which, impulsive creature that I was, almost offended me, he said—

“Am I mistaken, or is your name *really* Moncton?”

“*Really* and truly, Geoffrey Moncton, at your service. What made you doubt the fact?”

“I had always heard that Robert Moncton had but one son.”

“Surely there is enough of the breed, without your wishing to affiliate me upon him. I flatter myself that we do not in the least resemble each other. And as to the name, I have so little respect for it, for his sake, that I wish some one

would leave me a fortune to change it; for, between ourselves, I have small reason to love it. He is my uncle—my father's younger brother—and I find the relationship near enough."

This explanation led to a brief sketch of my painful, though uneventful history, to which Mr. Harrison listened with an air of such intense interest that, though it flattered my vanity, not a little surprised me. When I concluded, he grasped my hand firmly, muttering to himself—

"It is like him—just like him. The infernal scoundrel!"

"What do you know about him?" said I, astonished at the excited state into which my revelations had thrown him.

"Only *too* much," he responded, with a heavy sigh; and sinking back in his chair, pressed his hands to his head, like one who wished to shut out painful recollections, while I continued to grasp his arm and stare at him in blank amazement. At length, rousing himself, he said with a faint smile,—

"Don't make big eyes at me, Geoffrey. I cannot tell you all you wish to know. At some other time, and in some other place, I will repay

the confidence you have reposed in me, and satisfy your queries; but not here—not in the lion's den."

"For heaven's sake! don't keep silent now," I cried. "You have roused my curiosity to such a pitch, that I shall go mad if you hold your tongue. You *must* speak out."

"I *must* not, if, by so doing, I ruin your prospects and my own. Be satisfied, Geoffrey, that I am your friend; that henceforth I will regard you as a brother, and do all in my power to lighten and shorten your present bondage."

The generous assurance he gave me of a warm and affectionate sympathy in my destiny, nearly atoned for twenty years of sorrow and degradation. The intense desire I felt to deserve his esteem, made me anxious to cultivate my mind, which I had suffered to lie waste. Harrison kindly offered his aid, and supplied me with books. I now devoted myself with zeal to the task. For the first time I had a motive for exertion; I no longer vegetated; I had a friend, and my real life commenced from that day. I set apart two hours each night for reading and study, and soon felt a keen relish for the employment.

"In these lie your best hope of independence, Geoffrey," said my kind friend, laying his hand upon a pile of books, which, for lack of a table, he placed upon the truck-bed in my mean garret. Then seating himself beside me on the shabby couch, he proceeded to examine, by the light of a miserable tallow-candle, a translation I had been making from the Orations of Cicero.

"With your talents, Geoffrey, you need not fear the tyranny of any man. It will be your own fault if you do not rise in the profession you have chosen."

"The choice was none of mine."

"Then be grateful to your uncle for once, in having chosen it for you."

"Do not expect impossibilities!" and I smiled bitterly.

"Not exactly. Yet, Geoffrey, many things which appear at first sight impossible, only require a series of persevering efforts to become both easy and practicable. You might render your unpleasant position with your uncle more tolerable, by yielding to his authority with a better grace. The constant opposition you make to his wishes, is both useless and dangerous. Though you neither love nor respect him,

and I should be sorry if you could do either, yet he is entitled to obedience and a certain degree of deference as your guardian and master."

"I never can willingly obey him," I cried, angrily, "or bring my mind to submit to his authority."

"In which, I assure you as a friend, you are wrong. As long as his commands do not interfere with any moral obligation, you are bound to listen to them with respect."

"The man has always been my enemy, and would you have me become a passive instrument in his hands?"

"Certainly, as long as you remain his clerk, and he does not require your aid in any villainous transaction. If his intentions towards you are evil, you cannot frustrate them better than by doing your duty. Believe me, Geoffrey, you have a more dangerous enemy to contend with, one bound to you by nearer ties, who exercises a more pernicious influence over your mind."

"His sordid, selfish, counterpart—his *worthy* son?"

George shook his head.

I looked inquiringly.

"A certain impetuous, wilful, wrong-headed boy, yeleft Geoffrey Moncton."

"Pish!" I exclaimed, shrugging my shoulders: "is this your friendship?"

"The best proof I can give you of it."

I walked hastily to and fro, the narrow limits of the chamber, raising, at every step, a cloud of dust from folds of old, yellow parchment and musty rolls of paper, which had accumulated there for the last half century, and lay in a pile upon the floor. I was in no humour to listen to a lecture, particularly when my own faulty temper was to be the principal subject, and form the text. Harrison watched my movements for some time in silence, with a provokingly-amused air; not in the least discouraged by my wayward mood; but evidently ready for another attack.

"Prithee, Geoffrey, leave off raising that cloud of dust, disturbing the evil spirits which have long slumbered in yon forgotten pile of professional rubbish, and sit down quietly and listen to reason."

I felt annoyed, and would not resume my place beside him, but, assuming a very stately air, seated myself opposite to my tormentor on a

huge iron chest, which was the only seat, save the bed, in the room; and then, fixing my eyes reproachfully upon him, I sat as stiff as a poker, without relaxing a muscle of my face.

He laughed outright.

"You are displeased with my bluntness, Geoffrey, and I am amused with your dignity. That solemn, proud face would become the Lord Chancellor of England."

"Hold your tongue, you tormentor; I won't be laughed at in this absurd manner. What have I done to deserve such a sermon?"

"'Vanity, vanity, all is vanity, saith the preacher,' and surely, Geoffrey, your vanity exceeds all other vanity. I hint at a fault, and point it out for correction. You imagine yourself perfection, and are up in arms in a moment. Answer me, seriously: do you ever expect to settle in life?"

"I have dared to cherish the forlorn hope."

"Forlorn as it is, you are taking the best method to destroy it."

"What would you have me do?"

"Yield to circumstances."

"Become a villain?" This was said with a very tragic air.

"May Heaven forbid ! I should be sorry to see you so nearly resemble your uncle. But I would have you avoid uselessly offending him ; for, by constantly inflaming his mind to anger, you may ruin your own prospects, and be driven in desperation to adopt measures for obtaining a living, scarcely less dishonourable than his own."

"Go on," I cried : "it is all very well for you to talk in this philosophical strain. You have not been educated in the same bitter school with me ; you have not known what it is to writhe beneath the oppressive authority of this cold, unfeeling man ; you cannot understand the nature of my sufferings, or the painful humiliation I must daily endure."

He took my hand affectionately.

"Geoffrey," said he, "how do you know all this ? Yours is not a profession which allows men to jump at conclusions. What can you tell of my past or present trials. What if I should say, they had been far greater and worse to bear than your own ?"

"Impossible !"

"All things that have reference to sorrow and trouble, in this world, are only too possible. But I will have patience with you, my poor

friend; your heart is very sore. The deadly wounds in mine are partially healed; yet, my experience of life has been bought with bitter tears;—the loss of hope, health and self-respect. I am willing that you should profit by this; and, having made this confession, will you condescend to hear my lecture to an end?"

"Oh, tell me something more about yourself. I would rather listen to your sorrows, than have my faults paraded before me."

A melancholy smile passed over his face.

"Geoffrey, what a child you are! Listen to me. You have suffered this personal dislike to your uncle and his son to overtop, like some rank weed, every better growth of your mind; to destroy your moral integrity and mental advantages; to interfere with your studies, and prevent any beneficial result which might arise from your situation as clerk in this office. Is this wise?"

I remained obstinately silent.

"You are lengthening the term of your bondage, and riveting the fetters you are so anxious to break. Does not your uncle know this? Does he not laugh at your impotent efforts to break his yoke from off your neck? In one short year your articles will expire, and

you will become a free agent. But, with the little knowledge you have gained of your profession, what would liberty do for you? Would it procure for you a better situation; establish your claims as a gentleman, or fill an empty purse?"

"Let the worst come to the worst, I could work for my bread."

"Not such an easy thing as you imagine."

"With health, strength and youth on my side, what should hinder me?"

"Your uncle's influence, which is very great. The world does not know him, as we know him. He is considered an upright, honourable man. One word from him would blast your character, and keep you out of every office in London."

I felt my cheeks grow pale. I had never seen matters in this light before. Still, I would not yield to the arguments of my friend. The obstinate spirit of the Monctons was in active operation just then, and would not submit to reason.

"There are more ways of earning a living than by following the profession of the law," said I doggedly.

"To all of which you have an apprenticeship

to serve. Think, Geoffrey, of the thousands of respectable young men who are looking for employment in this vast metropolis, and how few are successful; and then ask yourself, how you, without money, without friends, and with a powerful enemy to crush all your honest endeavours, and render them abortive, are likely to earn your own living."

I was struck speechless, and for the first time in my life became aware of my utter inability to extricate myself out of the net of difficulties which surrounded me.

"You are convinced at last. Look me steadily in the face, Geoffrey, and own that you are beaten. Nay, smooth that frowning brow: it makes you look like Robert Moncton. Your profession is a fortune in itself, if you persevere in acquiring it. Be not discouraged by difficulties that beset the path. A poor man's road to independence is always up-hill work. Duty fences the path on either side, and success waves her flag from the summit; but every step must be trod, often in ragged garments, and with bare feet, if we would reach the top."

I pressed George Harrison's hand, silently

within my own. He had won a great victory over obstinacy and self-conceit.

From that hour my prospects brightened. I became a new creature, full of hope, activity and trust. My legal studies engaged all my leisure moments. I had no time left to brood over my wrongs. My mind had formed an estimate of its own powers; the energetic spirit which had been wasted in endless cavils and contradictions (for my temper was faulty and headstrong, and my uncle not always the aggressor) now asserted its own dignity, and furnished me with the weapon most needed in such petty warfare—self-respect. Harrison had given me a motive for exertion, and I was ashamed of having suffered my mental powers to remain so long inactive. As my mind recovered a healthy tone, my spirits rose in proportion. The thirst for improvement daily acquired new strength, while my industry not only surprised, but drew forth the commendations of my uncle.

“What has become of your churlish, morose temper, Geoffrey?” said he to me one day, at dinner; “why, boy, you are greatly changed of late. From a sulky, impertinent, vindictive lad,

you have become an industrious, agreeable, pleasant fellow."

"It is never too late to mend, uncle," said I, laughing, though I did not much relish his portrait of what I had been. "My temper I found a greater punishment to myself than to others, so I thought it high time to change it for a better."

"You were perfectly right. I have a better hope for your future than I once had. I shall be able to make something out of you yet."

This unlooked-for condescension on the part of Mr. Moncton, softened the hard feelings I had long cherished against him into a more Christian-like endurance of his peculiarities; and the conscientious discharge of my own duty taught me to consider his interests as my own.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNGRATIFIED CURIOSITY.

THERE is a period in every young man's first outset in life, which gives a colouring to his future destiny. It is the time for action, for mental and moral improvement, and the manner in which it is applied or neglected, will decide his character, or leave him weak and vacillating all the days of his life.

If this precious portion of existence be wasted in frivolous amusements, time gets the start of us, and no after-exertion will enable us to overtake him in his flight. This important era was mine ; and I lost no opportunity of turning it to the best advantage. I worked early and late in

the office, and made myself master of the nature of the work which employed my hands. I learned the philosophy of those law forms, which hitherto I had only copied mechanically, and looked upon as a weary task, and I soon reaped the benefit of my increased stock of knowledge. Grave men, in the absence of my uncle, often applied to me for information and advice, which I felt proud and happy in being able to supply.

Thus, I found that in serving my employer faithfully, I conferred the greatest benefit on myself; and the hours devoted to study, while they formed a pleasant recreation from the day labours of the office, were among the happiest and most sinless of my life.

I was seldom admitted into my uncle's drawing-room, and never allowed to mingle with evening parties, which, during the brief visits of Theophilus to his home, were not only frequent, but very brilliant. This I felt as a great hardship. My solitary and companionless youth had deeply imbued my mind with romance. I was fond of castle-building; I pictured to myself the world as a paradise, and fancied that I was an illustrious actor in scenes of imaginary

splendour, which bore no analogy to the dull realities of my present life.

I was a dreamer of wild dreams, and suffered my enthusiasm to get the master of reason, and betray me into a thousand absurdities. My love for poetry and music was excessive. I played upon the flute by ear, and often when alone dissipated my melancholy thoughts by breathing them into the instrument.

Through this medium, Harrison became an adept at discovering the state of my feelings. "My flute told tales," he said. "It always spoke the language of my heart." Yet from him I had few concealments. He was my friend and bosom-counsellor, in whom I reposed the most unreserved confidence. But strange to say, this confidence was not mutual. There was a mystery about George which I could not fathom; a mental reservation which was tantalizing and inexplicable.

He was a gentleman in education, appearance and manners, and possessed those high and honourable feelings, which if displayed in a peasant would rank him as one, and which are inseparable from all who really deserve the title. He never spoke to me of his family — never

alluded to the events of his past life, or the scenes in which his childhood had been spent. He talked of sorrow and sickness—of chastisements in the school of adversity, in general terms ; but he never revealed the cause of these trials, or why a young man of his attainments was reduced to a situation so far below the station he ought to have held in society.

I was half inclined to quarrel with him for so pertinaciously concealing from me circumstances which I thought I had a right to know ; and in which, when known, I was fully prepared to sympathize. A thousand times I was on the point of remonstrating with him on this undue reserve, which appeared so foreign to his frank, open nature, but feelings of delicacy restrained me.

What right had *I* to pry into his secrets ? My impertinent curiosity might reopen wounds which time had closed. There were, doubtless, good reasons for his withholding the information I coveted.

Yet, I must confess that I had an intense curiosity—a burning desire to know the history of his past life. For many long months my wishes remained ungratified.

At this time I felt an ardent desire to see something more of life, to mingle in the gay scenes of the great world around me. Pride, however, withheld me from accepting the many pressing invitations I daily received from the clerks in the office, to join them in parties of pleasure, to the theatres and other places of public amusement. Mr. Moncton had strictly forbidden me to leave the house of an evening; but as he was often absent of a night, I could easily have evaded his commands; but I scorned to expose to strangers the meanness of my wealthy relative, by confessing that mine was an empty purse; while the thought of enjoying myself at the expense of my generous companions, was not to be tolerated for an instant. If I could not go as a gentleman, and pay my own share of the entertainment, I determined not to go at all; and these resolutions met with the entire approbation of my friend Harrison.

“ Wait patiently, Geoffrey, and fortune will pay up the arrears of the long debt she owes you. It is an old and hackneyed saying, ‘ That riches alone, cannot confer happiness upon the possessor.’ ”

“ My uncle and cousin are living demonstra-

tions of the truth of the proverb. Mr. Moncton is affluent, and might enjoy all the luxuries that wealth can procure ; yet he toils with as much assiduity to increase his riches, as the poorest labourer does to earn bread for his family. He can acquire, but has not the heart to enjoy—while the bad disposition of Theophilus would render him, under any circumstances, a miserable man. Yet, after all, George, in this bad world, money is power.”

“ Only, to a certain extent : to be happy, a man must be good ; religiously, morally, physically. He must bear upon his heart the image of the Prince of Peace, before he can truly value the glorious boon of life.”

“ I wish I could see these things in the same calm unprejudiced light,” said I ; but I find it a bitter mortification, after so many years of hard labour, to be without a penny to pay for seeing a raree-show,”

Harrison laughed heartily, “ You will perhaps say, that it is easy for me to preach against riches ; but like the Fox in the fable, the grapes are sour. I speak, however, with indifference of the good that Providence has placed beyond my reach. Geoffrey, I was once the envied possessor

of wealth, which in my case was productive of much evil.”

“How did you lose such an advantage?” I eagerly exclaimed, “do tell me something of your past life?”

This was the first allusion he had made to his former circumstances; and I was determined not to let the opportunity pass unnoticed.

He seemed to guess my thoughts. “Are you anxious for a humiliating confession, of vanity, folly and prodigality? Well, Geoffrey, you shall have it; but mark me—it will only be in general terms—I cannot enter into particulars. I was born poor, and unexpectedly became rich, and like many persons in like circumstances, I was ashamed of my mean origin; and thought, by making a dashing appearance and squandering lavishly my wealth, to induce men to forget my humble birth. The world applauds such madness as long as the money lasts, and for a short period, I had friends and flatterers at will.

“My brief career terminated in ruin and disgrace: wealth which is not acquired by industry, is seldom retained by prudence; and to those unacquainted with the real value of money, a

large sum always appears inexhaustible. So it was with me. I spent, without calculating the cost, and soon lost all. The world now wore a very different aspect. I was deserted by all my gay associates ; my most intimate companions passed me in the streets without recognition. I knew that this would be the result of my altered fortunes, yet the reality cut me to the heart.

“These are mortifying lessons, which experience, wisdom’s best counsellor, daily teaches us ; and a man must either be very self-conceited, or very insensible, who cannot profit by her valuable instructions. The hour which brought to me the humiliating conviction, that I was a person of no consequence ; that the world could go on very well without me ; that my merry companions would not be one jot less facetious, though I was absent from their jovial parties, was after all not the most miserable of my life.

“I woke as from a dream. The scales had fallen from my eyes. I knew myself—and became a wiser and better man. I called all my creditors together, discharged my debts, and found myself free of the world in the most liberal sense.

“Good Heavens!” I exclaimed. “How could you bear such a dreadful reverse with such fortitude—such magnanimity?”

“You give me greater credit than I deserve, Geoffrey: my imprudent conduct merited a severe punishment, and I had sense enough to discern that it was just. After the first shock was over, I felt happier in my poverty than I had ever done during my unmerited prosperity. I had abused the gifts of fortune while they were mine, and I determined to acquire an independence by my own exertions. A friend, whom I had scarcely regarded as such, during my reckless career of folly, came unexpectedly to my assistance, and offered to purchase for me a commission in the army, but I had private reasons for wishing to obtain a situation in this office. Writing a good hand, and having been originally educated for the profession, together with the recommendation of Mr. Bassett who was related to my friend, procured me the place I now hold.”

“And your reasons for coming here?” I cried, burning with curiosity.

“Pardon me, Geoffrey. That is my secret.”

He spoke with the calmness of a philosopher,

but I saw his emotion, as his eyes turned mechanically to the parchment he was copying, and affected an air of cheerful resignation.

The candid exposure of his past faults and follies raised, rather than sunk him in my estimation; but I was sadly disappointed at the general terms in which they were revealed. I wanted to know every event of his private life, and this abridgment was very tantalizing.

While I was pondering these things in my heart, the pen he had grasped so tightly was flung to some distance, and he raised his fine eyes to my face.

“Thank God! Geoffrey; I have not as yet lost the faculty of feeling—that I can see and deplore the errors of the past. When I think what I was, what I am, and what I might have been, it brings a cloud over my mind which often dissolves in tears. This is the weakness of human nature. But the years so uselessly wasted rise up in dread array against me, and the flood-gates of the soul are broken up by bitter and remorseful regrets. But see,” he exclaimed, dashing the thickening mist from his eyes, and resuming his peculiarly benevolent

smile: "the dark cloud has passed, and George is himself again."

"You are happier than I. You can smile through your tears," I cried, regarding his April face with surprise.

"And so would you, Geoffrey, if, like me, you had brought your passions under the subjection of reason."

"It is no easy task, George, to storm a city, when your own subjects defend the walls, and at every attack drive you back with your own weapons, into the trenches. I will, however, commence the attack, by striving to forget that there is a world beyond these gloomy walls, in whose busy scenes I am forbidden to mingle."

"Valiantly resolved, Geoffrey. But how comes it, that you did not tell me the news this morning?"

"News—what news?"

"Your cousin Theophilus returned last night."

"The devil he did! That's everything but good news to me. But are you sure the news is true?"

"My landlady is sister to Mr. Moncton's

housekeeper. I had my information from her. She tells me that the father and son are on very bad terms."

"I have seldom heard Mr. Moncton mention him of late. I wonder we have not seen him in the office. He generally pays us an early visit to show off his fine-clothes, and to insult me."

"Talk of his satanic majesty, Geoff. You know the rest. Here comes the heir of the house of Moncton."

"He does not belong to the elder branch," I cried, fiercely. "Poor as I am, I consider myself the head of the house, and one of these days will dispute his right to that title."

"Tush!" said George, resuming his pen, "you are talking sad nonsense. But hereby hangs a tale."

"I looked up inquiringly. Harrison was hard at work. I saw a mischievous smile hovering about his lips. He turned his back abruptly to the door, and bent more closely over his parchment, as Theophilus Moncton entered the office equipped for a journey.

CHAPTER IX.

A PORTRAIT.

Two years had passed away since I last beheld my cousin, and during his absence, there had been peace between his father and me. He appeared before me like the evil genius of the house, prepared to renew the old hostility, and I could not meet him with the least show of cordiality and affection.

I am not a good hand at sketching portraits, but the person of my cousin is so fresh in my memory, his image so closely interwoven with all the leading events, of my life, that I can scarcely fail in giving a tolerably correct likeness of the original.

He was about the middle stature, his figure slender and exceedingly well made: and but for

a strong dash of affectation, which marred all that he did and said, his carriage would have been easy and graceful. His head was small and handsomely placed upon his shoulders, his features sharply defined and very prominent. His teeth were remarkably white, but so long and narrow, that they gave a peculiarly sinister and malicious expression to his face—which expression was greatly heightened by the ghastly contortion that was meant for a smile, and which was in constant requisition, in order to show off the said teeth, which Theophilus considered one of his greatest attractions. But my cousin had no personal attractions. There was nothing manly or decided about him. Smooth and insidious where he wished to please, his first appearance to strangers was always unprepossessing ; and few persons on their first introduction had any great desire to extend their acquaintance.

He ought to have been fair, for his hair and whiskers were of the palest tint of brown ; but his complexion was grey and muddy, and his large sea-green eyes afforded not the least contrast to the uniform smokiness of his skin. Those cold, selfish, deceitful eyes ; his father's

in shape and expression, but lacking the dark strength—the stern, determined look which at times lighted up Robert Moncton's proud, cruel face.

Much as I disliked the father, he was in his worst moods more tolerable to me than his son. Glimpses of his mind would at times flash out through those unnaturally bright eyes ; and betray somewhat of the hell within ; but Theophilus was close and dark—a sealed book which no man could open and read. An overweening sense of his own importance was the only trait of his character which lay upon the surface ; and this, his master-failing, was revealed by every look and gesture.

A servile flatterer to persons of rank, and insolent and tyrannical to those whom he considered beneath him, he united in his character, the qualifications of both tyrant and slave.

The most brilliant sallies of wit could not produce the least brightening effect upon his saturnine countenance, or the most pathetic burst of eloquence draw the least moisture to his eye, which only became animated when contradicting some well-received opinion, or discussing the merits of an acquaintance, and

placing his faults and follies in the most conspicuous light.

He was endowed with excellent practical abilities, possessed a most retentive memory, and a thorough knowledge of the most intricate windings of the human heart. Nothing escaped his observation. It would have been a difficult matter to have made a tool of one, whose suspicions were always wide awake; who never acted from impulse, or without a motive, and who had a shrewd knack of rendering the passions of others subservient to his own.

He was devoted to sensual pleasures, but the mask he wore, so effectually concealed his vicious propensities, that the most cautious parents would have admitted him without hesitation into their family circle. Robert Moncton thought himself master of the mind of his son, and fancied him a mere puppet in his hands; but his cunning was foiled by the superior cunning of Theophilus, and he ultimately became the dupe and victim of the being for whose aggrandizement he did not scruple to commit the worst crimes.

Theophilus was extremely neat in his dress, and from the cravat to the well-polished boot,

his costume was perfect. An effeminate, solemn-looking dandy outwardly—within, as ferocious and hard a human biped as ever disgraced the name of man.

“Well, Geoff!” said he, condescendingly presenting his hand, “what have you been doing for the last two years?”

“Writing, in the old place,” said I, carelessly.

“A fixture!—ha, ha! ‘A rolling stone,’ they say, ‘gathers no moss.’ How does that agree with your stationary position?”

“It only proves, that all proverbs have two sides to them,” said I. “You roll about the world and scatter the moss that I sit here to help accumulate.”

“What a lucky dog you are,” said he, “to escape so easily from the snares and temptations of this wicked world. While I am tormented with ennui, blue-devils and dyspepsia, you sit still and grow in stature and knowledge. By Jove! you are too big to wear my cast-off suits now. My valet will bless the increase of your outward man, and I don’t think you have at all profited by the circumstance. Where the deuce did you get that eccentric turn-out? It certainly does not remind one of Bond Street.”

“Mr. Theopilus!” I cried, reddening with indignation. “Did you come here on purpose to insult me?”

“Sit still, now, like a good lad, and don’t fly into heroics and give us a scene. I am too lazy to pick a quarrel with you. What a confounded wet morning! It has disarranged all my plans. I ordered the groom to bring up my mare at eleven. The rain commenced at ten. I think it means to keep on at this rate all day.”

He cast a peevish glance at the dusty ground-glass windows.

“There’s no catching a glimpse of heaven through these dim panes. My father’s clerks are not called upon to resist the temptation of looking into the streets.”

“They might not inappropriately be called the pains and penalties of lawyer’s clerks,” said I, smothering my anger, as I saw by the motion of Harrison’s head, that he was suffering from an agony of suppressed laughter.

“Not a bad idea that. The plan of grinding the glass was suggested by me. An ingenious one, is it not? My father had the good sense to adopt it. It’s a pity that his example is not

followed by all the lawyers and merchants in London."

In spite of the spattering of Harrison's pen, which told me as plainly as words could have done, that he was highly amused at the scene, I felt irritated at Theophilus joking about a circumstance which, to me, was a great privation and annoyance.

"If *you* had a seat in this office, Mr. Theophilus," said I, laying a strong stress upon the personal pronoun, "you would, I am certain, take good care to keep a peep-hole, well-glazed, for your own convenience."

"If I were in the office," he replied, with one of his sidelong, satirical glances, "I should have too much to do in keeping the clerks at work and in their places, to have much time for looking out of the window. My father would do well to hire an overseer for *idle* hands."

Harrison's tremulous fit increased, while I was burning with indignation, and rose passionately from my seat.

"Geoffrey"—pronounced in an undertone, restrained me from committing an act of violence. I resumed my stool, muttering audibly between my teeth—

“Contemptible puppy !”

I was quite ready for a quarrel, but Theophilus, contrary to my expectations, did not choose to take any notice of my imprudent speech. Not that he wanted personal courage. Like the wasp, he could, when unprovoked, attack others, and sting with tenfold malice when he felt or fancied an affront. His forbearance on the present occasion, I attributed to the very handsome riding-dress in which he had encased his slight and elegant form. A contest with a strong, powerful young fellow like me, might have ended in its demolition :

Slashing his boot with his riding-whip, and glancing carelessly towards the window, he said, with an air of perfect indifference,

“Well, if the rain means to pour in this way all day, it is certain that I cannot prosecute my journey to Dover on horseback. I must take the coach, and leave the groom to follow with the horses.”

“Dover !” I repeated, with an involuntary start, “are you off for France ?”

“Yes” (with a weary yawn) ; “I shall not return until I have made the tour of Europe,

and I just stepped in for a moment to say good-by."

"*Unusually* kind," said I, with a sneer.

He remained silent for a few minutes, and seemed slightly embarrassed, as if he found difficulty in bringing out what he had to say.

"Geoffrey, I may be absent several years. It is just possible that we may never meet again."

"I hope so," was the response in my heart, while he continued,

"Your time in this office expires when you reach your majority. Our paths in life are very different, and from that period I must insist upon our remaining perfect strangers to each other."

Before I had time to answer his ungracious speech, he turned upon his heel and left the office, and me literally foaming with passion.

"Thank God he is gone!" cried Harrison. "My dear Geoff, accept my sincere congratulations. It would indeed be a blessing did you never meet again."

"Oh, that he had stayed another minute

that I might have demolished his gay plumes ! I am so angry, so mortified, George, that I can scarcely control myself."

"Nonsense ! His departure is a fortunate event for you."

"Of course—the absence of one so actively annoying, must make my bondage more tolerable."

"Listen to me, petulant boy ! there is war in the camp. Theophilus leaves the house under the ban of his father's anger. They have had a desperate quarrel, and he quits London in disgrace ; and if you are not a gainer by this change in the domestic arrangements, my name is not George Harrison."

"Why do you think so ?"

"Because I know more of Robert Moncton than you do. To provoke his son to jealousy, he will take you into favour. If Theophilus has gone too far—he is so revengeful, so unforgiving—he may, probably, make you his heir."

"May God forbid !" cried I, vehemently. Harrison laughed.

"Gold is too bright to betray the dirty chan-

nels through which it flows—and I feel certain, Geoffrey—”

A quick rap at the office-door terminated all further colloquy, and I rose to admit the intruder.

Harrison and I generally wrote in an inner room, which opened into the public office; and a passage led from the apartment we occupied into Mr. Moncton's private study, in which he generally spent the fore-part of the day, and in which he received persons who came to consult him on particular business.

On opening the door which led into the public office, a woman wrapped closely in a black camblet cloak, glided into the room.

Her face was so completely concealed by the large calash and veil she wore, and, but for the stoop in the shoulders, it would have been difficult at a first glance to have determined her age.

“Is Mr. Moncton at home?” Her voice was harsh and unpleasant; it had a hissing, grating intonation, which was painful to the ear.

The moment the stranger spoke, I saw Harrison start, and turn very pale. He rose

hastily from his seat and walked to a case of law-books which stood in a dark recess, and taking down a volume, continued standing with his back towards us, as if intently occupied with its contents.

This circumstance made me regard the woman with more attention. She appeared about sixty years of age. Her face was sharp, her eyes black and snake-like, while her brow was channelled into deep furrows which made you think it almost impossible that she had ever been young or handsome. Her upper lip was unusually short, and seemed to writhe with a constant sneer; and in spite of her corrugated brow, long nose, and curved chin, which bore the unmistakable marks of age, her fine teeth shone white and ghastly, when she unclosed her fleshless, thin lips. A worse, or more sinister aspect, I have seldom, during the course of my life, beheld.

In answer to her inquiry, I informed her that Mr. Moncton was at home, but particularly engaged; and had given orders for no one to be admitted to his study before noon.

With a look of bitter disappointment, she then asked to speak to Mr. Theophilus.

"He has just left for France, and will not return for several years."

"Gone!—and I am too late," she muttered to herself. "If I cannot see the son, I *must* and *will* speak to the father."

"Your business, then, was with Mr. Theophilus?" said I, no longer able to restrain my curiosity; for I was dying to learn something of the strange being whose presence had given my friend Harrison's nerves such a sudden shock.

"Impertinent boy!" said she with evident displeasure. "Who taught you to catechise your elders? Go, and tell your employer that *Dinah North* is here; and *must* see him immediately."

As I passed the dark nook in which Harrison was playing at hide and seek, he laid his hand upon my arm, and whispered in French, a language he spoke fluently, and in which he had been giving me lessons for some time, "My happiness is deeply concerned in yon hag's commission. Read well Moncton's countenance, and note down his words, while you deliver her message, and report your observations to me."

I looked up in his face with astonishment. His countenance was livid with excitement and

agitation, and his whole frame trembled. Before I could utter a word, he had quitted the office. Amazed and bewildered, I glanced back towards the being who was the cause of this emotion, and whom I now regarded with intense interest.

She had sunk down into Harrison's vacant seat, her elbows supported on her knees, and her head resting between the palms of her hands: her face completely concealed from observation. "Dinah North," I whispered to myself; "that is a name I never heard before. Who the deuce can she be?" With a flushed cheek and hurried step, I hastened to my uncle's study to deliver her message.

I found him alone: he was seated at the table, looking over a long roll of parchment. He was much displeased at the interruption, and reproved me in a stern voice for disobeying his positive orders; and, by way of conciliation, I repeated my errand.

"Tell that woman," he cried, in a voice hoarse with emotion, "that I *will not* see her! nor any one belonging to her."

"The mystery thickens," thought I. "What can all this mean?"

On re-entering the office, I found the old

woman huddled up in her wet clothes, in the same dejected attitude in which I had left her. When I addressed her, she raised her head with a fierce, menacing gesture. She evidently mistook me for Mr. Moncton, and smiled disdainfully on perceiving her error. When I repeated his answer, it was received with a bitter and derisive laugh.

“He will not see me?”

“I have given you my uncle’s answer.”

“*Uncle!*” she cried, with a repetition of the same horrid laugh. “By courtesy, I suppose; I was not aware that there was another shoot of that accursed tree.”

I gazed upon her like one in a dream. The old woman drew a slip of paper from her bosom, bidding me convey *that* to my *worthy* uncle, and ask him, in her name, “whether he, or his son, *dared* to refuse admittance to the bearer.”

I took the billet from her withered hand, and once more proceeded to the study. As I passed through the passage, an irresistible impulse of curiosity induced me to glance at the paper, which was unsealed, and my eye fell upon the following words, traced

in characters of uncommon beauty and delicacy :

“If Robert Moncton refuses to admit my claims, and to do me justice, I will expose his villainy, and his son’s heartless desertion, to the world.

“A. M.”

I had scarcely read the mysterious billet than I felt that I had done wrong. I was humbled and abashed in my own eyes, and the riddle appeared as difficult of solution as ever. My uncle’s voice sounded as ominously in my ears as the stroke of a death-bell, as he called me sharply by name. Hastily refolding the note, I went into his study, and placed it on the table before him, with an averted glance and trembling hand. I dreaded lest his keen, clear eye should read guilt in my conscious face. Fortunately for me, he was too much agitated himself to notice my confusion. He eagerly clutched the paper, and his aspect grew dark as he perused it.

“Geoffrey,” said he, and his voice, generally

so clear and passionless, sunk into a choking whisper, "Is that woman gone?"

"No, uncle, she is still there, and dares you to refuse her admittance."

I had thought Robert Moncton icy and immovable—that his blood never flowed like the blood of other men. I had deceived myself. Beneath the snow-capped mountain, the volcano conceals its hottest fires. My uncle's cold exterior was but the icy crust that hid the fierce passions which burnt within his breast. He forgot my presence in the excitement of the moment, and the stern unfeeling eye blazed with lurid fire.

"Fool!—madman—insane idiot!" he cried, tearing the note to pieces, and trampling on the fragments in his ungovernable rage: "how have you marred your own fortune, destroyed your best hopes, and annihilated all my plans for your future advancement!"

Suddenly he became conscious of my presence, and glancing at me with his usual iron gravity, said, with an expression of haughty indifference, as if my opinion of his extraordinary conduct was matter of no importance,

"Geoffrey, go and tell that mad-woman—
But no. I will go myself."

He advanced to the door, seemed again irresolute, and finally bade me show her into the study. Dinah North rose with alacrity to obey the summons, and for a person of her years, seemed to possess great activity of mind and body. I felt a secret loathing for the hag, and pitied my uncle the unpleasant conference which I was certain awaited him.

Mr. Moncton had resumed his seat in his large study chair, and he rose with such calm dignity to receive his unwelcome visitor, that his late agitation appeared a delusion of my own heated imagination.

Curiosity was one of my besetting sins. Ah, how I longed to know the substance of their discourse; for I felt a mysterious presentiment that in some way or another, my future destiny was connected with this stranger. I recalled the distress of Harrison, the dark hints he had thrown out respecting me, and his evident knowledge, not only of the old woman, but of the purport of her visit.

I was tortured with conjectures. I lingered in the passage; but the conversation was carried

on in too low a tone for me even to distinguish a solitary monosyllable ; and ashamed of acting the part of a spy, I stole back with noiseless steps to my place in the office. I found George at his desk : his face was very pale, and I thought I could perceive traces of strong emotion. For some time he wrote on in silence, without asking a word about the secret that I was burning to tell. I was the first to speak and lead him to the subject.

“ Do you know that horrible old woman, George ?”

“ Too well : she is my grandmother, and nursed me in my infancy.”

“ Then, what made you so anxious to avoid a recognition ?”

“ I did not want her to know that I was living. She believes me dead : nay more,” he continued, lowering his voice to a whisper, “ she thinks she murdered me.” His lips quivered as he murmured, in half-smothered tones : “ And she—the beautiful, the lost one—what will become of her ?”

“ Oh, Harrison,” I cried, “ do speak out ; do not torture me with these dark hints. If you are a true friend, give me your whole confidence, nor

let your silence give rise to painful conjectures and doubts. I have no concealments from you. Such mental reservation on your part is every thing but kind."

"I frankly acknowledge that you have just cause to suspect me," said George, with his usual sad, winning smile. "But this is not a safe place to discuss matters of vital interest to us both—matters which involve life and death. I trust to clear up the mystery one of these days, and for that purpose I am here. But tell me: how did Moncton receive this woman—this Dinah North?"

I related the scene. When I repeated the contents of the note, his calm face crimsoned with passion, his eyes flashed, and his lips quivered with indignation.

"Yes, I thought it would come to that; unhappy, miserable Alice! how could you bestow the affections of a warm, true heart on a despicable wretch like Theophilus Moncton. The old fiend's ambition and this fatal passion have been your ruin."

For some time he remained with his face bowed upon his hands. At length, raising his head, and turning to me with great ani-

mation, he asked if I knew any of my father's relations, besides Robert Moncton and his son?

"I was not aware that I had any other relatives."

"They are by no means a prolific race, Géoffrey. And has your insatiable curiosity never led you to make the inquiry?"

"I dared not ask my uncle. My aunt told me that, but for them, I should be alone in the world. It was a subject never discussed before me," I continued, after a long pause, in which George seemed busy with his own thoughts. "I understood that my uncle had only one brother."

"True," said George, "but he has a cousin; a man of great wealth and consequence. Did you never hear Theophilus mention Sir Alexander Moncton?"

"Never."

"Nor to whom his long visits in Yorkshire were made?"

"How should I? No confidence existed between us. I was indifferent to all his movements; not imagining that they could in any degree interest me."

"I begin to see my way through this tangled maze," returned George, musingly. "I now understand the secluded manner in which you have been brought up; and their reasons for keeping you a prisoner within these walls. They have an important game to play, in which they do not want you to act a conspicuous part. I can whisper a secret into your ears well worth the knowing—ay, and the keeping, too. Geoffrey Moncton, you are this Sir Alexander's *heir*!"

A sudden thrill shot through my whole frame. It was not pleasure, for at that moment I felt sad enough; nor hope, for I had long accustomed myself to look only on the dark side of the picture. It was, I fear, revenge; a burning desire to pay back the insults and injuries I had received from Theophilus Moncton, and to frustrate the manœuvres of his designing father.

"Has Sir Alexander no children?"

"He has a daughter—an only daughter, a fair, fragile girl of sixteen; the noblest, the most disinterested of her sex; a creature as talented as she is beautiful. Margaretta Moncton is destined to be the wife of her cousin Theophilus."

"Does he love her?"

"How can you ask that question, knowing

the man, and after having read the note addressed to your uncle?"

"That note was signed A—— M——."

"It was written by an unhappy, infatuated creature, whom Theophilus *did* love, if such a passion as his callous bosom can feel, deserves the name; but he shall not escape my vengeance. The arrow is in the bow, and a punishment as terrible as his crime, shall overtake him yet."

"Oh, that you would enter more fully into these dark details. You are ingenious at tormenting. I am bewildered and lost amid these half disclosures."

"Hush, Geoffrey! these walls have ears. I, too, am tortured, maddened by your questions. You are too imprudent—too impulsive, to trust with matters of such vital importance; I have revealed too much already. Try and forget the events of this morning; nor let your uncle discover by look, word or gesture, that you are in possession of his secret. He is deeply offended with his son, not on account of his base conduct to this poor orphan girl, but because it is likely to hinder his marriage with Miss Moncton, which has been for years the idol wish of his heart. His morose spirit, once aroused, is deadly

and implacable; and in order to make Theophilus feel the full weight of his anger, he may call you to fill his vacant place."

The sound of Mr. Moncton's step in the passage put a sudden stop to our conversation, but enough had been said to rouse my curiosity to the highest pitch; and I tried in vain to lift the dark veil of futurity—to penetrate the mysteries that its folds concealed.

CHAPTER X.

DREAMS.

I WENT to bed early, and tried in vain to sleep. The events of the day passed continually through my brain, and brought on a nervous headache. All the blood in my body seemed concentrated in my head, leaving my feet and hands paralyzed with cold. After tossing about for many hours, I dropped off into a sort of mesmeric sleep, full of confused images, among which the singular face of Dinah North haunted me like the genius of the night-mare.

Dreams are one of the greatest mysteries in the unsolved problem of life. I have been a dreamer from my cradle, and if any person could explain the phenomena, the practical ex-

perience of a long life ought to have invested me with that power.

Most persons, in spite of themselves, or what they consider to be their better judgment, attach a superstitious importance to these visions of the night; nor is the vague belief in the spiritual agency employed in dreams, diminished by the remarkable dreams and their fulfilment, which are recorded in Holy Writ, the verity of which we are taught to believe as an article of faith.

My eyes are scarcely closed in sleep, before I become an actor in scenes of the most ludicrous or terrific nature. All my mental and physical faculties become intensified, and enjoy the highest state of perfection; as if the soul centered in itself the qualities of its mysterious triune existence.

Beautiful visions float before the sight, such as the waking eye never beheld; and the ear is ravished with music which no earthly skill could produce. The dreaming sense magnifies all sounds and sights which exist in nature. The thunder deepens its sonorous tone, ocean sends up a louder voice, and the whirlwind shakes the bending forest with tenfold fury.

I have beheld in sleep the mountains reel;

the yawning earth disclose her hidden depths, and the fiery abyss swarm with hideous forms, which no waking eye could contemplate, and the mind retain its rationality. I have beheld the shrinking sea yield up the dead of ages, and have found myself a guilty and condemned wretch; trembling at the bar of Eternal Justice.

“Oh! what have I not beheld in sleep?”

I have been shut up, a living sentient creature in the cold, dank, noisome grave; have felt the loathsome worm slide along my warm, quivering limbs; the toad find a resting-place upon my breast; the adder wreath her slimy folds round my swelling throat; have struggled against the earthly weight that pressed out my soul and palsied my bursting heart, with superhuman strength; but every effort to free myself from my prison of clay was made in vain. My lips were motionless; my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth and refused to send forth a sound. Hope was extinct. I was beyond the reach of human aid; and that mental agony rendered me as powerless, as a moth in the grasp of a giant.

I have stood upon the edge of the volcano,

and listened to the throbbings of Nature's fiery heart; and heard the boiling blood of earth, chafing and roaring far below; while my eyes vainly endeavoured to explore its glowing depths. Anon, by some fatal necessity, I was compelled to cross this terrible abyss—my bridge, a narrow plank insecurely placed upon the rounded stems of two yielding, sapling trees. Suddenly, frightful cries resounded on every side, and I was pursued by fiend-like forms in the shape of animal life. I put my foot upon the fearful bridge, I tried its strength, and felt a horrid consciousness that I never could pass over it in safety; my supernatural enemies drew nearer—I saw their blazing eyes—heard their low muttered growls; the next moment I leaped upon the plank—with a loud crash it severed—and with the velocity of thought, I was plunged headlong into the boiling gulf—down—down—down—for ever whirling down—the hot flood rushed over me. I felt the spasmodic grasp of death upon my throat, and awoke struggling with eternity upon the threshold of time.

Most persons of a reflective character, have kept a diary of the ordinary occurrences of life. I reversed this time-honoured mental exercise;

and for some months, noted down what I could remember of the transactions of the mind, during its sleeping hours.

So wild and strange were these records, so eccentric the vagaries of the soul during its nocturnal wanderings, that I was induced to abandon the task, lest some friend hereafter, might examine the mystic scroll, and conclude that it was written by a maniac.

It happened, that on the present night, I was haunted by a dream of more than ordinary wildness.

I dreamt that I stood in the centre of a boundless plain of sand, which undulated beneath my feet like the waves of the sea. Presently, I heard the rushing of a mighty wind, and as the whirl-blast swept over the desert, clouds of sand were driven before it, and I was lifted off my feet, and carried along the tide of dust as lightly as a leaf is whirled onward through the air. All objects fled as I advanced, and each moment increased the velocity of my flight.

A vast forest extended its gloomy arms athwart the horizon; but did not arrest my aerial journey. The thick boughs groaned

and crashed beneath me, as I was dragged through their matted foliage; my limbs lacerated and torn, and my hair tangled amid the thorny branches. Vainly I endeavoured to cling to the twigs which impeded my passage, but they eluded my frenzied grasp, or snapped in my hands, while my cries for help were drowned in the thundering sweep of the mighty gale. Onward—onward. I was still flying onward without the aid of wings. There seemed no end to that interminable flight.

At length, when I least expected a change, I was suddenly cast to the bottom of a deep pit. The luxury of repose to my wounded and exhausted frame, was as grateful and refreshing as the dews of heaven to the long parched earth. I lay in a sort of pleasing helplessness, too glad to escape from past perils to imagine a recurrence of the same evil.

While dreamily watching the swallows, tending their young in the holes of the sandy bank that formed the walls of my prison, I observed the sand at the bottom of the pit caught up in little eddies and whirling round and round. A sickening feeling of dread stole over me, and I crouched down in an agony of fear, and

clung with all my strength to the tufts of thorny shrubs which clothed the sides of the pit.

Again the wind-fiend caught me up on his broad pinions, and I was once more traversing with lightning speed the azure deserts of air. A burning heat was in my throat—my eyes seemed bursting from their sockets; confused sounds were murmuring in my ears, and the very blackness of darkness swallowed me up. No longer carried upward, I was now rapidly descending from some tremendous height. I stretched forth my hands to grasp some tangible substance in order to break the horrors of that fall, but all above, around, and beneath me, was empty air;—the effort burst the chains of that ghastly slumber, and I awoke with a short stifled cry of terror, exclaiming with devotional fervour, “Thank God! it is only a dream!”

The damp dews stood in large drops upon my brow, my hands were tightly clenched, and every hair upon my head seemed stiffened and erect with fear.

“Thank God!” I once more exclaimed in an agony of gratitude, “it is only a dream!”

Then arose the question: “What was the

import of this dream, the effects of which I still felt through all my trembling frame, in the violent throbbing of my heart, and the ghastly cessation of every emotion save that of horror?"

Then I began to ponder, as I had done a thousand times before, over the mysterious nature of dreams, the manner in which they had been employed by the Almighty to communicate important truths to mankind, until I came to the conclusion that dreams were revelations from the spirit land, to warn us of dangers which threatened, or to punish us for crimes committed in the flesh.

"What are the visions which haunt the murderer's bed," I thought, "but phantoms of the past recalled by memory and conscience, and invested with an actual presence in sleep?"

Dr. Young, that melancholy dreamer of sublime dreams, has said—

"If dreams infest the grave,
I wake emerging from a sea of dreams."

What a terrible idea of future punishment is contained in these words to one, whose sleep like mine is haunted by unutterable terrors! Think

of an eternity of dreaming horrors. A hell condensed within the narrow resting-place of the grave.

My reveries were abruptly dispelled by the sound of steps along the passage which led to my chamber. My heart began to beat audibly. It was the dead hour of the night—who could be waking at such an unusual time? I sat up in the bed and listened.

I heard voices: two persons were talking in a loud tone in the passage, that was certain. For a long time, I could not distinguish one word from another, until my own name was suddenly pronounced in a louder key; and in a voice which seemed perfectly familiar to my ears.

The garret in which I slept, was a long, low, dingy apartment which formed a sort of repository for all the worn-out law books and waste papers belonging to the office, and as I have before stated the only furniture it possessed, was a mean truckle-bed on which I slept, and a large iron chest, which Mr. Moncton had informed me, contained title-deeds and other valuable papers, of which he himself kept the key.

They were kept in my apartment for better

security; as the stair which led to the flat roof of the house opened into that chamber, and in case of fire, the chest and its contents could be easily removed.

• For a wonder, I had never felt the least curiosity about the chest and its contents.

It stood in the old place, the day I first entered that dismal apartment when a child; and during the many long years which had slowly intervened, I never recollected having seen it unclosed. My attention for the first time was drawn to its existence by hearing my uncle say to some one in the passage in a hurried under tone.

“Set your mind at rest, the paper is in the iron chest in that room. If you will not rely upon my promise to destroy it, I will burn it before your eyes.”

“That alone will satisfy my doubts,” returned his companion. “Be cautious how you open the door, or the lad will awake.”

“Nonsense, young folks like him sleep well.”

“Ay, Robert Moncton, they are not troubled with an evil conscience.”

This last observation was accompanied with a low sarcastic laugh; and with an involuntary

shiver, I recognized in the mysterious speaker the old woman who had haunted my dreams.

"Conscience never troubles me, Dinah," returned Moncton, gloomily. "You first taught me to drown its warning voice."

"You were an apt pupil," said the woman. "All your natural tendencies were evil. I only fostered and called them out. But what is the use of recalling unpleasant truths. Why don't you silence memory, when you have ceased to feel remorse. But I tell you what it is, Moncton. The presence of the one proves the existence of the other. The serpent is sleeping in his coil, and one of these days you will feel the strength of his fangs. Is this the door that leads to his chamber? You have chosen a sorry dormitory for the heir of the proud house of Moncton."

"Hush! I wish he slept with his fathers. But even if he should awake, how could he guess, that our visit to his chamber could in any way concern him?"

"He has a shrewd face, an intelligent eye—an eye to detect treachery, and defy danger."

"On the contrary, a babe might deceive him."

“He has been educated in too hard a school to revel in such ignorance, Moncton.”

“Hold your tongue, Dinah, and give me the light. Remember how you were deceived in his cousin Philip.”

Mr. Moncton's hand was on the lock of the door: an almost irresistible impulse urged me to spring from the bed and draw the bolt. On second thoughts, however, I determined to feign sleep, and watch all that passed.

Resistance on my part would have been utterly useless, and I was anxious to find out if possible what connexion existed between my uncle, George Harrison, and this strange woman.

All this darted through my mind on the instant; the rays of the candle flashed upon the opposite wall; and my uncle, followed by his odious-looking companion, entered the room.

My intention of watching all their movements was completely frustrated by Mr. Moncton, who, advancing with cautious steps to my bed-side, held up the light in such a manner as not only to reveal my face, but the attitude in which I lay.

"Is he sleeping?" he whispered to his companion.

"He breathes like one in a profound slumber," was the reply. "'Tis a fine lad. How much he resembles Sir Alexander."

"His father, rather," sneered Moncton. "He's a second edition of Ned; but has got more brains. Thanks to his grandfather, Geoffrey, and his own mother, who was a beautiful, talented creature. Stand by the bed, Dinah, and keep watch over him while I light that lamp which he has left on the window-sill, and search for the papers."

The old woman took the light from Mr. Moncton's hand, and his station beside my bed. My too lively imagination pictured the witch-like face, with its dark, snaky eyes, bending over me, and I found it impossible to maintain, with any appearance of reality, the composure I had assumed. In order to conceal the excited state of my mind, and to convince her of the certainty of my pretended slumber, I threw out my arms, and began to toss and turn, and mutter in my sleep, putting on all the contortions which generally convulse the countenance of persons while writhing under the influence of some terrible

dream. A state of perfect quiescence might have aroused suspicion; the noise I made completely lulled theirs to sleep.

Meanwhile my uncle had unlocked the chest, and I heard him toss the papers it contained, upon the floor; while, from time to time, he gave utterance to expressions indicative of vexation and disappointment.

After examining the contents of the box thoroughly, and returning the parchments to their original place, he said in a mortified tone:

"The papers are not here. How they have been abstracted I cannot imagine, as I always keep the key in a private drawer of my cabinet, which is known only to myself."

"Did you place them there yourself?" demanded the old woman, in a hurried whisper.

"No, but Walters, in whom I placed the most implicit confidence, assured me that he placed them here with his own hands. He may, however, have destroyed them, and anticipated my wishes."

"And you, with all your caution," sneered Dinah North, "could trust an affair of such importance to another."

"He was my creature, sworn to secrecy, and

bought with my money, whose interest was to serve, not to betray me."

"A person who is capable of receiving a bribe to perform a base action, Moncton, is never to be trusted, especially a low-born fellow, like Walters ; and where," she continued, anxiously, "is this man to be found?"

"He left twelve years ago for America, and took out with him, Michael Alzure, my brother's old servant, and Mary Earl, the boy's nurse, who were the only witnesses to the marriage. I wanted him to take the boy himself, and adopt him into his own family, which would have saved us all further trouble, but this to my surprise he positively refused to do."

"To what part of America did he emigrate?"

"First to Boston, where he remained for three years. He then removed to Philadelphia from the latter place. I twice received letters from him. He had been successful in business, and talked of buying land in the western States ; for the last six years I have never heard of him or from him. It is more than probable that he is long since dead."

"People whom you wish out of the way, never die when you want them," said Dinah,

with her peculiar sneering laugh. "But I think you told me that the—" I could not catch the word which she breathed into the ear of Mr. Moncton—"had been destroyed."

"Yes—yes. I burnt it with my own hand; this was the only document of any consequence, and it is a hundred chances to one, that he ever recovers it, or meets with the people who could prove his identity."

My uncle rose from his knees and locked the iron chest, then, extinguishing my lamp, he and the old woman left the room.

The sound of their retreating footsteps had scarcely died away, when, in spite of my wish to keep awake, I dropped off into a profound sleep, and did not again unclose my eyes until it was time to dress for breakfast.

CHAPTER XI.

MY FIRST LOVE.

I FOUND my uncle sipping his coffee, as if nothing of importance had occurred during the night, to disturb his slumbers. I took my seat at the table in silence. My heart was full to bursting, and I dared not trust my voice, to offer him the common salutations of the morning.

My face, I have no doubt, betrayed the agitation which I endeavoured to conceal.

“You are late this morning, Geoffrey.”

“Yes, Sir—I passed a very restless night, and the result is a bad headache.”

“How did that happen?” surveying me attentively, with his clear, glittering eyes.

“I was harassed by frightful dreams, and

only awoke from one fit of nightmare to fall into a worse."

"Are you often troubled with bad dreams?" said he, without removing his powerful gaze from my pale face.

"Not often with such as disturbed me last night."

I detected my uncle's drift in using this species of cross-questioning, and I determined to increase his uneasiness without betraying my own.

"I wish, uncle, I had never seen that old woman who visited the office yesterday; she haunted me all night like my evil genius. Sir Matthew Hale might have condemned her for a witch, with a safe conscience."

"She is not a very flattering specimen of the fair sex," said my uncle, affecting a laugh, "but ugly as she now is, I remember her both young and handsome. What was the purport of your dream?"

"That I should like to know. The Josephs and Daniels of these degenerate modern days, are makers of money, not interpreters of dreams. But, I hope you don't imagine that

I place the least importance on such things. My dream was simply this :

“I dreamed that that ugly old woman, whom you call Dinah North, came to my bedside with an intent to murder me.” I paused, and fixed my eyes upon Mr. Moncton’s face. The glitter of his bright orbs almost dazzled me. I thought, however, that his cheek paled for a moment, and that I could perceive a slight twitching movement about the muscles of the mouth.

“Well,” said he, quite calmly, “and what then ?”

“For a long time I resisted her efforts to stab me with a long knife, and I received several deep wounds in my hands, in endeavouring to ward off her home-thrusts ; till, faint with loss of blood, I gave up the contest, and called aloud for aid. I heard steps in the passage—some one opened the door—it was you, Sir, and I begged you to save my life, and unloosen the fiend’s grasp from my throat, but instead of the assistance I expected, you seized the knife from the old woman’s hand, and with a derisive laugh, plunged it to the hilt in my heart. I awoke

with a scream of agony, and with the perspiration streaming from every part of my body.”

The dream was no invention of the moment, but had actually occurred, after Dinah North and Mr. Moncton had left my chamber. I wished to see what impression it would make upon him.

He leaned back in his chair with his eyes still fixed on my face. “It was strange, very strange—enough to excite a nervous, irritable fellow like you. Did you hear me come into your room last night?”

Taken by surprise, I gave an involuntary start, but regained my presence of mind in a moment. “Did you suspect, sir, that I was in the habit of leaving the house at night, that you thought it necessary to ascertain that I was in my bed?”

“Petulant boy! How ready you are to take offence at trifles. How do you expect to steer your way through the world? Business brought me into your room last night. Some papers belonging to the woman, whom your fertile imagination has converted into a witch or fiend, were in the iron chest. Anxious to satisfy her that the papers were safe, I went to look

for them. You were making a sad noise in your sleep. I was half inclined to waken you, but thought that my presence in your chamber at that hour of the night would only increase your uneasiness. The sound of my steps in the passage, I have no doubt, was the immediate cause of your dream."

This was a masterly stroke, and those who knew Robert Moncton in a moment would recognize the man. The adroitness with which he mingled truth with falsehood, almost made me doubt the evidence of my senses, and to fancy that the events of the past night were a mental delusion.

"Did you find the papers you wanted, Sir?"

His eye flashed, and his lip curled. "What business is that of yours, Sir? I don't allow an impertinent boy to pry into my private affairs."

"My question was one of idle curiosity."

"Even as such, never dare to repeat it."

I was struck dumb, and concluded my breakfast without speaking to him again. When the tea equipage was removed, I rose to leave the room, but he motioned me to remain.

His anger had passed away, and his really

handsome face wore a more agreeable expression than usual.

“Sit down, Geoffrey. I have long wished to converse with you upon your future prospects. What progress have you made in your profession?”

Astonished at his condescension, I told him candidly how I had of late improved my time, and studied late and early to acquire a competent knowledge of it in all its branches.

He was surprised, and appeared agreeably so.

“I had no idea of this, Geoffrey. Your industry has won for you a higher position than an office drudge. You cannot, however, make an able lawyer, without some knowledge of the world. To make a man of you it is absolutely necessary for you to go more into society.”

“You forget, Sir, that I have no means to indulge such a wish. I cannot consent to go into company under existing circumstances.”

“Oh, we can manage all that,” said he, tapping me on my shoulder. “Be obedient to my orders, and attend to my interest, and you shall not long want the means of gratifying your wishes. Mr. Harrison has left the office. It is my intention that you supply his place.

"Harrison gone!" cried I in a tone of vexation and regret; "then I have lost my best friend."

"Harrison was a clever, gentlemanly young man," said Mr. Moncton, coldly; "but, to tell you the plain truth, Geoffrey, I did not like the close intimacy which existed between you."

"Why, it is to him that I am indebted for all the knowledge I have acquired. His society was the only pleasure I had, and it seems hard to be deprived of it, without any fault on his side."

"Geoffrey, it is of no consequence to me what your opinion may be on the subject; I am master of my own actions, and please myself as to whom I retain or employ. Clear up that scowling brow, and be very thankful to obtain a handsome salary for services which I can command without remuneration."

The loss of my friend, my only friend, was a dreadful blow. I was too much overcome to thank my uncle for his offer, and left the room.

I had been so little accustomed to think for myself, that I relied upon George as my counsellor in all matters of importance. Besides, I

had an idea that he could throw some light upon the mysterious events of the night, and I was anxious to unburden to him the important secret.

Having to obtain the signature of a gentleman who resided in Fleet Street, to some legal documents, and knowing that Harrison lodged in the same street, I snatched up my hat and sallied forth, determined to consult him with regard to the change in my prospects, as I felt certain, that some sinister motive was concealed beneath my uncle's unlooked-for condescension.

I was again doomed to disappointment. On reaching Harrison's lodgings, I learned that he had left town that morning, for a visit of some weeks into the country, but to what part his landlady did not know. At parting, he told her she might let his rooms until he gave her notice of his return.

"Gone! without seeing or writing one line to inform me of his departure. That is not like his general conduct," I muttered, as I turned from the door.

With a heavy heart, I sauntered on, almost unconscious of the path I had taken, until I found myself entangled among the crowds which thronged Oxford Street.

A scream, echoed by several voices from the crowd, "that the lady would be crushed to death!" startled me from my unprofitable musings; and following the direction of the general gaze, I saw that a young female, in attempting to cross the street, had just fallen between the horses of two carriages advancing in opposite directions.

It was but the impulse of the moment to dash across the intervening space, and hinder the young lady from being trampled to death beneath the horses' hoofs. She fortunately was unconscious of her danger, and could not by useless screams and struggles frighten the horses, and frustrate my endeavours to save her.

The coachmen belonging to the vehicles, succeeded in stopping the horses, and I bore my insensible burden through the crowd to an apothecary's shop, which happened to be near at hand. The gentleman in attendance hastened to my assistance. We placed the young lady in a chair, and he told me to remove her bonnet, while he applied restoratives to her wrists and temples.

She was exceedingly fair; her rich, black,

velvet pelisse, setting off to great advantage the dazzling whiteness of her skin, and the rich colouring of her sunny brown hair.

My heart throbbed beneath the lovely head that rested so placidly above it ; and the arm that supported her graceful form, trembled violently. The glorious ideal of my youthful fancy had assumed a tangible form, had become a bright reality ; and as I looked down upon that calm, gentle face, I felt that I loved for the first time. A new spirit had passed into me, I was only alive to the delicious rapture that thrilled through me.

First passion is instantaneous—electrical. It cannot be described, and can only be communicated through the same mysterious medium.

People may rave as they like about the absurdity of love at first sight ; but the young and sensitive always love at first sight, and the love of after-years, however better and more wisely bestowed, is never able to obliterate from the heart the memory of those sudden and vivid impressions made upon it by the first electrical shocks of love.

How eagerly I watched the unclosing of

those blue eyes ; yet, how timidly I shrunk from their first mild rays.

Blushing, she disengaged herself from my arms, and shaking the long, sunny ringlets from her face, thanked me with gentle reserve for the service I had rendered.

“But for your prompt assistance, I must have lost my life, or at the very least been seriously injured. My poor thanks will never convey to you the deep gratitude I feel.”

She gave me her hand with a charming frankness, and I touched the white slender fingers with as much reverence as if she had been a saint.

At this moment, we were joined by a handsome elderly lady, who ran into the shop, exclaiming in hurried tones :

“Where is she?—where is my child? Is she safe?”

“Yes, dear aunt, thanks to this gentleman’s timely aid, who risked his own life to save mine.”

“How shall we thank you—how shall we thank you, Sir?” exclaimed the elderly lady, seizing my hand, and all but embracing me in an ecstasy of gratitude. “You have rendered

me a great service—a great service indeed. Without that dear girl, life would be a blank to me. My Kate, my Kate!" she cried, clasping the young lady in her arms, and bursting into tears, "you don't know how dreadfully I felt when I saw you under the hoofs of those horses. My child! my child!—I can hardly yet believe that you are safe."

The charming Kate tenderly kissed her weeping relative, and assured her that she could realize it all—that she must not fret, for she was quite herself again—not even hurt; only frightened a little.

And then she turned her lovely face to me, on which a tear rested, like a dew-drop upon the heart of a rose, with such a sweet, arch smile, as she said, "My aunt is very nervous, and is so fond of me that her fears for my safety have quite upset her. The sooner we get her home the better. Will you be so kind, Sir, as to tell me if a carriage is at the door. Ours is blue, with white horses."

The carriage was there. How I wished it at Jericho. The old lady again repeated her thanks in the warmest manner, and I assisted her and her charming niece into the equipage.

The young lady waved her hand and smiled, the powdered footman closed the door, and they drove off, leaving me spell-bound, rooted to the door-sill of the shop.

“Who are those ladies?” asked the apothecary, looking complacently down upon the sovereign the elder lady had slipped into his hand.

“I was just going to ask that question of you,” said I.

“How! not know them—and let them go away without inquiring their names! Arn’t you a simple young fellow? If it had been me now, I should have done my best to improve such a golden opportunity. Gratitude you know begets love, and I’ll be sworn that the pretty young woman has a good fortune, by the anxiety the old one felt in her behalf.”

I was in the maddest heroics of love. “What do I care about her property,” said I disdainfully. “Such a beautiful, elegant creature is a fortune in herself.”

“Yes—to those who have enough of their own. But my dear young sir, beauty won’t boil the pot.”

To joke me at the expense of the beautiful

unknown was sacrilege, and casting upon my tormentor, a look of unmitigated contempt, I left the shop with a lofty step, and an air of offended dignity.

As I passed into the street, I fancied that the term "ridiculous puppy!" was hissed after me.

I strode back into the shop. The apothecary was waiting upon a new customer.

"Was that insult intended for me?" I demanded, in a haughty tone.

"What did I say, Sir?"

"You called me a ridiculous puppy," said I.

"You are mistaken, young man. I am not in the habit of speaking my thoughts aloud."

I deserved this cut for my folly, and felt keenly that I had placed myself in an absurd position.

"My uncle is right," said I, to myself, as I retraced my steps to Hatton Garden. "I am a babe in my knowledge of the world. I must go more into society, or I shall for ever be getting into such ridiculous scrapes."

At dinner my uncle met me with a serious face.

"What kept you from the office, Geoffrey, this morning?"

I, willing to act openly with him, narrated to him the adventure I had met with.

"I think I know the lady," said he. "She is not very tall—is fair complexioned, with blue eyes and light brown hair. *Rather* pretty than otherwise."

"*Rather* pretty. She is *beautiful*, Sir."

"Phew!" said Mr. Moncton. *We* see with other eyes. Young men are always blind. The girl is well enough—and better still, she is very rich. Did she tell you her name?"

"I did not ask her."

"Where was your curiosity?"

"I wished very much to put the question, for I was anxious to know; but really, uncle, I had not the face to do it. But you can tell me."

"If she did not tell you herself, I am not going to betray her secret. What use would the knowledge be to you?"

"It would be pleasant to know her name."

My uncle looked hard at me; and something like a sarcastic smile passed over his lips.

"Boy, it would render you miserable."

"In what way?"

"By leading you to neglect business, and by filling your head with hopes which could never be realized."

"And why not?" I demanded, rather fiercely.

"Young ladies in our days seldom commit matrimony with penniless clerks."

This was said with a strong sneer.

"It may be so—and they are right not to involve themselves in misery. I am penniless at present. But that is no reason that I am always to remain so. I am young, healthy, industrious, with a mind willing and able to work—why should I not make a fortune as others have done? As my grandfather, for instance, did before me?"

"This is all true," said he, calmly, "and I admire your spirit, Geoffrey; but, nephew" (this was the first time I ever remember his calling me so), "there are other difficulties in the way of your making a high and wealthy alliance, of which you have no idea."

I know not why—but a sudden tremor

seized me as he said this. But mastering my agitation, I begged him to explain his meaning.

"I have long wished to do so," said he, "but you were so violent and unreasonable, that I thought it prudent to defer unpleasant communications until you were older, and better able to take things calmly. You have thought me a hard task-master, Geoffrey—a cruel unfeeling tyrant, and from your earliest childhood have defied my authority and resisted my will; yet you know not half the debt of kindness you owe to me."

I was about to speak. He held up his hand for me to maintain silence; which I did with a very bad grace; and he continued in the same cold methodical way—

"Children are naturally averse to control, and are unable to discern between sternness of manner, and a cold unfeeling hardness of heart; and construe into insults and injuries the necessary restraint imposed upon their actions for their good. Yours, I admit, was a painful situation, which you rendered still more unpleasant by your obstinate and resentful disposition."

"But, uncle!" I exclaimed, unable longer to hold my tongue, "you know I was treated very ill."

"Who treated you so? I am very certain, that Rebecca indulged you, as she never did one of her own children."

"My dear aunt! God bless her! she was the only creature in the house who treated me with the least kindness. The very servants were instructed to slight and insult me by your *amiable* son, and his servile tutor."

"He was a fool," said Mr. Moncton, refilling his glass. "As to Theophilus, it was natural for him to dislike the lad who had robbed him of his mother's affections, and who left him behind in his lessons. You were strong enough, and bold enough to take your own part, and if I mistake not, did take it. And pray, Sir, who was it that freed you from the tyranny of Mr. Jones, when he found that the complaints you brought against him were just?"

"But not until after I had been first condemned, and brutally maltreated." The less said on that score, uncle, the better."

He laughed—his low, sarcastic, sneering laugh, but did not choose to be angry.

“There are circumstances connected with your birth, Geoffrey, that evidently were the cause of these slights. People will not pay the same respect to a natural child, which they do to a legitimate one.”

“Good God !” I exclaimed, starting from my chair. “You don’t mean to insinuate—you dare not say, that I am a bastard ?”

“Such is the fact.”

“It is a falsehood ! invented to ruin me !” I exclaimed, defiantly. “One of these days you shall be forced to prove it such.”

“I shall be very happy to do so—if you will only give me the proofs.”

“*Proofs !*” I exclaimed, bitterly, “they are in your own possession—or you have destroyed them !”

“What interest can I have in trying to make you a bastard ? Is the boy mad ?”

“You never act without a motive,” I cried ; “you know that I am heir to a title, and property that you covet for yourself and your son !”

His pretended calmness was all gone. His pale face crimsoned with rage. Yet it was wonderful how instantaneously he mastered his passion.

“Who told you this *probable* story? Who put such absurd notions into your head?”

“One, upon whose word I can rely. My friend, Mr. Harrison.”

“I would like to ask Mr. Harrison what he knows of our family affairs,” sneered Mr. Moncton. “He has proved himself a scoundrel by inventing this pretty little romance to get up a quarrel between us, and rob you of the only real friend you have. I will repay Mr. Harrison for this base falsehood, one of these days.”

I felt that I had betrayed my friend, and perhaps by my foolish rashness marred my own fortunes. Inwardly I cursed my imprudence, and loaded myself with reproaches. Then the thought suggested itself, “Could my uncle be right—was I indeed illegitimate?”

“No, no,” I exclaimed, unconsciously aloud; “it is not true—I feel that it is false. A base falsehood got up to rob me of my good name—the only treasure left me by Providence when she deprived me of my parents. Uncle,” I exclaimed, standing erect before him, “I will never part with it. I will maintain my equality with you and your son to the last moment of my life.”

Overcome by excitement and agitation, I sank down into a chair, my head dropped upon the table and I sobbed convulsively.

“Geoffrey,” said my uncle, in a low voice, in which an unusual touch of kindness mingled, “calm down this furious passion. Poor lad! I pity and excuse your indignation; both are natural in your case.”

“Such sympathy is worse than hate,” I muttered.

“Well, believe me the author of all your wrongs, if it pleases you, Geoffrey; but first listen to what I have to say.”

I was too much exhausted by the violence of my emotions to offer the least opposition, and he had it entirely his own way—commencing his remarks with a provoking coolness which cut me to the heart.

“When you lost your parents, Geoffrey, you were too young to have formed a correct estimate of their characters.”

“I have a very indistinct recollection of my father. I remember my mother well.”

“You may imagine that. Your father had a fine, manly face, and nature had endowed him with those useless but brilliant qualities of mind,

which the world calls genius, and like many of the same class, he acted more from impulse than from principle. Your mother was a beautiful young woman, but with little discretion, who loved unwisely and too well. Her father saw enough of my brother Edward's character, to awaken his suspicions that his attentions to his daughter were not of an honourable nature, and he forbade him the house.

"This impolitic step brought matters to a crisis. The young people eloped together, and the old man died of a broken heart. Your mother went by the name of Moncton, and was introduced to his sporting friends as my brother's wife. But no evidence exists of a marriage having taken place; and until such evidence can be procured, the world will look upon you as illegitimate.

"You will soon be of age, Geoffrey, and if you are prepared with these indispensable documents, I will assist, to the best of my professional abilities, in helping you to establish your claims. It is not in my power to destroy or invalidate them. Why then these base suspicions—these unmerited reproaches—these hurricanes of passion? Why doubt my integrity at the very

moment when I am most anxious to serve you?"

"Because in no instance have you ever proved yourself my friend, and I cannot help doubting your sincerity!"

"A want of candour is certainly not among your failings," said Mr. Moncton, with a slight curl of his proud lip. "You have studied the law long enough to know the impolicy of such conduct."

"I judge, not from fair words but deeds. Sir, the change in your behaviour to me is too sudden for me to believe it genuine."

"Strange," mused Mr. Moncton, "so young and so suspicious!" then turning to me, he said, without the least appearance of resentment at my violence,

"Geoffrey, I know your faulty temper, and forgive you for using such insulting language. The communication I have just made was enough to irritate your sensitive nature and mortify your pride; but it is not reasonable that your anger should be directed against me. I considered it absolutely necessary, to apprise you of these important facts, and conveyed the

knowledge of them to you, as gently as I could, just to show you that you must depend upon your own exertions to advance your position in society."

"If your statement be true, what have I to do with society?" said I. "What position could I obtain in a world which already regards me as an outcast?"

"Not here, perhaps. But there are other countries, where the conventional rules which govern society in this, are regarded with indifference—*America*, for instance."

He fixed his keen eye upon me. An electric flash passed into my mind. I saw his drift. I recollected Harrison's advice that the only way to obtain my rights and baffle my uncle's cunning, was *non-resistance*. I formed my plans in a moment, and determined to foil his schemes, by appearing to countenance them, until I could arrive at the truth, and fathom his designs—and I answered with composure.

"Perhaps, I have done you injustice, Sir. The distracted state of my mind must be my excuse. I will try and submit with patience to my hard fate."

"It is your only wise course. Hark you,

Geoffrey ! I am rich, trust in me, and the world shall never sneer at you as a *poor relation*. Those whom Robert Moncton takes by the hand may laugh at doubtful birth and want of fortune."

The scoundrel ! how I longed to knock him down, but that would have done me no good, so I mastered my indignation and withdrew.

CHAPTER XII.

I FORFEIT MY INDEPENDENCE.

"BE ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves," was the advice of the Divine Lawgiver, when he sent his disciples forth on their heavenly mission to reform an evil world.

Religion, as I have before stated, had formed no part in my education. I had read the sacred volume with fear and trembling, and derived no consolation from its mystic pages. I had adopted the fatal idea, that I was one of those pre-condemned beings, for whom the blackness of darkness was reserved for ever, and that no effort on my part could avert the terrible decree.

This shocking and blasphemous belief had taken such deep hold of my mind, that

looked upon all religious exercises as perfectly useless. I could not fancy myself one of the elect, and so went from that extreme to the other. If I were to be saved, I should be saved; if a vessel of wrath, only fitted for destruction, it was folly to struggle against fate, and I never suffered my mind to dwell upon the subject. In the multitude of sorrows which pressed sorely on my young heart, I more than ever stood in need of the advice and consolation which the Christian religion can alone bestow.

I left the presence of my uncle, and sought my own chamber. The lonely garret did not appear so repulsive as usual. No one would disturb its gloomy solitude, or intrude upon my grief. There I had free liberty to weep—to vent aloud, if I pleased, the indignant feelings of my heart. My mind was overwhelmed with bitter and resentful thoughts; every evil passion was struggling for mastery, and the worst agony I was called upon to endure, was the hopeless, heart-crushing, downward tending madness of despair.

To die—to get rid of self, the dark consciousness of unmerited contempt and social degradation, was the temptation which continually fitted

through my excited brain. I have often since wondered how I resisted the strong impulse which lured me onward to destruction.

My good angel prevailed. By mere accident, my Bible lay upon the iron chest. I eagerly seized the volume, and sought in the first page I should open, an omen that should decide my fate, and my eye glanced upon the words already quoted—"Be ye, therefore, wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

I closed the book and sat down, and tried to shape the words to suit my present state. What better advice could I follow? from what higher authority could I derive sounder counsel? Did it not suit completely my case?

Harrison had disappeared. I was alone and friendless in the house of the oppressor. Did I follow the suggestions of my own heart, I should either destroy myself, or quit the protection of Mr. Moncton's roof for ever.

"But then," said reason, "if you take the first step, you are guilty of an unpardonable sin, and by destroying yourself, further the sinister views of your uncle. If the second, you throw away seven years of hard labour, lose your indentures, and for ever place a bar on your future

advancement. In a few months you will be of age, and your own master. Bear these evils patiently a little longer—wait and watch: you never can regain your lost name and inheritance by throwing yourself friendless upon the world.”

Determined to adopt, and strictly to adhere to this line of conduct, and leave the rest to Providence, I washed the traces of tears from my face and returned to the private office.

Here I found Mr. Moncton engaged with papers of consequence.

He held out his hand as I took my seat at the desk. “Are we friends, Geoffrey?”

“That depends upon circumstances” said I.

“How hard it is for you to give a gracious answer,” he replied. “It is your own fault that we ever were otherwise.”

“I will try and think you my friend for the time to come.”

He seemed more amused than surprised at this concession, and for some time we both wrote on in silence.

A tap at the door, and one of the clerks handed in a letter.

Mr. Moncton examined the post-mark and eagerly opened it up. While reading, his coun-

tenance underwent one of those remarkable changes I had on several occasions witnessed of late, and which seemed so foreign to his nature.

Suddenly crushing the letter tightly in his hand, he flung it from him to the floor, and spurned it with his foot, exclaiming as he did so, with a fiend-like curl of the lip: "So would I serve the writer were he here!" Then turning to me, and speaking in a low confidential tone, he said:

"The writer of that letter is unconsciously making your fortune, Geoffrey. This son of mine has acted in a base, ungrateful manner to me—in a manner which I can never forget or forgive. If you conduct yourself prudently, you may become dearer to me than this wicked young man."

"I should be sorry to rise on my cousin's ruin. I would rather gain your respect on any other terms."

This remark made him wince.

"Foolish boy! How blind you are to your own interest. You belong to a family famous for playing the fool. It runs in the blood of the Monctons."

Starting from his seat, he paced the room for

some minutes, as if in deep communion with himself.

"Geoffrey," said he at last, "from this day I adopt you as my son. I exempt you from the common drudgeries of the office, and will engage masters to instruct you in the fashionable accomplishments which are deemed necessary to complete the education of a gentleman."

I was mute with astonishment.

"Trifling as these things may appear to the man of science, and the candidate for literary honours, they are not without their use to the professional student. The world judges so much by externals, that nothing is despised which helps to flatter its prejudices and ensure popularity. You are not too old to learn dancing, fencing and riding. I should like you to excel in athletic sports and exercises."

"You are making game of me, uncle," said I, for I could not believe him in earnest.

"By the living God! Geoffrey, I mean what I say."

I stood before him, gazing into his face like one in a dream. There was a downright earnestness in his face which could not be mistaken. He was no longer acting a part, but really meant

what he said. Nor could I doubt but that letter had wrought this sudden change in my favour. Where, now, was all my high-souled resolutions? Human nature prevailed, and I yielded to the temptation. There sat Robert Moncton, gazing complacently upon me, from beneath those stern, dark brows, his glittering eyes no longer freezing me with their icy shine, but regarding me with a calm, approving smile: no longer the evil genius of my childhood, but a munificent spirit intent to do me good.

Ah, I was young—very young, and the world in my narrow circle had dealt hardly with me. I longed for freedom, for emancipation from constant toil. This must plead an excuse for my criminal weakness.

Years of painful experience, in the ways and wiles of men, had not as yet perfected the painful lesson taught me in after years. Young, ardent, and willing to believe the best I could of my species, I began to think that I alone had been to blame; that I had wronged my uncle, and thrust upon his shoulders the burden of injuries which I had received from his son.

The evil influence of that son had been

removed, and he was now willing to be my friend; and I determined to bury the past in oblivion, and to believe him really and truly so.

I shook him warmly by the hand, and entreated his forgiveness for the hard thoughts I had entertained, and thanked him sincerely for his offers of service.

The light faded from his eye. He looked gloomily, almost sadly into my face, glowing, as it must have been, with generous emotions, marvelling doubtlessly at my credulity.

Mr. Moncton up to this period had resided in the house which contained his office; the basement having been appropriated entirely for that purpose, while the family occupied the floors above. My uncle seldom received visitors, excepting at those times when Theophilus returned from college. To these parties, I as a matter of course had never been admitted. My uncle's evenings were spent abroad, but I was unacquainted with his habits, and totally ignorant of his haunts.

Judge then, of my surprise and satisfaction when informed by Mr. Moncton, that he had purchased a handsome house in Grosvenor Street, and that we were to remove thither. The

office was still to be retained in Hatton Garden, but my hours of attendance were not to commence before ten in the morning; and were to terminate at four in the afternoon.

I had lived the larger portion of my life in great, smoky London, and had never visited the west end of the town. The change in my prospects was truly delightful. I was transported as if by magic from my low, dingy, ill-ventilated garret, to a well-appointed room on the second story of an elegantly furnished house in an airy, fashionable part of the town; the apartment provided for my especial benefit, containing all the luxuries and comforts which modern refinement has rendered indispensable.

A small, but well-selected library crowned the whole.

I did little else the first day my uncle introduced me to this charming room, but to walk to and fro from the book-case to the windows; now glancing at the pages of some long coveted treasure; now watching with intense interest the throng of carriages passing and repassing; hoping to catch a glance of the fair face, which had made such an impression on my youthful fancy.

A note from Mr. Moncton, kindly worded for him, conveyed to me the pleasing intelligence that the handsome pressful of fine linen, and fashionably cut clothes, was meant for my use; to which he had generously added, a beautiful dressing-case, gold watch and chain.

I should have been perfectly happy, had it not been for a vague, unpleasant sensation—a certain swelling of the heart, which silently seemed to reproach me for accepting all these favours from a person whom I neither loved nor respected.

Conscience whispered that it was far better to remain poor and independent, than compromise my integrity. Oh, that I had given more heed to that voice of the soul! That still, small voice, which never lies—that voice which no one can drown, without remorse and self-condemnation.

Time brought with it the punishment I deserved, convincing me then, and for ever, that no one can act against his own conviction of right, without incurring the penalty due to his moral defalcation.

I dined alone with Mr. Moncton.

He asked me if I was pleased with the apartments he had selected for my use. I was warm in my thanks, and he appeared satisfied.

After the cloth was drawn, he filled a bumper of wine, and pushed the bottle over to me.

"Here's to your rising to the head of the profession, Geoffrey. Fill your glass, my boy."

I drank part of the wine, and set the glass down on the table. It was fine old Madeira. I had not been used to drink anything stronger than tea and coffee, and I found it mounting to my head.

"I will not allow that, Geoffrey—you must honour my toast."

"I have done so, uncle, as far as I am able. I have had enough wine."

"Nonsense, boy! Don't you like it?"

"I hardly know. It makes me feel giddy and queer."

"Ha! ha! that's good"—chuckling and rubbing his hands.

"If I take more just now, I shall certainly be tipsy."

"What then?"

"It would be disgraceful. In your presence, too."

"What—were you never drunk?"

"Never, in my life."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty."

"And never intoxicated—well, that's a good joke. Few young men of your age could say that. Would you not like to increase your knowledge, and be as wise as others?"

I shook my head.

"Ridiculous prudery. Come, fill your glass."

He drank off several glasses in succession; and for fear I should be thought deficient in spirit; I followed his example. But the Rubicon once crossed, to my surprise, I found that the wine had no effect upon my senses; only serving to elevate my spirits a little, and make me more sociable and communicative.

My uncle's stern face began to relax from its usual cold severity, and I found that when warmed with wine, he could be a most intelligent and agreeable companion. After conversing for some time on indifferent subjects, he said:

"You think you remember your parents.

I have their portraits. Perhaps you would like to keep them in your own possession."

"No present you could make me, would be so valuable," I replied.

"No heroics," he said, going to a beautiful inlaid cabinet. "I detest sentimental people. They are the greatest humbugs in the world."

Returning to the table, he placed two large miniature cases in my hand. I eagerly seized them.

"Don't look at them now," he resumed, "or we shall have a scene—wait until you are alone. I found them among my brother's papers, and had forgotten all about them, until I chanced to stumble over them in the bustle of removing."

I hid away the precious relics in my bosom, and was about to quit the room.

"Sit down, Geoffrey," he said, with a grim smile, "you are too sober to go to bed yet."

I filled the glass mechanically, but it remained untasted before me.

"By the by," continued my uncle, in a careless tone, which his eager glance contradicted, "what has become of your friend Harrison?"

"I wish I knew. His absence is a great loss to me."

"Who and what is this Harrison? You were his confidant, and, doubtless, know."

"Of his private history, nothing."

My uncle's large dark eyes were looking into my soul. I felt that he doubted my word. "He has, I believe, been unfortunate, and is reduced in his circumstances. His moral character, *I know* to be excellent."

"And doubtless you are a *capital judge*," said Mr. Moncton. "Young men all imagine themselves as wise as Daniel or Socrates. I think, however, friend Geoffrey, that this man deceived you."

"Impossible! Harrison is incapable of committing a mean or dishonourable action. Nor does he attempt to spare himself from blame; but frankly confesses, that to his own imprudence he is mainly indebted for his misfortunes."

"*Imprudence* is a respectable term for intemperance, dissipation, and vice of every kind," sneered my uncle. "Your moral young gentleman might preach against sins which had caused his own ruin. Believe me, Geoffrey,

the crimes and passions of most men are alike, with only this difference, that some have greater art in concealing them."

"That would make virtue a mere name," said I, indignantly. "I cannot believe *that* ideal, which I have been used to worship as a *reality*."

"All bosh. At your age men cling to the ideal, and resolutely close their eyes to the true and rational. I was guilty of the same weakness once."

"You, uncle !"

"Ay, you are astonished. But the time came, and too soon, when I learned to wonder at my own credulity. I was in love once. You smile. Yes, with that old witch, as you call her now. She was as beautiful as an angel then. She is an incarnate devil now ! Love has turned to hate—admiration to execration—and I curse myself for ever having thought her wise or good."

He flung himself into a chair, and groaned like one in acute pain ; and I, thinking he wished to be alone, slipped away before he raised his head from between his clasped hands.

“What could he mean by asking me so many questions?” I cried, as I threw myself into an easy chair in my luxurious apartment. “Were they instigated by the wine he had drank, or suggested by idle curiosity? or were my answers intended to answer some sinister purpose? God knows! He is a strange, inexplicable man, whose words and actions the most profound lawyer could scarcely fathom. I think he endeavoured to make me intoxicated in the hope of extracting some information regarding poor George. If so, he has missed his mark.”

I drew from my bosom the portraits he had given me, perhaps as a bait to win my confidence; but I was thankful to him for the inestimable gift, whatever the motives were which led to its bestowal.

The first case contained the miniature of my father. The gay, careless, happy countenance, full of spirit and intelligence, seemed to smile upon his unfortunate son.

I raised my eyes to the mirror—the same features met my glance: but ah, how different the expression of the two faces. Mine was saddened and paled by early care, and close con-

finement to a dark unhealthy office ; at twenty, I was but a faded likeness of my father.

I sighed as I pressed the portrait to my heart. In the marked difference between us I read distinctly the history of two lives.

But how shall I describe my feelings whilst gazing on the picture of my mother ? The fast falling tears for a long while hid the fondly remembered features from my sight ; but they still floated before the eyes of my soul in all their original loveliness.

Yes, there was the sweet calm face, the large soft confiding blue eyes, the small rosy mouth with its gentle winning smile, and the modest truthful expression of the combined features which gave such a charm to the whole.

Oh, my mother ! my dear lost, angel mother ! how that picture recalled the far-off happy days of childhood, when I sat upon your knees, and saw my own joyous face reflected in those dove-like eyes ! when, ending some nursery rhyme with a kiss, you bowed your velvet cheek upon my clustering curls, and bade God bless and keep your darling boy ! Would that I could become a child again, or that I could go to you, though you cannot return to me !

I leant my head upon the table and wept. Those tears produced a salutary effect upon my mind, and slipping down upon my knees, I poured out the feelings of my oppressed heart in prayer, and after awhile rose from the ground in a more composed state of mind. The picture still lay there smiling upon me. "Is it of you, dearest mother," said I, "that bad men dare whisper hard things? Who could look at that pure lovely face and believe aught against your honour? I could despise my father, though his only son, could I for an instant imagine him capable of taking advantage of such youth and innocence. But no, it is a foul slander invented by a villain to answer some base purpose; and may I perish, when I believe it true!"

I locked the portraits carefully in my desk, and retired to bed. The wine I had drank and the unusual excitement of my feelings for a long time prevented sleep, and it was the dawn of day before I sank to rest.

CHAPTER XIII.

A VISIT FROM THE GREAT MAN OF THE FAMILY.

FROM that day I became Mr. Moncton's factotum, his confidential clerk, and principal agent. In all matters that required prompt and skilful management, he invariably employed me.

If he did not regard me with affection, for that was foreign to his nature, he respected my abilities, and placed the greatest reliance on my principles. I attended him in most of his professional journeys, and was present in every court in which he had an important case. I no sooner appeared with him in public than I became a person of considerable consequence among his friends and acquaintances, and invitations flowed in upon me from all quarters.

One thing appeared very certain, that the same persons who had despised the shabbily-dressed lawyer's clerk, no longer regarded me with cold eyes as a *poor relation*, but were among the first to overwhelm me with civilities; and, for a while, I was intoxicated with the adulation I received from the world and its smooth-tongued votaries.

Three months glided rapidly away, and every day added to my self-importance, and brought with it fresh opportunities of enlarging the circle of my friends, and of acquiring a competent knowledge of the conventional rules of society. Though naturally fond of company, I hated dissipation, and those low vices which many young men designate as pleasure, in the pursuit of which they too often degrade their mental and physical powers. Mr. Moncton laughed at what he termed my affectation of moral integrity, and tried by every art to seduce me to join in amusements, and visit scenes, from which my mind revolted; and his own example served to strengthen my disgust. My resistance to such temptations I do not ascribe to any inherent virtue in me; but I have often observed in my subsequent journey

through life, that young men, whose knowledge of the world has chiefly been confined to books, and who have never mingled much with persons of their own age, are guarded from low vices by the romantic and beautiful ideal of life, which they formed in solitude. The coarse reality is so shocking and degrading, so repugnant to taste and good feeling, and all their preconceived notions upon the subject, that they cannot indulge in it without remorse and a painful sense of degradation. This was so completely my case, that I often fled to solitude as a refuge from pleasures, so-called, which I could not enjoy, and scenes in which I felt shame to be an actor. Perhaps I was mainly indebted to the passion I had conceived for the beautiful Catherine, which acted as a secret talisman in securing me from the contaminating influences to which, in my new position, I was often exposed. In the hope of meeting again the fair creature whose image filled my soul, I had frequented theatres, operas, and mixed much in society, but to no purpose; on this head I was still doomed to suffer the most provoking disappointment.

One evening, I returned late from the office

in Hatton Garden ; my uncle was from home, and a great press of business had detained me beyond the usual dinner-hour, which was at six. The porter had scarcely admitted me into the hall, when one of the footmen, with whom I was a great favourite, addressed me with an air of mystery which I thought highly amusing, he seemed so anxious to impress me with the importance of the news he had to communicate.

“ Mr. Geoffrey, Sir Alexander Moncton, my master’s cousin, sir, is in the dining-room, waiting to see you ; and the dinner, sir, is waiting, too. I told him, sir, that we expected Mr. Moncton home this evening, and he bade his valet bring up his portmanteau from the hotel, and said that he would wait here till master returned.”

“ Thank you, Saunders, for your information,” cried I, hurrying off to my chamber to dress for dinner.

I felt greatly excited at the prospect of the approaching interview with the great man of the family, who might prove a powerful friend to his friendless relative.

My uncle was from home, which would afford me an opportunity of speaking for myself. I

was anxious to make a favourable impression on Sir Alexander, and took an unusual degree of pains with my toilet..

I joined Sir Alexander in the drawing-room, just as the footman announced that dinner was on the table.

Sir Alexander received me, and my apologies for detention in the office, with a mighty good grace, shook me warmly by the hand, and accompanied me into the dining-room, with the air of a man who was determined not to be cheated out of his dinner, and anxious to make up for lost time.

I did the honours as well as I could ; but not without committing sundry awkward blunders ; greatly to the horror of Saunders, who with toe and elbow, gave me various silent hints upon the subject, as he glided noiselessly to and fro. This only increased my confusion, but, fortunately, my worthy relative was too much engrossed with his dinner, to notice the trifling omissions, which poor Saunders considered of such immense importance.

I was greatly relieved when the cloth was removed ; and the wine and glasses were placed

upon the table, and Sir Alexander and I were left alone to improve our acquaintance.

He commenced the conversation by introducing the very subject uppermost in my mind.

“Did I mistake you, young gentleman, or did you tell me, that you were a son of the late Edward Moncton?”

“His only son.”

“I was not aware of his marriage—still less that he left a son. It is strange, that I should have been kept in ignorance of this important fact.”

This was said half musingly. He then turned to me with a lively air.

“Your father, young gentleman, deeply offended me. It was a foolish affair; but it effectually severed the friendship of years. We repent of these things when it is too late. Had he been less violent, and less obstinate, a reconciliation might have been brought about. As it was—interested parties did their best to widen the breach.

“Edward and I were school-fellows; and though little harmony existed between the elder

branches of the family, we loved like brothers. He was a handsome, generous, high-spirited fellow, but rash and extravagant. While at school he was always in debt and difficulty, to the great annoyance of his money-loving father, who looked upon me as the aider and abettor in all his scrapes. We continued firm friends until the night before he left college, when the quarrel, which I do not mean to particularize, took place; from which period we never met, and all correspondence ceased between us. I heard, that in after-years, he made a love connexion; but I never learned the particulars from any one but your uncle Robert; and he did not inform me, that Edward had left a son—nor can I comprehend his motive for concealing the fact.”

Sir Alexander paused and looked earnestly in my face. I felt the blood rush to my temples.

“I do not doubt your veracity, young sir. You are too like the man I loved so long and well, for me to question your origin. But are you *certain* that you are Edward Moncton’s *legitimate* son?”

“I feel no doubt upon the subject; my

heart tells me that I am his lawful representative; and I trust that heaven will one day enable me to substantiate my claims." This was said with a vehemence that brought the tears into my eyes.

"Does Robert Moncton admit them?"

"No."

"On what grounds?"

"He affirms, that no certificate of my mother's marriage can be found, and without this important document, the law will not acknowledge me as Edward Moncton's legitimate son."

"Or Alexander Moncton's heir," replied the Baronet. "But I do not judge like the rest of the world, young man, and dare to think and act for myself. This uncle of yours is a cunning man: I know him and his ways of old. I know how he fomented the quarrel between his brother and me, to gain his own ends; and this son of his—this Theophilus, is a finished scoundrel! It is mortifying to the pride of an English gentleman to acknowledge such men as his successors."

The old man rose from his seat, and paced the room for some time in silence. He was

so much occupied with his own reflections, that I had leisure to examine his countenance minutely.

A strong family likeness existed between him and my father, and uncle Robert; and as for me, I might have passed for his son. He had the same high forehead, aquiline nose, chestnut curling hair, and dark piercing eyes; but his face lacked the careless, frank, good-nature of my father's, and was totally destitute of the subtle, stern demeanour of my uncle's. The expression was more simple, and less worldly than either. It was a thoughtful, intellectual, benevolent physiognomy, which excited feelings of confidence and affection at first sight. While looking at him, I thought I had known and loved him for years.

His tall commanding figure was slightly bent in the shoulders, and his hair was thickly sprinkled with grey; yet, his age could scarcely have exceeded fifty. His complexion, unlike my handsome uncle's, was very pale, and an early acquaintance with grief might be traced in the lines which furrowed his ample white forehead.

After a few turns through the room, he resumed his seat.

“Mr. Geoffrey Moncton,” said he, grasping me warmly by the hand, “I wish sincerely that you could prove your legitimacy. There is something about you that pleases and interests me. If ever you stand in need of assistance you may rely upon me as your friend. It is not Robert Moncton’s bare assertion that will make me believe you a bastard. Tell me all you know about yourself.”

I endeavoured to speak, but I was so completely overwhelmed by his unexpected kindness, that I could find no words to express my thanks, or comply with his request.

A loud knocking at the door, announced the arrival of Mr. Moncton.

“That is my uncle’s knock,” cried I, breaking the spell that bound me.

“We will talk over this matter again, Geoffrey. If we cannot get an opportunity, you must write, and tell me all you know.”

Before I could promise anything Mr. Moncton entered the room. He cast a hurried, scrutinizing glance at me, and seemed surprised and annoyed at finding me on such intimate terms with the baronet, to whom he gave a most cordial and flattering welcome.

The other met his advances with cold and studied politeness. It was evident to me that he, too, put a restraint upon his feelings.

“I am sorry, Sir Alexander, that I was from home when you arrived. This visit *from you* is such an *unexpected* favour.”

“Your absence, Robert Moncton, gave me an opportunity of making the acquaintance of your nephew, whom I have found a very agreeable and entertaining substitute, as well as a near relation.”

Mr. Moncton regarded me with a haughty and contemptuous smile.

“I am happy to learn that your time was so agreeably spent. By-the-by, Geoffrey,” turning abruptly to me, and speaking in a hasty, authoritative tone, “are those papers transcribed I gave you at parting? They will be required in court early to-morrow.”

He evidently expected a negative.

“They are ready, sir, and many others that have been placed in my hands since. We have been hard at work in the office all day.”

“I commend your diligence,” said he, affecting a patronizing air; “I am sorry to take you from such pleasant company, but business, you

know, cannot be neglected. This bundle of papers," (and he took a packet from his wallet and placed in my hand), "must be transcribed to-night. You need not go to the office. Step into the study, you will find all that you require there."

This was but a stratagem to get rid of my unwelcome presence. I bowed to Sir Alexander, and reluctantly withdrew.

It so happened, that Mr. Moncton's study opened into the dining-room, and without meaning to do so, I left the door but partially closed.

Sitting down to the table, I trimmed the large shaded lamp that always burnt there, and began mechanically to transcribe the uninteresting papers. An hour passed away. The gentlemen were conversing upon the current news of the day over their wine. The servant brought up coffee, and I ceased to give any heed to what was passing in the next room.

I was drawing out a long deed of settlement, when my attention was aroused by the mention of my own name, and the following dialogue caught my ear :

"This nephew of yours, Robert Moncton, is

a fine lad. How is it that I never heard of him before?"

"I did not think it necessary to introduce him to your notice, Sir Alexander. He has no legal claim upon our protection. He is a natural son of Edward's, whom I educate for the profession out of charity."

"An act of benevolence hardly to be expected from you," said Sir Alexander with a provoking sneer. "I suppose you expect to get the interest for your kindness out of the lad?"

"Why, yes! He has excellent abilities, and might do much for himself, but is too like the father, but with this difference, Edward was good-natured and careless to a fault; this boy is haughty and petulant, with the unmanageable obstinacy and self-will of old Geoffrey. He is not grateful for the many obligations he owes to me, and gives me frequent cause to regret that I ever adopted him into my family."

"When you are tired of him," said Sir Alexander, carelessly, "you may turn him over to me. I am sure I could make something of him."

"You are not in earnest?" in a tone of surprise.

"Never more so."

A long silence ensued. My hand trembled with indignation. Was this Mr. Moncton's pretended friendship? I tried in vain to write. "It is useless," I said mentally. "The deed may go to the devil, and Robert Moncton along with it, for what I care," and I flung the parchment from me. "That man is an infamous liar! I will tell him so to his face."

I was just about to burst into the room, when Sir Alexander resumed the conversation.

"Who was this lad's mother?"

"A young person of the name of Rivers; the only daughter of a poor curate, in Derbyshire. You know my brother's dissipated habits. He enticed the girl from her peaceful home, and grief for her loss brought the old father to his grave. This boy was the sole fruit of the connection. The parents were never married."

"Is that a fact?"

"I have made every legal inquiry upon the subject; but, no proofs are in existence of such an union between the parties."

"I can scarcely believe Edward guilty of such a villainous act!"

"Extravagant men of unsettled principles are

not much troubled with qualms of conscience. On his death-bed Edward repented of this act, and recommended the child to my especial care and protection. His letter, which I have by me, was couched in such moving terms, that I considered myself bound in duty to do what I could for the boy, as he was not answerable for the fault of the parents. I took him home the day his mother was buried, and he has been an inmate of my house ever since."

"When he is out of his time, what do you intend doing for him?"

"I have not yet determined; perhaps, associate him with myself in the office. There is, however, one stumbling-block in the way—the dislike which exists between him and Theophilus."

"Ay, that might prove a formidable barrier to their mutual welfare. By-the-by, what has become of Theophilus?"

"He was travelling on the continent. His last letter is dated from Rome. He has been a great source of trouble and vexation to me, and is constantly getting into scrapes by his gallantries, which you must allow, Sir Alexander, is a family failing of the Monctons."

"His conduct lately has been such," said the baronet, in an angry voice, "that it makes me blush that we bear the same name. It was to speak to you on this painful subject that brought me to London."

"I know the circumstance to which you allude," said Mr. Moncton, in a humble tone; "nor can I defend him; but, we must make allowances for youth and indiscretion. We were young men ourselves once, Sir Alexander."

"Thank Heaven! bad as I might be, no poor girl could accuse me of being the cause of her ruin," cried the baronet, striking his hand emphatically upon the table. "But this young scoundrel! while a visitor beneath my roof, and a solicitor for the hand of my daughter, outraged all feelings of honour and decency, by seducing this poor girl, on our own estate, at our very doors. It was mean, wicked, dastardly—and without he marries his unhappy victim, he shall never enter my doors again."

"*Marry!*" and Mr. Moncton hissed the words through his clenched teeth. "Let him dare to marry her, and the sole inheritance he gets from me, will be his father's curse!"

"Till he does this, and by so doing wipes off the infamous stain he has brought upon our house, I must consider both father and son as strangers!"

"Please yourself, Sir Alexander. You will never by menace induce me to give my consent to this disgraceful marriage," cried Moncton, stamping with rage.

There was another long pause. I heard Sir Alexander traversing the apartment with hasty strides. At length, stopping suddenly before his excited companion, he said; "Robert, you may be right. The wicked woman, who sold her grandchild for money, was once in your service. You best know what relationship exists between your son and his beautiful victim."

A hollow laugh burst from Mr. Moncton's lips.

"You possess a lively imagination, Sir Alexander. I did love that woman, though she was old enough then to have been my mother. It was a boy's rash, blind love; but I was too proud to make her my wife, and she was too cunning and avaricious to be mine on any other terms. Your suspicions, on *that head* at least, are erroneous."

"Be that as it may," said Sir Alexander, "Theophilus Moncton shall never darken my doors until the grave closes over me."

He left the room while speaking. A few minutes later, a carriage dashed from the door at a rapid rate, and I felt certain that he had quitted the house. My uncle's step approached. I let my head drop upon the table and feigned sleep, and without attempting to waken me, he withdrew.

From that night a marked alteration took place in his manner towards me. It was evident that the commendations bestowed upon me by Sir Alexander had ruined me in his eyes, and he considered me in the light of a formidable rival. He withdrew his confidence, and treated me with the most pointed neglect. But he could not well banish me from his table, or deprive me of the standing he had given me among his guests, without insulting them, by having introduced to their notice a person unworthy of it. On this head I was tolerably secure, as Mr. Moncton was too artful a man to criminate himself. In a few days, I should now become of age, when the term of my articles would expire. I should then be

my own master ; and several private applications had been made to me by a lawyer of eminence, to accept a place in his office, with promises of further advancement ; this rendered my uncle's conduct a matter of indifference. The sudden and unexpected return of Theophilus gave a very different aspect to my affairs.

CHAPTER XIV.

LOVE AND HATRED.

AT first Mr. Moncton refused to see his son; but on the receipt of a letter from Theophilus, his positive orders on that head were not only reversed, but the worthy young gentleman was received with marked attention by his father.

The contents of that letter I did not know then, but got a knowledge of them in after years. The son had become acquainted with some villainous transactions of the parent, which he threatened to expose to the world, if any rigorous measures were adopted towards himself. These revelations were of such a startling nature, that no alternative remained to Mr.

Moncton but to submit, which he did, and with a wonderful good grace.

It would be no easy matter to describe the surprise and indignation of Theophilus Moncton, when he discovered that the despised and insulted Geoffrey had become a person of some consequence during his absence. I shall never forget the studied air of indifference, the chilling coldness, with which he met me on his return, and under the cover of which he endeavoured to conceal his chagrin.

The long-cherished dislike that I had entertained for him, had lost much of its bitter character during a separation of many months. I was willing to believe that I might sometimes have been the aggressor, and that time, and a more intimate knowledge of the world, might have produced a favourable change in his surly and morose disposition. I had still to learn that the world rarely improves the heart, but only teaches both sexes more adroitly to conceal its imperfections. I could perceive no alteration in Theophilus which gave the least promise of mental improvement. After a few minutes spent in his company, I found him more arrogant and conceited than when he left Eng-

land. The affectation of imitating foreign manners, and interlarding his conversation with French and Italian, rendered him less attractive in his assumed, than he had been in his natural, character.

I listened for the first week to his long, egotistical harangues, with tolerable patience, hoping that the theme of self would soon be exhausted, and the Frenchified dandy condescend to remember that he was an Englishman ; but finding him becoming more arrogant and assuming by listening to his nonsense, I turned from him with feelings of aversion, which I could but ill conceal. It must have been apparent even, to himself, that I considered his company a bore.

The sympathy which exists between kindred minds, all have experienced at some period of their lives ; but the mysterious chords of feeling which unite hearts formed by nature, to understand and appreciate each other, are not more electrical in their operation than those which have their origin in the darker passions of the human breast.

How repugnant to a sensitive mind is a forced association with persons in whom we can find no affinity ; and whose sentiments and pursuits are

at utter variance with our own. I was acutely alive to these impressions, whenever I encountered the sidelong, watchful glance of my cousin. There was nothing straightforward in him ; he never looked friend or enemy honestly in the the face. We mutually understood each other. Though he scrupulously avoided addressing his conversation to me, yet it was chiefly intended for my edification ; and was replete with satirical observations.

I detest this covert manner of attack ; it is mean and unfair in the highest degree, as it deprives the person attacked from taking his own part, and boldly defending himself. Theophilus was a perfect adept at this dastardly species of warfare.

I tried to treat his conduct with silent contempt ; but his provoking remarks galled me exceedingly ; and often, when I appeared unconscious of their being levelled against me, and earnestly engaged in the perusal of some dull law-book, I was listening to every word he uttered, and quivering with indignation. Theophilus enjoyed my discomfiture, and I found his powers of tormenting greater than I had at first imagined.

The second day after his arrival, he sent a message up to my room, to inform me that he required that apartment for his valet, and I could remove to a chamber in the next story.

I returned for answer, "That I should not quit the occupation of the room that had been allotted to my use by his father, until I received positive orders from him to that effect. But I should only require it a few days longer, and then he could do as he pleased."

This insolent demand was not seconded by Mr. Moncton, and I took no further notice of it.

That my uncle had a game of his own to play, when he took me from the obscurity of the office and introduced me into society, I was now more than ever convinced. Whilst in the presence of his son he treated me with marked attention and respect, which rendered my situation far more trying and irksome, as I mistrusted the designs of the one and detested the other.

I felt that Mr. Moncton acted thus, on purpose to annoy Theophilus, and make him feel the weight of the resentment, which for good reasons he dared not openly express; while he praised my talents and application to business, on

purpose to rouse the envy and hatred of my cousin.

One afternoon, as we were sitting over the dessert, Mr. Moncton as usual addressed his conversation exclusively to me, which irritated Theophilus to such a degree, that he turned suddenly to his father, and exclaimed with much violence :

“ You seem, sir, to forget you have a son ?”

“ Yes, when that son forgot what was due to himself, and to his father’s house.”

“ You have to thank yourself for *that*,” was the insolent reply. “ I have trod too closely in your own footsteps, and followed too strictly the honest principles of my father.” He laughed bitterly. “ It seems strange, that you should be surprised, that such an example should have produced corresponding effects upon the mind and character of your son.”

Shocked at this horrible speech (for in spite of its awful truth, it seemed terrible from the mouth of a son,) I looked from Theophilus to his father, expecting to see the dark eye of the latter alive with the light of passion. But no—there he sat, mute as a marble statue; it was frightful to contemplate the glossy stare of his

glittering eye, the rigid immobility of his countenance.

"Heavens!" I mentally exclaimed, "can he be insulted in this manner by his only son, and remain thus calm?" But calm he was, without even attempting a reply, whilst his insolent son continued.

"By heaven! if you think that advancing that puppy into my place will bend me to your purpose, you grossly deceive yourself. I pity the stupid puppet who can thus sneak to his bitterest enemy, to obtain a position he could never rise to by his own merit. Silly boy!— I laugh at his folly, our shallow policy, and his credulity."

The words were scarcely out his mouth, when I sprang from my chair, and with a well-directed blow levelled him at my feet.

"Thank you, Geoffrey!" exclaimed Mr. Moncton, raising the crest-fallen hero from the ground. "You have answered both for yourself and me."

"I have been too rash," said I, seeing the blood stream copiously from my cousin's nose; "but he exasperated me beyond endurance."

"He provoked it himself," returned Mr.

Moncton. "I never blame any person when insulted, for taking his own part. You need be under no apprehension of a hostile encounter: Theophilus is a cowardly dog—he can bark and snarl, but dares not fight. Go to your room, Geoffrey, you will be better friends after this."

He said this in a tone of such bitter irony, that I hardly knew whether he was pleased with what I had done, or offended, for who could fathom the mind of such a man? I instantly complied with his request, and felt, however mortifying to my pride, that Theophilus Moncton had uttered the truth.

"In another week," I exclaimed, as I strode through the apartment—"yes, in less than a week, I shall obtain my majority: I shall be free, and then farewell to this accursed house of bondage for ever!"

Theophilus had not been home many days, before I perceived a decided alteration in the once friendly greetings I had been accustomed to receive from Mr. Moncton's guests. I was no longer invited to their parties, or treated with those flattering marks of attention which had

been so gratifying to my vanity, and given me such an exalted idea of my own consequence.

At first I was at a loss to imagine what had produced this sudden change. One simple sentence at length solved all these unpleasant doubts, and pressed the unwelcome truth home to my heart. Robert Moncton had been reconciled to his son, and I was once more regarded as only a *poor relation*.

The day I made this important discovery, I had been detained at the office long after our usual dinner-hour, and meeting with a friend on my way home, I sauntered with him several times up and down Regent Street, before I returned to my uncle's house.

I was not aware that my uncle expected company that day, until informed by Saunders in the hall, that a large party were assembled in the dining-room.

I was a little provoked at not receiving any intimation of the event, and in being too late for appearing at dinner, the third course having been placed on the table; but I hurried away to my own apartment to change my dress, and join the ladies in the drawing-room.

This important duty was scarcely effected, before Saunders entered with a tray covered with dainties, which he had catered for my benefit.

“I was determined, Mr. Geoffrey, that they should not have all the good things to themselves. Here is an excellent cut of salmon and lobster-sauce; the plump breast of a partridge, and a slice of delicious ham—besides, the sunkets. If you cannot make a good dinner off these, why, I says, that you deserves to be hungry.”

And throwing a snowy napkin over a small table near the fire, he deposited the tray and its tempting contents thereon, placed my chair, and stood behind it with beaming eyes, his jolly, rosy face radiant with good-nature and benevolence.

I thanked him heartily for his attention to my comfort, and being tired and hungry, did ample justice to the meal he had provided.

“This party has been got up in a hurry, Saunders?”

“Not at all, sir. I carried out the invitations four days ago.”

“You surprise me!” said I, dropping my knife and fork. “Four days ago—and I know nothing about it. That is something new.”

“It is young Mr. Moncton’s doings, sir. The party is given in honour of his return. Says Mr. Theophilus to the Guv’nor, says he, ‘I shall say nothing to Geoffrey, about it. What a capital joke it will be, to see him bolt into the room without studying the Graces for an hour.’ I think it was the Graces, he said, sir; but whether it’s a law book, or a book of fashions, sir, hang me if I can tell.”

“But why did not you give me a hint of this, my good fellow?”

“Why, sir,” said Saunders, hesitating and looking down, “everybody in this world has his troubles, and I, sir, have mine. Trouble, sir, makes a man forget every one’s affairs but his own; and so, sir, the thing slipped quite out of my ’ead.”

“And what has happened to trouble such a light heart as yours, Saunders?”

“Ah, sir!” sighing and shaking his head, “you remember Jemima, the pretty chamber maid, who lives at Judge Falcon’s, across the street; I am sure you must, sir, for no one that saw Jemima once could forget her; and it was your first praising her that made me cast an eye upon her. Well, sir, I looked

and loved, and became desperate about her, and offered her my 'onest 'and and 'eart, sir, and she promised to become my wife. Yes, indeed, she did; and we exchanged rings, and lucky sixpences and all that; and I gave master warning for next week; and took lodgings in a genteel country-looking cottage on the Deptford road. But I was never destined to find love there with Jemima."

"And what has happened to prevent your marriage?" said I, growing impatient and wishing to cut his long story down to the basement.

"Many a slip, sir, between the cup and the lip. There's truth in those old saws howsomever. Mr. Theophilus's French valet, poured such a heap of flummery into the dear girl's ears, that it turned her 'ead altogether, and she run off with the haffected puppy last night; but let him look well after himself, for I swear the first time I catch him, I'll make cat's meat of him. Ah! sir, the song says, that it's the men who is so cruelly deceitful, but I have found it the reverse. Never trust in vimen, sir! I swear I'll hate 'em all from this day, for Jemima's sake."

“Consider yourself a fortunate fellow,” said I. “You have made a very narrow escape.”

“Ah, sir, it’s all very well talking, when you don’t feel the smart yourself. I loved that false creter with my ’ole ’art. But there’s one thing,” brightening up, “which consoles me under this great haffliction, the annoyance that it has given to Mr. Theophilus. This morning, there was no one to dress him—to flatter his vanity and tell him what a fine gentleman he is: I had to carry up his boots and shaving-water. It was rare fun to see him stamping and raving about the room, and vishing all the vimen in the world at the devil. But hark! there’s the dining-room bell. More wine. The ladies have just left for the drawing-room.”

The blaze of lights, the gay assemblage of youth and beauty which arrested my eyes as Saunders threw back the folding-doors, sent a sudden thrill of joy to my heart. But these feelings were quickly damped by the cold and distant salutations I received from the larger portion of the company there assembled. Persons who a few weeks before had courted my

acquaintance and flattered my vanity, by saying and doing a thousand agreeable things, had not a friendly word to offer.

The meaning glance which passed round the circle when I appeared among them, chilled the warm glow of pleasure, which the sight of so many fair and familiar faces had called up.

What could be the meaning of all this? A vague suspicion flashed into my mind, that my cousin was the direct cause of this change in the aspect of affairs, and, sick and disgusted with the world, I sat down at a distant table and began mechanically to turn over a large portfolio of splendid prints that I had not notice before, and which I afterwards discovered, had been brought by Theophilus from Paris.

A half suppressed titter from two young ladies near me, and which I felt was meant for me, stung my proud heart to the quick. A dark mist floated between me and the lights; and the next moment I determined to leave the room in which I felt that my presence was not required, and where I was evidently regarded as an intruder.

I had just risen from my seat to effect a quiet retreat, when the folding-doors were again

thrown open, and Mrs. Hepburn and Miss Lee were announced.

What were these strangers to me? The new arrival appeared to make no small sensation. A general bustle ensued, and my eyes unconsciously followed the rest.

The blood receded from my cheeks, to flush them again to a feverish glow, when I instantly recognized the lovely girl and her aunt, whom I had for so many months sought for, and sought in vain.

Yes, it was she—my adored Catherine—no longer pale and agitated from recent danger, but radiant in youth and beauty, her lovely person adorned with costly jewels, and the rich garments that fashion has rendered indispensable to her wealthy votaries.

“Miss Lee,” was whispered among the ladies near me.

“Mr. Moncton’s ward?”

“The rich heiress.”

“Do you think her handsome?”

“Yes—passable.”

“Too short.”

“Her figure pretty—but insignificant.”

“She is just out.”

“So I hear. She will not make any great sensation. Too sentimental and countrified. As Lord Byron says,—‘Smells of bread and butter.’”

This last sneering remark, I considered a compliment. My charming Kate, looked as fresh and natural as a new-blown rose with the morning dew still fresh upon its petals. There was nothing studied or affected about her—no appearance of display—no effort to attract admiration; she was an unsophisticated child of nature, and the delightful frankness, with which she received the homage of the male portion of the company, was quite a contrast to the supercilious airs of the fashionable belles.

The opinion of the gentlemen with regard to the fair *débutante*, was quite the reverse of those given by her own sex.

“What a lovely girl!”

“What an easy graceful carriage!”

“Did you ever see a more charming expression—a more bewitching smile? A perfect lady from head to foot.”

“I have lost *my* heart already.”

“By Jove! won’t she make a noise in the gay world?”

“The beauty of the season.”

“A prize, independent of her large for tune!”

“And doubly a prize with.”

And thus the men prated of her among themselves.

The excitement at length subsided; and favoured by the obscurity of my situation, I could watch at a distance all her movements, and never tire of gazing upon that beaming face.

By some strange coincidence, I could hardly think it purely accidental, Mrs. Hepburn and her niece came up to the table upon which I was leaning.

I rose up in confusion, wondering if they would recognize me, and offered the elder lady my chair.

In my hurry and agitation, the portfolio fell from my hand, and the fine prints were scattered over the floor and table.

A general laugh arose at my expense; I felt annoyed, but laughed as loudly as the rest. Miss Lee, very good-naturedly assisted me in restoring the prints to their place, then looking earnestly in my face for a few seconds, she said—
“Surely, I am not deceived—you are the gen-

tleman who reseued me from that frightful situation in Oxford Street."

"The same," said I, with a smile.

"How delighted I am to meet you once more," she exclaimed, giving me her hand, and warmly shaking mine; "I was afraid that I should never see you again. And your name—you must tell me your name."

"Geoffrey Moncton. But, Miss Lee, do not distress me by thinking so much of a trifling service, which gave me so much pleasure."

"Trifling! do you call it? Sir, you saved my life, and I never can forget the debt of gratitude I owe you. Aunt," turning to Mrs. Hepburn, "do you remember this gentleman? How often we have talked that adventure over, and wondered who my preserver was. It is such a pleasure to see him here."

The old lady, though not quite so eloquent as her niece, was kind enough in her way. Wishing to change the subject, I asked Miss Lee if she drew?

"A little."

"Let us examine these beautiful prints," said I.

I gave her a chair, and leant over her. My

heart fluttered with delight. I forgot my recent mortification. I was near her, and, in the rapture of the moment, could have defied the malice of the whole world.

"I am no judge of the merits or demerits of a picture," she said, in her sweet, gentle voice. "I know what pleases me, and suffer my heart to decide for my head."

"That is exactly my case, Miss Lee. A picture to interest me, must produce the same effect upon my mind as if the object represented was really there. This is the reason, perhaps, why I feel less pleasure in examining those pictures by the ancient masters, though portrayed with matchless skill, which represent the heathen deities. With Jupiter, Mars and Venus, I can feel little sympathy, while the truthful and spirited delineations of Wilkie and Gainsborough, which have been familiar from childhood, strike home to the heart."

Before Miss Lee could reply, Theophilus Moncton walked to the table at which we were talking. He stared at me, without deigning a word of recognition, and shook hands cordially with Miss Lee and her aunt.

"Happy to see you here, Catherine—was

afraid you would be too much fatigued, after dancing all night, to give us a look in this evening. Been admiring my prints? Splendid collection, ain't they? By-the-by, Mr. Geoffrey, I would thank you to be more careful in handling them. Persons unaccustomed to fine drawings, are apt to injure them by rough treatment."

A contemptuous glance was my reply, which was returned by a sidelong withering glare of hate.

"That picture, on the opposite side of the room," continued my tormentor, anxious to divert Miss Lee's attention from me, "is a fine portrait, by Sir Thomas Lawrence. You are an admirer of his style; let us examine the picture nearer; I want to have your opinion of it."

They crossed the room. In a few seconds, a large group gathered before the picture of which Theophilus and Miss Lee formed the nucleus, and half a dozen wax-lights were held up to exhibit it to the best advantage.

Theophilus was eloquent in praising Lawrence's style of painting, and entertained the company with an elaborate detail of all the

celebrated paintings he had seen abroad; the studios he had visited, and the distinguished artists he had patronized. He could talk well, when he pleased, on any subject, and possessed considerable talent and taste for the arts; yet, I thought him more egotistical and affected than usual, when standing beside the simple and graceful Catherine Lee.

She listened to him with politeness, until the gratuitous lecture came to an end, and then quietly resumed her seat at the table by me, with whom she entered into a lively conversation.

The swarthy glow of indignation mounted to my cousin's wan face. He drew back, and muttered something inaudibly between his shut teeth, while I secretly enjoyed his chagrin. When supper was announced I had the honour of conducting Miss Lee down stairs, leaving my cousin to take charge of the elder lady. Nor did my triumph end here. Catherine insisted on taking a seat at the lower end of the table, and I found myself once more placed by her side.

"I do detest upper seats at feasts," said she; "it exposes you to observation, while in our

pleasant obscurity we can enjoy a little friendly chat. I never could understand why so many ladies quarrel so much about taking precedence of each other."

"It is only ambition in a small way," said I.

"Very small, indeed," she continued, laughing. "But tell me, why you were not at Mrs. Wilton's large party last night?"

"Simply, because I was not invited."

"The Monctons were there, father and son. But, perhaps you mix very little in the gaieties of the town."

"Since Theophilus returned, I have been very little from home; and have become a mere cipher with my old friends. A few weeks ago, these Wilton's courted my acquaintance, and the young men vied with each other, in paying me attention. To-night, we met as perfect strangers. To me, the change is unaccountable. I am, however, a perfect novice in the ways of the world. Such examples of selfish meanness often repeated will render me a misanthrope."

"You must not condemn all, because you have experienced the unmerited neglect of a few," said Catherine. "Selfish, interested

people are found in every community. It is a maxim with me, never to judge the mass by individuals. Many of the persons we meet with in the world do not live entirely for it, and are incapable of the conduct you deplore. I have met with warm hearts and kind friends amid the gay scenes you condemn—young people, who like myself, are compelled by circumstances to mingle in society, while their thoughts and affections are far away.”

“You have never experienced the frowns of the world,” said I; “I can scarcely allow you to be a competent judge.”

“I am prepared to meet them,” she replied, quickly—then stopped—and sighed deeply. I looked up inquiringly.

The expression of her fine face was changed from a cheerful to a pensive cast. It was not actual sorrow which threw a shade over her clear brow, but she looked as if she had encountered some unexpected misfortune, and was prepared to meet it with resignation. She passed her small white hand slowly across her forehead, and I thought I saw tears trembling in her eyes. My interest was deeply excited, and I loved her better for having suffered. I

redoubled my attentions, and before the company rose from table, I fancied that she no longer regarded me with indifference.

From this happy dream, I too soon awoke to an agonizing consciousness of my own insignificance. A Counsellor Sabine, who had been conversing with my uncle during the greater part of the evening, beckoned me over to a distant part of the room, and I reluctantly obeyed the summons. He wanted me to settle a dispute between him and Mr. Moncton, relative to some papers, which he said had been entrusted to my care.

My place by Catherine Lee's side was instantly filled by Theophilus.

Mrs. Hepburn, Catherine's aunt, asked him in a low voice, which, occupied as I was with other matters, did not fail to reach my ears, who I was, and the station I held in society, and ended her remarks by passing sundry encomiums on my person and accomplishments.

"*Accomplishments!*" repeated Theophilus, with a sneer. "I know not how he should be accomplished, Mrs. Hepburn. He is a poor clerk in my father's office; and as to his

standing in society, that is something new to me. He is a natural son of my uncle Edward's, whom my father adopted into the family, and brought him up out of charity. I was surprised at him, an uninvited guest, daring to address his conversation to Miss Lee."

It was well for the dastard, that he was protected by the presence of ladies, and beyond the reach of my arm, or I certainly should have committed an act of violence.

I restrained my indignation, however, and appeared outwardly calm—received some instructions from the counsellor and noted them down with stoical precision. My hand did not tremble, my passion was too terrible for trifling demonstrations. I think I could have put a pistol to his head, and seen him bleeding at my feet, without feeling one pang of remorse.

Miss Lee's carriage was announced. I roused myself from a dream of vengeance, and offered my arm to conduct her down stairs. She cast upon me a look of sorrowful meaning, and her aunt refused my services with a distant bow.

I drew proudly back. "This," I thought, "is their gratitude. This is like the rest of the world."

Mrs. Hepburn gave her hand to Theophilus, and with a grin of triumph he led them out.

After the company had separated I went up to Theophilus, and demanded an explanation of his ungentlemanly conduct. The answer I received was an insolent laugh.

No longer able to restrain my feelings, I poured upon him the boiling rage of my indignation, and did and said many bitter things, that had been better unsaid. He threatened to complain of me to his father. I dared him to do his worst—and left the room in a state of dreadful excitement.

The next morning, while busy in the office, Mr. Moncton came in, and closed the door carefully after him.

I rose as he entered and stood erect before him. I knew by the deadly pallor of his face, that something decisive was about to take place.

"Geoffrey," he said, in a low, hoarse voice, which he vainly endeavoured to make calm,

“you have grossly insulted my son, and spoken to him in the most disrespectful terms of me, your friend and benefactor. Without you will make a full and satisfactory apology to me for such intemperate language, and ask his pardon, you may dread my just displeasure.”

“Ask his pardon!” I cried; almost choking with passion—“for what? For his treating me like a menial and a slave!—Never, Mr. Moncton, never!”

My uncle regarded me with the same icy glance which froze my blood when a child, while I recapitulated my wrongs, with all the eloquence which passion gives—passion which makes even the slow of speech act the part of an orator.

He listened to me with a smile of derision.

Carried beyond the bounds of prudence, I told him, that I would no longer be subjected to such degrading tyranny; that his deceitful conduct had cancelled all ties of obligation between us; that the favours lately conferred upon me, I now saw had only been bestowed to effect my ruin; that he had been acting a base and treacherous game with me to further his own dishonest views; that I was fully aware

of his motives, and appreciated them as they deserved; that he well knew the story of my illegitimacy was a forgery, that I had the means to prove it one, and would do it shortly; that the term of my articles would expire on the following day, and I would then leave his house for ever and seek my own living."

"You may do so to-day," he replied, in the same cool sarcastic tone; and unlocking his desk he took out the indentures.

A sudden terror seized me. Something in his look threatened danger: I drew a quicker breath, and advanced a few paces nearer.

All my hopes were centered in that sheet of parchment, to obtain which, I had endured seven years of cruel bondage. "No, no," said I, mentally, "he cannot be such a villain—he dare not do it!"

The next moment the fatal scroll lay torn and defaced at my feet. A cry of despair burst from my lips: I sprang forward, and with one blow laid him senseless at my feet, and fled from the house.

I saw Robert Moncton but once again.

Recollection shudders when I recall that dreadful meeting.

I walked rapidly down the street, perfectly unconscious that I was without my hat, and that the rain was falling in torrents; or that I was an object of curiosity to the passers-by.

Some one caught my arm.

I turned angrily round to shake off the intruder—it was my friend Harrison.

“In the name of Heaven! Geoffrey, tell me what has happened? What is the matter—are you in your right senses? Have you quarrelled with your uncle? Let me return with you to the house,” were questions he asked in a breath.

“*My uncle!* he is an infernal scoundrel!” I exclaimed, throwing out my clenched hand, and hurrying on still faster. “Oh, that I could crush him with one blow of this fist!”

“Geoffrey, you are mad—do you know what you say?”

“Perfectly well—stand back, and let me kill him!”

He put his arm forcibly round me. “Calm yourself, Geoffrey. What has caused this dread-

ful excitement? Good Heavens! how you tremble. Lean upon me—heavier yet. The arm of a sincere friend supports you—one who will never desert you, let what will befall.”

“Leave me, George, to my fate. I have been shamefully treated, and I don’t care what becomes of me.”

“If you are unable to take care of yourself, Geoffrey,” he replied, clasping my hand fervently in his own, and directing my steps down a less frequented street, “it is highly necessary that some one should, until your mind is restored to its usual tranquillity. Return with me to my lodgings; take a composing draught, and go to bed. Your eyes are bloodshot, and starting from your head for want of sleep.”

“Sleep! how is it possible for me to sleep, when the blood is boiling in my veins, and my brain is on fire, and I am tempted every moment to commit an act of desperation?”

“This feverish state cannot last, my poor friend; these furious bursts of passion must yield to exhaustion. Your knees bend under you. In a few minutes we shall be beyond public observation, and can talk over the matter calmly.”

As he ceased speaking, a deadly faintness stole over me—my head grew giddy, the surrounding objects swam round me in endless circles and with surprising rapidity, the heavens vanished from my sight, and darkness, blank darkness closed me in, and I should have fallen to the earth, but for the strong arm which held me in its grasp.

When I again opened my eyes, it was in the identical apothecary's shop into which, some months before, I had carried the fainting Catherine Lee. The little apothecary was preparing to open a vein in my arm. This operation afforded me instant relief; my fury began to subside, and tears slowly trickled down my cheeks.

George, who was anxiously watching every change in my countenance, told the shop-boy to call a coach, which conveyed me in a few minutes to his old lodgings in Fleet Street.

CHAPTER XV.

GEORGE HARRISON AND HIS HISTORY.

MANY days passed over me of which I was totally unconscious. A violent fever had set in, and I was not aware of my situation ; scarcely of the bodily sufferings I endured. My wants were ministered to by the kindest, truest friend that ever soothed the miseries of the unfortunate.

Fancying myself still under the control of Robert Moncton, and a resident beneath his roof, I raved continually of my wrongs, and exhausted myself by threats of vengeance. Long before the crisis of the fever had passed, George had gathered from my impotent ravings the story of my injuries. After fluctuating a long time between life and death, youth and a

naturally strong constitution conquered my malady, and I once more thought and felt like a rational creature. My indignation against my uncle and cousin subsided into a sullen, implacable hatred, to overcome which I tried, and even prayed in vain. Ashamed of harbouring this sinful passion, I yet wanted the moral courage and Christian forbearance to overcome what reason and conscience united to condemn.

Degraded in my own estimation, I longed, yet dreaded to confide to Harrison, that the man he attended with such devotion was capable of such base degeneracy—of entertaining sentiments only worthy of Robert Moncton and his son.

The violence of my disorder had reduced me to such a state of weakness that I imagined myself at the point of death, when I was actually out of danger. My nervous system was so greatly affected that I yielded to the most childish fears, and contemplated dying with indescribable horror.

Harrison, who was unacquainted with the state of my mind, attributed these feelings to the reaction produced by the fever ; and thinking that a state of quiescence was necessary for my

recovery, seldom spoke to me but at those times when, with tenderness almost feminine, he gave me food and medicine, arranged my pillows, or made affectionate inquiries about my bodily state. I often pretended to be asleep, while my mind was actively employed in conjuring up a host of ghastly phantoms, which prevented my recovery, and were effectually undermining my reason.

One afternoon, as I lay in a sort of dreamy state, between sleeping and waking, and mournfully brooding over my perishing hopes and approaching dissolution, I thought that a majestic figure, clothed in flowing garments of glistening white, came to my bedside, and said to me in tones of exquisite sweetness, "Poor, perishing, sinful child of earth! if you wish to enter Heaven, you must first forgive your enemies. The gate of Life is kept by Love, who is ready to open to every one who first withdraws the bar which Hatred has placed before the narrow entrance."

Overwhelmed with fear and astonishment, I started up in the bed, exclaiming in tones of agonized entreaty, "Oh, God, forgive me! I cannot do it!"

“Do what, dear Geoffrey?” said George, coming to the bedside, and taking my hand in his.

“Forgive my enemies. Forgive those wretches who have brought me to this state, and by their cruel conduct placed both life and reason in jeopardy. I cannot do it, though He, the merciful, who dying forgave his enemies, commands me to do so.”

“Geoffrey,” said Harrison, soothingly, “you can never recover your health, or feel happy till you can accomplish this great moral victory over sin and self.”

“I cannot do it!” I responded, turning from him, and burying my face in the bed-clothes while I hardened my heart against conviction. “No, not if I perish for refusing. I feel as if I were already with the condemned.”

“No wonder,” returned Harrison, sternly. “Hatred and its concomitant passion, Revenge, are feelings worthy of the damned. I beseech you, Geoffrey, by the dying prayer of that blessed Saviour, whom you profess to believe, try to rise superior to these soul-debasing passions; and not only forgive, but learn to pity, the authors of your sufferings.”

"I have done my best. I have even prayed to do so."

"Not in a right spirit, or your prayers would have been heard and accepted. What makes you dread death? Speak the truth out boldly. Does not this hatred to your uncle and cousin stand between you and Heaven?"

"I confess it. But, Harrison, could you forgive them?"

"Yes."

"Not under the same provocation?"

"I have done so under worse."

"God in Heaven!—how is that possible?"

"It is true."

"I won't believe it," said I, turning angrily upon the pillow. "It is not in human nature; and few can rise above the weakness of their kind."

"Listen to me, Geoffrey," said Harrison, seating himself on the side of the bed. "You wished very much at one time to learn from me the story of my past life. I did not think it prudent at that time, and while under Robert Moncton's roof, to gratify your curiosity. I will do so now, in the hope of beguiling you

out of your present morbid state of feeling, while it may answer the purpose of teaching you a good, moral lesson, which I trust you will not easily forget.

“Man’s happiness depends in a great measure on the sympathy of others. His sufferings, by the same rule, are greatly alleviated when contrasted with the miseries of his neighbours, particularly if their sorrows happen to exceed his own.

“Much of my history must remain in the shade, because time alone can unravel the mystery by which I am surrounded; and many important passages in my life, prudence forces me to conceal. But, my dear fellow, if my trials and sufferings will in any way reconcile you to your lot, and enable you to bear with fortitude your own, your friend will not have suffered and sinned in vain.”

George adjusted my pillows, and gave me my medicine, stirred the fire to a cheerful blaze, and commenced the narrative that for so many months I had so ardently longed to hear.

HARRISON'S STORY.

“ Perhaps, Geoffrey, you are not aware that your grandfather left Sir Robert Moncton, the father of the present Baronet, guardian and trustee to his two sons, until they arrived at their majority; Edward at the time of his death, being eighteen years of age, Robert a year and a half younger.

“ What tempted Geoffrey Moncton to leave his sons to the guardianship of the aristocratic father, from whom he had parted in anger many years before, no one could tell.

“ The Baronet was a very old man, and was much respected in his day; and it is possible that the dying merchant found by experience, that he could place more reliance on the honour of a gentleman, than in a man of business. Or it might be, that on his death-bed he repented of the long family estrangement, and left his sons to the care of their grandfather, as a proof that all feelings of animosity were buried in his grave.

“ Sir Robert's eldest son had been dead for some years, and the present Baronet, who resided with his grandfather, was just two

years older than your father, and for several years the cousins lived very amicably beneath the same roof—were sent to the same college in Oxford to finish their studies and mingle in the same society.

“It was unfortunate for your father, who had too little ballast to regulate his own conduct, that he contracted the most ardent friendship for the young Alexander, who was a gay, reckless, dissipated fellow, regarding his wealth as the source from which he derived all his sensual pleasures, and not as a talent committed to his stewardship, of which he must one day give an account.

“Sir Alexander’s early career, though not worse than that of many young men of the same class, was unmarked by any real moral worth. His elegant person, good taste, and graceful manners, won for him the esteem and affection of those around him. Frank, courteous, and ever ready to use his influence with Sir Robert, in mitigating the distress of his poor tenants, he was almost adored by the lower classes, and by whom, in return, they were treated with a degree of familiarity, much beneath his position as a gentleman. From

this extravagant, kind-hearted, and popular young man, Edward Moncton contracted those habits which terminated in his ruin.

“Congeniality of mind strongly attached the cousins to each other; and I am certain that Sir Alexander truly loved the frank, confiding, careless Edward Moncton, while he equally disliked the cold, calculating, money-getting propensities of his brother Robert. Robert possessed a disposition not likely to forget or forgive a slight; and he deeply resented the preference shown to his brother; and his hatred, though carefully concealed, was actively employed in forming schemes of vengeance.

“You well know, how Robert Moncton can hate; the depths of guile, and the slow, smooth words, with which he can conceal the malignity of his nature, and hide the purposes of his heart. He had a game too to play, from which he hoped to rise up the winner; and to obtain this object he alternately flattered and deceived his unconscious victims.

“The particulars of your father’s quarrel with Sir Alexander I never knew; it took place just before the young men left college and became

their own masters ; but it was of such a nature that they parted in anger, never to meet again.

“ Shortly after this quarrel old Sir Robert died ; and Alexander Moncton came in for the estates and title. Your father and uncle, both being now of age, entered upon the great business of life. Your father resumed the business bequeathed to him by his father, and your uncle entered into partnership with the firm, of which he now stands the head and sole proprietor.

“ Several years passed away. The only intercourse between the families was through Sir Alexander and his cousin Robert, who, in spite of the young Baronet’s aversion, contrived to stick to him like a bur, until he fairly wriggled himself into his favour. At thirty, Sir Alexander still remained a bachelor, and seemed too general an admirer of the sex to resign his liberty to any particular *belle*.

“ About this period of my story one of Sir Alexander’s game-keepers was shot by a band of poachers, who infested the neighbourhood. Richard North, the husband of Dinah, had made himself most obnoxious to these lawless depredators, and thus fell a victim to his over-zeal.

“ Sir Alexander considered himself bound in honour to provide for the widow and her daughter of his faithful servant, particularly as the former had been left without any means of support. Both mother and daughter were received into his service—Dinah as housekeeper at the Hall, and her daughter Rachel as upper chamber-maid.

“ Dinah, at that period, was not more than thirty-four years of age, and for a person of her class was well educated, and uncommonly handsome. I see you smile, Geoffrey, but such was the fact.

“ Rachel, who was just sixteen, was considered a perfect model of female beauty, by all the young fellows who kept Bachelors’ Hall with Sir Alexander. The young Baronet fell desperately in love with his fair dependent, and the girl and her mother entertained hopes that he would make her his wife. Pride, however, hindered him from making her Lady Moncton. In order to break the spell that bound him he gave the mother a pretty cottage on the estate, and a few acres of land rent-free, and went up to London to forget, amid its gay scenes, the bright eyes that had sorely wounded his peace.

“Dinah North was not a woman likely to bear with indifference the pangs of disappointed ambition. She bitterly reproached her daughter for having played her cards so ill, and vowed vengeance on the proud lord of the manor, in curses loud and deep.

“Rachel’s character, though not quite so harshly defined, possessed too much of the vindictive nature of the mother. She had loved Sir Alexander with all the ardour of a first youthful attachment. His wealth and station were nothing to her—it was the man alone she prized. Had he been a peasant, she would have loved as warmly and as well. Lost to her for ever, she overlooked the great pecuniary favours just conferred upon her mother and herself, and only lived to be revenged.

“It was while smarting under their recent disappointment that these women were sought out and bribed by Robert Moncton to become his agents in a deep-laid conspiracy, which he hoped to carry out against Sir Alexander and his family.

“Robert Moncton was still unmarried, and Dinah took the charge of his establishment, being greatly enraged with her beautiful daugh-

ter for making a run-away match with Roger Mornington, Sir Alexander's huntsman, who was a handsome man, and the finest rider in the county of York.

"After an absence of five years, Sir Alexander suddenly returned to Moncton Park, accompanied by a young and lovely bride. During that five years, a great change had taken place in the young Baronet, who returned a sincere Christian and an altered man.

"Devotedly attached to the virtuous and beautiful lady whom he had wisely chosen for his mate, the whole study of his life was to please her, and keep alive the tender affections of the noble heart he had secured.

"They loved, as few modern couples love; and Sir Alexander's friends, and he had many, deeply sympathized in his happiness.

"Two beings alone upon his estate viewed his felicity with jealous and malignant eyes—two beings, who, from their lowly and dependent situations, would have been thought incapable of marring the happiness which excited their envy. Dinah North had been reconciled to her daughter, and they occupied the huntsman's lodge, a beautiful cottage within the precincts of the

park. Dinah had secretly vowed vengeance on the man who, from principle, had saved her child from the splendid shame the avaricious mother coveted. She was among the first to offer her services, and those of her daughter, to Lady Moncton. The pretty young wife of the huntsman attracted the attention of the lady of the Hall, and she employed her constantly about her person, while in cases of sickness, for she was very fragile, Dinah officiated as nurse.

“A year passed away, and the lady of the manor and the wife of the lowly huntsman were both looking forward with anxious expectation to the birth of their first-born.

At midnight, on the 10th of October, 1804, an heir was given to the proud house of Moncton; a weak, delicate, puny babe, who nearly cost his mother her life. At the same hour, in the humble cottage at the entrance of that rich domain, your poor friend, George Harrison (or Philip Mornington, which is my real name) was launched upon the stormy ocean of life.”

At this part of Harrison's narrative I fell back upon my pillow and groaned heavily.

George flew to my assistance, raising me in

in his arms and sprinkling my face with water.

“Are you ill, dear Geoffrey?”

“Not ill, George, but grieved: sick at heart, that you should be grandson to that dreadful old hag.”

“We cannot choose our parentage,” said George, sorrowfully. “The station in which we are born, constitutes fate in this world; it is the only thing pertaining to man over which his will has no control. We can destroy our own lives, but our birth is entirely in the hands of Providence. Could I have ordered it otherwise, I certainly should have chosen a different mother.”

He smiled mournfully, and bidding me to lie down and keep quiet, resumed his tale.

“The delicate state of Lady Moncton’s health precluding her from nursing her child, my mother was chosen as substitute, and the weakly infant was entrusted to her care. The noble mother was delighted with the attention which Rachel bestowed upon the child, and loaded her with presents. As to me, I was given into Dinah’s charge, who felt small remorse in depriving me of my natural food, if anything in

the shape of money was to be gained by the sacrifice. The physicians recommended change of air for Lady Moncton's health; and Sir Alexander fixed on Italy as the climate most likely to benefit his ailing and beloved wife.

"My mother was offered large sums to accompany them, which she steadfastly declined. Lady Moncton wept and entreated, but Rachel Mornington was resolute in her refusal. 'No money,' she said, 'should tempt her to desert her husband and child, much as she wished to oblige Lady Moncton.'

"The infant heir of Moncton was thriving under her care, and she seemed to love the baby, if possible, better than she did her own. Sir Alexander and the physician persuaded Lady Moncton, though she yielded most reluctantly to their wishes, to overcome her maternal solicitude, and leave her child with his healthy and affectionate nurse.

"She parted from the infant with many tears, bestowing upon him the most passionate caresses, and pathetically urging Rachel Mornington not to neglect the important duties she had solemnly promised to perform.

"Three months had scarcely elapsed before

the young heir of Moncton was consigned to the family vault ; and Sir Alexander and his wife were duly apprised by Robert Moncton, who was solicitor for the family, of the melancholy event. That this child did not come fairly by his death I have strong reasons for suspecting, from various conversations which I overheard when a child, pass between Robert Moncton, Dinah North, and my mother.

The news of their son's death, as may well be imagined, was received by Sir Alexander and Lady Moncton with the most poignant grief ; and six years elapsed before she and her husband revisited Moncton Park.

“ My mother was just recovering from her confinement with a lovely little girl—the Alice, to whom you have often heard me allude—when Sir Alexander and Lady Moncton arrived at the Hall. They brought with them a delicate and beautiful infant of three months old.

“ I can well remember Lady Moncton's first visit to the Lodge, to learn from my mother's own lips the nature of the disease which had consigned her son to his early grave. I recollect my mother telling her that the little George went to bed in perfect health, and died in a fit

during the night, before medical aid could be procured. She shed some tears while she said this, and assured Lady Moncton that the baby's death had occasioned her as much grief as if he had been her own—that she would much rather that I had died than her dear nurse-child.

“I remember, as I leant against Dinah North's knees, thinking this very hard of my mother, and wondering why she should prefer Lady Moncton's son to me. But, from whatever cause her aversion sprang, she certainly never had any maternal regard for me.

“Lady Moncton drew me to her, and with her sweet, fair face bathed in tears, told my mother that I was a beautiful boy—that her darling would have been just my age and size, and that she could not help envying her her child. She patted my curly head, and kissed me repeatedly, and said that I must come often to the Hall and see her, and she would give me pretty toys, and teach me to read.

“Ah, how I loved her! Her kind, gentle voice was the first music I ever heard. How I loved to sit at her feet when she came to the cottage, and look up into her pale, calm face; and when she stooped down to kiss me, and

her glossy ringlets mingled with mine, I would fling my arms about her slender neck, and whisper in a voice too low for my stern mother and Dinah to hear :

“‘I love you a thousand, thousand times better than anything else in the world. Oh ! how I wish I were your own little boy.’

“Then the bright tears would flow fast down her marble cheeks, and she would sigh so deeply, as she returned with interest my childish passionate caresses.

“Ah, Geoffrey, my childish heart spoke the truth. I loved that high-born, noble woman, better than I have since loved aught in this cold, bad world : at least, my affection for her was of a purer, holier character.

“My mother was taken home to the Hall, to act as wet nurse to little Margaret ; and I remained at the cottage with my harsh, cross grandmother, who beat me without the slightest remorse for the most trifling faults, often cursing and wishing me dead, in the most malignant manner.

“My father, whom I seldom saw (for his occupation took him often from home, which was rendered too hot for comfort, by the temper

of his mother-in-law), was invariably kind to me. When he came in from the stables he would tell me funny stories, and sing me jolly hunting songs; and what I liked still better, would give me a ride before him on the fine hunters he had under his care: promising that when I was old enough, I should take them airing round the park, instead of him.

“My poor father! I can see him before me now, with his frank, good-natured face, and laughing blue eyes: his stalwart figure, arrayed in his green velvet hunting-coat, buckskin breeches and top-boots; and the leather cap, round which his nut-brown hair clustered in thick curls; and which he wore so jauntily on one side of his head. Roger Mornington was quite a dandy in his way, and had belonged to a good old stock; but his father ran away when a boy, and went to sea, and disgraced his aristocratic friends; and Roger used to say, that he had all the gentlemanly propensities, minus the cash.

“He doated upon me. ‘His dear little jockey!’ as he used to call me; and I always ran out to meet him when he came home, with loud shouts of joy. But there came a night,

when Roger Mornington did not return ; and several days passed away, and he was at length found dead in a lonely part of the park. The high-spirited horse he rode had thrown him, and his neck was broken by the fall—and the horse not returning to the stables, but making off to the high road, no alarm had been excited at the absence of his rider.

“ My mother was sincerely grieved for his death ; he was a kind, indulgent husband to her ; and it was the first severe pang of sorrow that my young heart had ever known.

“ The day after his funeral, I was sitting crying beside the fire, holding my untasted breakfast on my knee.

“ ‘ Don’t take on so, child,’ said my mother, wiping the tears from her own eyes. ‘ All the tears in the world won’t bring back the dead.’

“ ‘ And will dear daddy never come home again?’ I sobbed. ‘ Ah, I have no one to love me now, but the dear good lady up at the Hall!’

“ ‘ Don’t I love you, Philip?’

“ ‘ No,’ I replied scornfully, ‘ you don’t love me, and you never did.’

“ ‘ How do you know that ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Because you never kiss me, and take me up in your lap, as Lady Moncton does, and look at me with kind eyes, and call me your dear boy. No, no, when I come for you to love me, you push me away, and cry angrily, ‘ Get away, you little pest ! don’t trouble me ! ’ and grandmother is always cursing me, and wishing me dead. Do you call *that* love ? ’ ”

“ I never shall forget the ghastly smile that played about her beautiful stern mouth, as she said unconsciously, aloud to herself: “ It is not the child, but the voice of God that speaks through him. How can I expect him to love me ? ”

“ How I wondered what she meant. For years that mysterious sentence haunted my dreams.

“ I was soon called to endure a heavier grief. Lady Moncton’s health daily declined. She grew worse—was no longer able to go out in the carriage, and the family physician went past our house many times during the day on his way to the Hall.

“ Old Dinah and my mother were constantly absent attending upon the sick lady, and I was

left in charge of a poor woman who came over to the cottage to clean the house, and take care of little Alice, while my mother was away.

“One day my mother came hastily in. She was flushed with walking fast, and seemed much agitated. She seized upon me, washed my face and hands, and began dressing me in my Sunday suit.

“‘A strange whim this, in a dying woman,’ said she, to the neighbour, ‘to have such a craze for seeing other people’s children. Giving all this trouble for nothing.’

“After a good deal of pushing and shaking she dragged me off with her to the Hall, and I was introduced into the solemn state chamber, where my kind and noble friend was calmly breathing her last.

“Ah, Geoffrey, how well I can recall that parting hour, and the deep impression it made on my mind. There, beneath that sumptuous canopy, lay the young, the beautiful—still beautiful in death, with Heaven’s own smile lighted upon her pale serene face. God had set his holy seal upon her brow. The Merciful, who delighteth in mercy, had marked her for his own.

“ Ah, what a fearful contrast to that angelic face was the dark fierce countenance of Dinah North, scowling down upon the expiring saint, and holding in her arms the sinless babe of that sweet mother.

“ Rachel Mornington’s proud handsome features wore their usual stern expression, but her face was very pale, and her lips firmly compressed. She held, or rather grasped me by the hand, as she led me up to the bed.

“ ‘ Is that my little Philip ? ’ said the dying woman in her usual sweet tones. But the voice was so enfeebled by disease as to be scarcely audible.

“ ‘ It is my son, my lady, ’ replied Rachel, and her voice slightly faltered.

“ ‘ What says my love ? ’ asked Sir Alexander, raising his head from the bed-clothes in which his face had been buried to conceal his tears.

“ ‘ Lift the boy up to me, dearest Alick, that I may kiss him once more before I die. ’


“ Sir Alexander lifted me into the bed beside her, and raised her up gently with his other arm, so that both she and I were encircled in his embrace. My young heart beat audibly. I heard Lady Moncton whisper to her husband.

“Alexander, he is your child. Ah, do not deny it now. You know, I love you *too* well to be jealous of you. Just tell me the honest truth?”

“A crimson glow spread over her husband’s face, as, in the same hurried whisper, he replied, ‘Dearest Emilia, the likeness is purely accidental. I pledge to you my solemn word, that he is not my son.’

“The poor lady looked doubtingly in his face. I saw a bitter scornful smile pass over the rigid features of my mother; whilst I, foolish child, was flattered with the presumption that I might possibly be Sir Alexander’s son.

“‘Do not cry, Philip, my darling boy!’ said Lady Moncton, holding me close to her breast. ‘Sir Alexander will be a father to you for my sake. I am very happy, my dear child; I am going to Heaven, where my own sweet baby went before me; I shall meet him there. Be a good boy, and love your mother, and your pretty little sister; and above all, my dear child, love your Saviour, who can lead you through the dark valley of the shadow of death, as gently as he is now leading me. Should you live to be a man,’ added she faintly, ‘remember this hour, and the lady who loved and adopted you as her son.’



“ Then turning slowly towards her husband, she wound her thin transparent hands about his neck ; breathed a few words of love in his ear, unheard by aught save him and me ; and reclining her meek pale face upon his manly breast, expired without a struggle.

“ A deep solemn pause succeeded. I was too awe-struck to weep. The deep convulsive sobs which burst from the heart of the bereaved husband warned intruders to retire. My mother led me from the chamber of death, and as we took our way in silence across the park, the solemn toll of the death-bell floated through its beautiful glades.

“ ‘ Mother,’ said I ; clinging to her dress. ‘ What is that ?’

“ ‘ The voice of death, Philip. Did you not hear that bell toll for your father ? It will one day toll for me—for you—for all.’

“ ‘ How I wish, mother, that that day would soon come.’

“ ‘ Silly boy ! Do you wish us all dead ?’

“ ‘ Not you mother, nor granny. You may both live as long as you like. But when it tolls for me, I shall be in Heaven with dear Lady Moncton.’

“ Rachel started, stopped suddenly, and fixed upon me a mournful gaze, the only glance of tenderness which ever beamed upon me from those brilliant, stern eyes.

“ ‘ Poor child ! you may have your wish gratified only too soon. Did Robert Moncton or Dinah North know of your existence, the green sod would not lie long unplied upon your head. You think I do not love you, Philip !’ she cried, passionately—‘ I do, I do, my poor child. I have saved your life, though you think me so cross and stern.’

“ She knelt down beside me on the grass, flung her arms round me, and pressed me convulsively to her bosom, whilst big bright tears fell fast over my wondering countenance.

“ ‘ Mother,’ I sobbed, ‘ I do love you sometimes—always, when you speak kindly to me, as you do now ; and I love dear little Alice—ah, so much ! my heart is full of love—I cannot tell you how much.’

“ Rachel redoubled her weeping—a step sounded behind us—she sprang to her feet, as Dinah North, with the little Margaret Moncton in her arms, joined us.

“ ‘ What are you doing there, Rachel ?’

growled forth the hard-hearted woman. 'Are you saying your prayers, or admiring the beauty of your son. Hang the boy! though he is your child, I never can feel the least interest in him.'

" 'Is that his fault or yours?' said my mother, coldly.

" 'Ah, mine, of course,' said Dinah, bitterly. 'We are not accountable for our likes or dislikes. I hate the boy!'

" 'I looked at her with defiance in my eyes, and she answered my look with a sharp blow on the cheek. 'Don't look at me, young dog, in that insolent way. I have tamed prouder spirits than yours, and I'll tame yours yet.'

" 'My mother gave her an angry glance, but said nothing, and we walked slowly on. At last Dinah turned to her and said :

" 'Rachel, this should be a proud and joyful day to you.'

" 'In what respect, mother?'

" 'Your rival's dead; you have gained your liberty, and Sir Alexander is free to choose another wife. Do you understand me now?'

" 'Perfectly; but that dream is past,' said my mother, mournfully. 'Sir Alexander loved

that dead angel too well, to place a woman of low degree in her place. If he did not unite his destiny to mine when I was young and beautiful, and he in the romance of life, don't flatter yourself into the belief that he will do it now. I know human nature better.'

" 'You don't know your own power,' said Dinah ; ' beauty is stronger than rank and fortune, and you are still handsome enough to do a deal of mischief among the men, if you only set about it in the right way.'

" 'Peace ! mother. I need none of your teaching. I learned to love Mornington, and ceased to love Sir Alexander. Nay, I am really sorry for the death of poor Lady Moncton, and should despise her husband if he could forget her for one like me.'

" ' Fool ! idiot !' exclaimed Dinah, in a tone of exasperation. ' You have ever stood in the way of your own fortune. Had you not been so over squeamish you might have changed the children, and made your own son the heir of the Moncton. Had I been at home, this surely would have been done. This was all the good I got by leaving you to the guidance of a handsome, good-natured fool like Mornington.'

“ ‘Mother, speak more respectfully of the dead,’ said Rachel. ‘He was *good*, at any rate, which we *are not*. It was my intention to have changed the children, but God ordered it otherwise,’ she continued, with a convulsive laugh. ‘However, I have had my revenge, but it has cost me many a blighting thought.’

“ ‘I don’t understand you,’ said Dinah, drawing close up before us, and fixing a keen look of inquiry on her daughter.

“ ‘Nor do I mean that you should,’ coldly retorted Rachel. ‘My secret is worth keeping. You will know it one day too soon.’

“ We had now reached home, and the presence of the strange woman put an end to this mysterious conversation. Though only a boy of eight years old, it struck me as so remarkable, that I could never forget it; and now, when years have gone over me, I can distinctly recall every word and look which passed between those sinful women. Alas, that one should be so near to me.

“ But you are sleepy, Geoffrey. The rest of my mournful history will help to wile away the tedium of the long to-morrow.”

CHAPTER XVI.

GEORGE HARRISON CONTINUES HIS HISTORY.

“THE sorrows of my childhood were great,” continued George, “but still they were counter-balanced by many joys. In spite of the disadvantages under which I laboured, my gay, elastic spirit surmounted them all.

“Naturally fearless and fond of adventure, I never shrunk from difficulties, but felt a chivalrous pride in endeavouring to overcome them. If I could not readily do this at the moment, I lived on in the hope that the day would arrive when by perseverance and energy, I should ultimately conquer.

“I have lived to prove that of which I early felt a proud conviction; that it is no easy matter for a wicked person, let him be ever so clever

and cunning, to subdue a strong mind, which dares to be true to itself.

“Dinah North felt my superiority even as a child, and the mortifying consciousness increased her hatred. She feared the lofty spirit of the boy whom her tyrannical temper could not tame ; who laughed at her threats, and defied her malice, and who, when freed from her control, enjoyed the sweets of liberty in a tenfold degree.

“Sir Alexander put me to a school in the neighbourhood, where I learned the first rudiments of my mother tongue, writing, reading, and simple arithmetic. The school closed at half-past four o'clock in the afternoon ; when I returned to the Lodge, for so the cottage was called in which we resided, and which stood just within the park at the head of the noble avenue of old oaks and elms that led to the Hall. Two of the loveliest, sweetest children nature ever formed were always at the Park gates watching for my coming, when they ran to meet me with exclamations of delight, and we wandered forth hand in hand to look for wild fruit and flowers among the bosky dells and romantic uplands of that enchanting spot.

“ Alice Mornington and Margareta Moncton were nearly the same age, born at least within three months of each other, and were six years younger than I. Strikingly different in their complexion, appearance and disposition, the two little girls formed a beautiful contrast to each other. Alice was exquisitely fair, with large, brilliant, blue eyes, like my poor mother’s, and long silken ringlets of sunny hair which curled naturally upon her snow-white shoulders. She was tall and stately for her age, and might have been a princess, for the noble dignity of her carriage would not have disgraced a court.

“ She was all life and spirit. The first in every sport, the last to yield to fatigue or satiety. Her passions were warm and headstrong; her temper irritable; her affections intense and constant, and her manners so frank and winning that while conscious that she had a thousand faults, you could but admire and love her.

“ A stranger might have thought her capricious, but her love of variety arose more from the exuberance of her fancy than from any love of change. She was a fair and happy child, the idol of her fond brother’s heart, till one baneful

passion marred what God and nature made so beautiful.

“Margaret Moncton, outwardly, was less gifted than Alice Mornington, but she far surpassed her foster-sister in mental endowments. Her stature was small, almost diminutive. Her features neither regular nor handsome except the dark eyes, the beauty of which I think I never saw surpassed.

“Her complexion was pure but very pale, and her lofty, thoughtful brow wore a serious expression from infancy. In our wildest revels on the green sward, you seldom heard Margaret laugh; but when pleased, she had a most bewitching smile, which lighted up her calm countenance till every feature beamed with an inexpressible grace. Her face was the mirror of purity and truth, and you felt, whilst looking upon it, that it was impossible for Margaret to deceive.

“How could I be unhappy, while I had these two beautiful children for my daily companions, and the most charming rural scenery at my immediate command?

“Sir Alexander came every day to the Lodge to see his child, and always lavished upon me

the most flattering marks of his favour. His manner to my mother was, at first, shy and reserved. This wore off by degrees, and before two years had expired, from the death of his wife, his visits became so constant, and his attentions so marked, that Dinah once more began to entertain hopes that her ambitious schemes for her daughter might yet be realized. These hopes were only frustrated by the sudden death of the object for whom they were cherished. My mother, for some weeks, had complained of an acute pain in her left side, just under her breast, and the medicines she procured from the doctor afforded her no relief. She grew nervous and apprehensive of the consequences, but as her personal appearance was not at all injured by her complaint, Dinah ridiculed her fears.

“ ‘You may laugh as you please, mother,’ said she, the very day before she died, ‘but I feel this pain will be the death of me—and I so unfit to die,’ she added, with a deep sigh.

“ ‘Nonsense!’ returned Dinah, ‘you will wear your wedding clothes a second time, before we put on your shroud.’

“ My mother only answered with another deep-drawn sigh. She passed a sleepless night

—the doctor was sent for in the morning, gave her a composing draught, and told her to make her mind easy, for she had nothing to fear.

“ I always slept in the same bed with my mother. That night I had a bad cold and could not sleep ; but knowing that she was not well, I lay quite still, fearing to disturb her. She slept well during the early part of the night. The clock had just struck twelve when she rose up in the bed, and called Dinah to come to her quickly. Her voice sounded hollow and tremulous.

“ ‘ What ails you, Rachel ? ’ grumbled the hard woman ; ‘ disturbing a body at this hour of the night.’

“ ‘ Be it night or morning,’ said my mother, ‘ I am dying, and this hour will be my last.’

“ ‘ Then in the name of God ! send for the doctor.’

“ ‘ It is too late now. He can do me no good : I am going fast ; but there is something on my mind, mother, which I must tell you before I go. Sit down beside me on the bed, whilst I have strength left to do it, and swear to me mother, that you will not abuse the confidence I am about to repose in you.’

“Dinah nodded assent.

“‘That will not do. I must have your solemn word—your oath!’

“‘What good will that do, Rachel? no oath can bind me—I believe in no God, and fear no devil!’

“This confession was accompanied by a hideous, cackling laugh. Rachel groaned aloud.

“‘Oh, mother! there is a God—an avenging God! Could you feel what I now feel, and see what I now see, like the devils, you would believe and tremble. You will know it one day, and like me, find out that repentance comes too late. I will, however, tell the plain truth, and your diabolical policy, will, doubtless, suggest the use which may be made of such an important secret.’

“There was a long pause, after which some sentences passed between them, in such a low voice, that I could not distinctly hear them; at last I heard my mother say,

“‘You never saw these children, or you would not wonder that my heart so clave to that fair babe. You thought that I accepted Robert Moncton’s bribe, and put the other child out of the way.’

“ ‘ And did you not ? ’ cried the eager old woman, breathless with curiosity.

“ ‘ I took the bribe. But the child died a natural death, and I was saved the commission of a frightful crime, which you and your master were constantly writing to me, to urge me to commit. Now, listen, mother.’

“ What she said was in tones so low, that, though I strained every nerve to listen, as I should have done, had it been a ghost story, or any tale of horror, the beating of my own heart frustrated all my endeavours.

“ Rachel’s communication appeared to astonish her mother. Her dark, wrinkled brows contracted until not a particle of the eyes were visible, and she sat for a long while in deep thought, rocking herself to and fro on the bed, whilst the dying woman regarded her with expanded eyes and raised hands, locked tightly together. At last she spoke.

“ ‘ Dinah ! make no ill use of my confidence, or there will come a day of vengeance for both you and me. What shall we gain by being tools in the hands of a wicked man like Robert Moncton. Why should we sell our souls for naught, to do his dirty work.’

“ ‘Not to serve him will I do aught to injure the child. No, no. Dinah North is not such a fool. If I do it to gratify my own revenge, that’s another thing. I have this bad, bold Robert in my power. This secret will be a fortune in itself—will extort from his mean, avaricious soul, a portion of his ill-gotten wealth. Ha, my child! you did well and wisely, and may die in peace, without the stain of blood upon your soul.’

“ Rachel shook her head despondingly.

“ ‘There is no peace, saith my God, for the wicked. My soul consented to the crime, and whilst the thought was uppermost in my heart, the bolt of the Almighty smote me, and my resolution wavered; but, the guilt, at this moment, appears to me the same. It is a dreadful thing to die without hope. Where is Alice?’

“ ‘Sleeping. Shall I bring her to you?’

“ ‘Let her sleep. I feel sleepy, too. Smooth my pillow, mother. Give me a little water. I feel easy now. Perhaps, I shall awake in the morning better.’

“The pillows were arranged—the draught given; but the sleeper never awoke again.

“Her mysterious communications, which only

came by halves to my ears, filled my mind with vague conjectures, and I cannot help thinking, to this hour, that the young heir of Moncton came to an untimely death, and she blamed herself so bitterly for not having me supply his place.

“Stern as my mother had been during her life, her death was a severe blow to us all, especially to Alice and me; as it removed from our humble home an object most dear to us both, the little lady of the manor, to whom we had ever given the endearing name of sister.

“After Margaret left us, how dull did all our pastimes appear. Alice and I wandered sadly and silently among our old haunts; the song of the birds cheered us no longer; the flowers seemed less fair; the murmur of the willow-crowned brook less musical; the presiding genius of the place had vanished; we felt that we were alone.

“I had now reached my fourteenth year, and Sir Alexander, true to the promise made to his wife, sent me to an excellent school in the city of York. Here I made such good use of my time, that before three years had elapsed I was second boy in the head class, and had won the

respect of the master and ushers. My munificent patron was greatly pleased with the progress I had made, and hinted at sending me to college, if I continued to deserve his good opinion.

“Ah, Geoffrey! those were halcyon days, when I returned to spend the vacations at the Lodge, and found myself ever a welcome visitor at the Hall. With a proud heart I recounted to Sir Alexander, all my boyish triumphs at school, and the good baronet listened to my enthusiastic details with the most intense interest, and fought all his juvenile battles over again, with boyish ardour, to the infinite delight of our admiring audience, Margaret and Alice. The latter spent most of her time with Miss Moncton, who was so much attached to her foster-sister, and shed so many tears at parting from her, that Sir Alexander yielded to her earnest request for Alice to remain with her, and the young heiress and the huntsman's blooming daughter were seldom apart. Miss Moncton's governess, an amiable and highly accomplished woman, took as much pains in teaching Alice as she did in superintending the education of her high-born pupil. The beautiful girl acquired her tasks so rapidly, and with such an intense desire for

improvement, that Sir Alexander declared, that she beat his Madge hollow.

“Dinah North exulted in the growing charms of her grand-daughter. If the old woman regarded anything on earth with affection, it was the tall, fair girl so unlike herself. And Alice, too—I have often wondered how it were possible—Alice loved with the most ardent affection, that forbidding-looking, odious creature.

“To me, since the death of my mother, she had been civil but reserved—never addressing me without occasion required—and I neither sought nor cared for her regard.

“It was on the return of one of those holidays, when I returned home full of eager anticipations of happiness, of joyous days spent at the Park in company with Margaret and Alice, that I first beheld that artful villain, Robert Moncton.

“It was a lovely July evening. The York coach set me down at the Park gates, and I entered the pretty cottage with my scanty luggage on my back, and found the lawyer engaged in earnest conversation with my grandmother.

“Struck with the appearance of the man,

which at first sight is very remarkable, I paused for some minutes on the threshold, unobserved by the parties. Like you, Geoffrey, I shall never forget the impression his countenance made upon me. The features so handsome, the colouring so fine, the person that of a finished gentleman; and yet, all this pleasing combination of form and face marred by that cold, cruel, merciless eye. Its expression so dead, so joyless, sent a chill through my whole frame, and I shrank from encountering its icy gaze, and was about quietly to retire by a back door, when my attention was arrested by the following brief conversation.

“ ‘I should like to see the lad.’

“ ‘We expect him home from school by the coach to-night.’

“ ‘What age is he?’

“ ‘Just sixteen.’

“ ‘What does Sir Alexander mean to do for him?’

“ ‘Send him to college, I believe. He is very fond of him.’

“ ‘Humph!—and then to London to make a lawyer of him. Leave him to me, Dinah, I will make a solicitor of him in earnest. I have

taught many a bold heart and reckless hand to solicit the charity of others.'

" 'Devil doubt you !' rejoined the fiend with a hollow, cackling laugh. 'But you may find the boy one too many for you, with all your cunning. He'll not start at shadows, nor stumble over straws. I have tamed many a proud spirit in my day, but this boy defies my power. I fear and hate him, but I cannot crush him. But hush !—here he is.'

" I bustled forward and flung my portman-teau heavily to the ground. 'How are you, grandmother? How's Alice? All well, I hope?'

" 'Do you see the gentleman, Philip?'

" 'Gentleman! I beg his pardon. A fine evening, sir; but very hot and dusty travelling by the coach. I have not tasted anything since breakfast, grandmother; and I am tired and hungry.'

" 'Yours is the hungry age,' said the lawyer, staring me full in the face, as if he was taking a proof impression for legal purposes. His cold, searching look brought the blood to my cheeks, and I returned the impertinent scrutiny with a glance of defiance.

“He rose; nodded meaningly to Dinah, bowed slightly to me, and left the cottage.

“The next minute Alice was in my arms.

“‘Brother! dear, darling brother! welcome, welcome a thousand times.’

“Oh, what a contrast to the dark, joyless countenance of Dinah North, was the cherub face of Alice—laughing in the irresistible glee of her young heart. I forgot my long, tiresome journey, dust, heat, and hunger, as I pulled her on my knee, and covered her rosy cheeks with kisses.

“‘What news since I left, Alice?’

“‘Sad news, Philip. Dear Madge is in London on a visit to her aunt; and there is a dull, cross boy staying at the Hall, with a very hard name—Theophilus Moncton—Margaret’s cousin. But he is nothing like her, though he calls her his little wife. But Madge says that she will never have him, though his father is very rich.’

“‘I am sure *you will* hate him, Philip, for he calls us beggar’s brats, and wonders that Sir Alexander suffers his daughter to play with us. I told him that he was very rude; and that he had better not affront you, for you would soon

teach him better manners. But he only sneered at me, and said, "My father's a *gentleman*. He never suffers me to associate with people *beneath* us. Your brother had better keep out of my way, or I will order my groom to horsewhip him.' I felt very angry and began to cry, and Sir Alexander came in and reproved the boy, and told me I had better return to grandmamma until Mr. Moncton and his son had left the Hall.'

"While little Alice, ran on thus to me, I felt stung to the quick ; and all the pride of my nature warring within. For the first time in my life, I became painfully conscious of the difference of rank which existed between me and my benefactor ; I was restless and unhappy, and determined not to go near the Hall, until Sir Alexander bade me do so himself.

"But days passed, and I saw nothing of the good Baronet, and Alice and I were obliged to content ourselves by roaming through all the old beloved haunts, and talking of Margaret. We were returning one evening through the fine avenue of oaks, which led to the front entrance of the demesne, when a pony rushed past us at full gallop. A boyish impulse, tempted me to

give a loud halloo, in order to set the beautiful animal off at its wildest speed. In a few minutes we met a lad of my own age, booted and spurred, with a whip in his hand, running in the same direction the pony had taken. He was in a towering passion, and coming up to us, he cried out, with a menacing air—

“ ‘ You impudent rascal! how dared you to shout in that way, to frighten my horse, when you saw me endeavouring to catch him?’ ”

“ ‘ I saw no such thing,’ I replied, drily. ‘ I admired the pony, and shouted to see how much faster he could run.’ ”

“ ‘ You deserve a good thrashing,’ quoth he. ‘ Go and catch the horse for me, or I will complain to Sir Alexander of your conduct.’ ”

“ ‘ Sir Alexander is not my master, neither are you. I shall do no such thing.’ ”

“ ‘ Do it instantly!’ stamping with his foot.

“ ‘ Do it yourself. You look quite as fit for a groom as I do.’ ”

“ ‘ I tried to pass him, but he stepped into the centre of the path, and hindered me. To avoid a collision was now impossible.

“ ‘ You insolent young blackguard!’ he cried,

‘do you know that you are speaking to a gentleman?’

“ ‘*Indeed!*’ I said, with a provoking smile. ‘I ought to thank you for the information, for I never should have suspected the fact.’

“With a yell of rage, he struck me in the face with the butt end of his whip. I sprang upon him with the strength of a tiger, and seizing his puny form in my arms, I dashed him beneath my feet, and after bestowing upon him sundry hearty kicks, rejoined the terrified Alice, and left Mr. Theophilus Moncton, to gather up his fallen dignity, and make the best of his way home to the Hall.

“This frolic cost me far more than I expected. The next morning, Sir Alexander rode over to the Lodge, and severely reprimanded me for my conduct; and ended his lecture, by affirming in positive terms, that if I did not beg his young relative’s pardon, he would withdraw his favour from me for ever.

“This, I proudly refused to do—and the Baronet as proudly told me, ‘To see his face no more!’

“I looked sorrowfully up as he said this. The

tears were in my eyes, for I loved him very much—but my heart was too full to speak.

“He leant down from his horse, expecting my answer. I was silent: the colour mounted to his cheeks; he waited a few minutes longer; I made no sign, and he struck the spurs into his horse, and rode quickly away.

“‘There goes my only friend!’ I cried. ‘Curse the mean wretch, who robbed me of my friend! I only regret that I did not kill him!’

“Thus for one boyish act of indiscretion I was flung friendless upon the world. Yet, Geoffrey, were the thing to do again, I feel that I could not, and would not, act otherwise.

“Time has convinced me that Robert Moncton, acting with his usual policy, had made Sir Alexander ashamed of his connection with us, and he gladly availed himself of the first plausible excuse to cast me off. Alice deeply lamented my disgrace; but the whole affair afforded mirth to my grandmother, who seemed greatly to enjoy my unfortunate triumph over the boy with the *hard name*.

CHAPTER XVII.

HARRISON FINDS A FRIEND IN NEED.

“ DURING my residence at school in York, my master was often visited by a wealthy merchant who bore the same name with myself. This man was an old bachelor, very eccentric, but universally esteemed as one of the most benevolent of men. He was present at one of the school examinations in which I took many prizes, and asking my name he found out that he was related to my father, and bestowed upon me many marks of favour, such as presenting me with useful books, and often asking me over to his house to dine, or spend the evening.

“ Flattered by his attentions to me, I had lost no opportunity of increasing our friendship, and

I determined to apply to him in my present distress.

“I was a perfect novice in the art of letter-writing, never having penned an epistle in my life, and after making several attempts with which I was perfectly disgusted, I determined to walk over to the city and make my application in person to Mr. Mornington.

“Without communicating my intentions to Alice, I carefully tied up a change of linen in a silk handkerchief, and with the mighty sum of five shillings in my pocket, commenced my pedestrian journey of thirty odd miles.

“I started in the morning by day-break, and without meeting with any particular adventures on the road, I arrived at six o'clock in the evening, foot-sore and weary at the rich man's door. When there, my heart, which had been as stout as a lion's on the road, failed me, and I sat down upon the broad stone steps that led up to the house, sorely depressed and uncertain what course to take.

“This I knew would not do: the night was coming on, and the rain, which had threatened all day, now began to fall fast. Making a desperate effort, I sprang up the steps, and gave a

gentle knock, so gentle that it was unheard ; and unable to summon sufficient courage to repeat the experiment, I resumed my seat until some more fortunate applicant should seek admittance.

“ Not many minutes elapsed before the quick loud rap of the postman brought Mrs. Jolly, the housekeeper, to the door ; and edging close to him of the red jacket, I asked in a tremulous voice—‘ If Mr. Mornington was at home ?’

“ ‘ Why, deeree me, master Philip, is that you ?’ said the kind woman, elevating her spectacles : ‘ who would have thought of seeing you t’night ?’

“ ‘ Who, indeed ! But, my dear Mrs. Jolly, is Mr. Mornington disengaged, and can I see him ?’

“ ‘ He is t’home, and you can speak to him, but not just now. He’s to his dinner, and doan’t like to be disturbed. But come this way, an I’ll tell him you are here.’

“ ‘ Who’s that you are speaking to, Mrs. Jolly ?’ cried my worthy old friend as we passed the dining-room door, through which the footmen were carrying an excellent dinner to table.

“ ‘ Only Mr. Philip, sir.’

“‘Mr. Philip!’ and the next moment, the old man came out and grasped me warmly by the hand. ‘Why, lad, what brings you back to school so soon—tired of play already, hey?’

“‘No, sir. I fear play will soon tire of me. I am to go to school no more.’

“‘Sorry to hear that, Phil. Just the time when instruction would be of the most service to you. You would learn more in the ensuing year, than in all that have gone before it. Leave school! no, no, I must see you the head boy in it yet.’

“‘That was my ambition, sir. But you know I am only a poor orphan lad, entirely dependent on the bounty of Sir Alexander Moncton. I have offended this gentleman, and he will do no more for me; and I walked from the Park to-day to ask your advice as to what course I had better pursue, and in what way I am most likely to earn my own living.’

“The old gentleman looked grave.

“‘Offended Sir Alexander? You must have acted very imprudently to do that, and he so kind to you. Walked all the way from Moncton. Bless the boy, how tired and hungry you must be! Sit down, young Philip Mornington, and

get your dinner with old Philip Mornington; and we will talk over these matters by and by.'

"Gladly I accepted the dear old gentleman's hearty invitation. I had not tasted food since early dawn, and was so outrageously hungry and eat with such a right good will, that he often stopped and laughed heartily at my voracity.

"'Well done, Philip! Don't be ashamed: hold in your plate for another slice of beef. Thirty miles of hard walking at this season of the year, may well give a boy of sixteen, strong and healthy like you, a good appetite.'

"After the cloth was drawn, and the old gentleman had refreshed me with a couple of glasses of excellent wine, obedient to his request I related to him my adventure with Theophilus Moncton in the park, and its unfortunate results.

"Instead of blaming me, the whole affair seemed greatly to amuse the hearty old man. He fell back in his chair, and chuckled and laughed until he declared that his sides ached.

"'And was it for punishing that arrogant puppy as he deserved, that Sir Alexander cast you, my fine fellow, from his favour?'

"'He might have forgiven that. It was for

refusing so positively his commands, in not asking young Moncton's pardon.'

" ' If you had obeyed him in this instance, Philip, you would have forfeited my good opinion for ever, and would have deserved to have been kicked by Sir Alexander's lackeys for your meanness. Don't look so cast down, boy. I honour you for you self-respect and independence. You have other friends besides Sir Alexander Moncton, who will not forsake you for taking your own part like a man. You shall go to school yet—ay, and become the head scholar in Dr. Trimmer's head class, and finish your education at Oxford, or my name is not Philip Mornington.

" How well did this excellent, warm-hearted, generous man perform his promise ; how ill I profited by the education he gave me, and the wealth he bequeathed to me at his death, the subsequent portion of my history will reveal.

" I went to school at the end of the vacation, but as a day-boarder ; Mr. Mornington having told me to consider his house as my future home.

" A boy who came from our village to Dr. Trimmer's school, told me that Sir Alexander's

passion soon cooled, and he rode over to the Lodge a week after I left, to inquire after his old pet, and was surprised and exasperated to find the bird flown, and taken by the hand by a man for whom he had a great personal antipathy ; who had ever opposed him in politics, and had twice carried an election against him.

“ There was enough of revenge in my composition to feel glad that Sir Alexander was annoyed at my good-fortune.

“ The next year saw me at college, with a handsome allowance from my generous patron, to enable me to establish my claims as a gentleman. I will pass over the three years I spent at this splendid abode of learning and science.

“ The gratitude I felt for all Mr. Mornington had done for me, for a long time restrained me from indulging in the wild excesses which disgraced the conduct of most of the young men with whom I associated. This reluctance, however, to do and countenance evil, gradually wore off, and I became as wild and dissipated as my companions.

“ I formed many agreeable acquaintances at college, but had only one who really deserved the name of a friend. Kind, gentle and studious,

Cornelius Laurie (for so I shall call him) mingled very little with his fellow students : his health being delicate, he spent most of his leisure hours in walking, an exercise of which he was particularly fond, and in which I generally participated.

“ His mild, intelligent countenance first won my regard. I sought his acquaintance, found him easy of access, friendly and communicative, and always anxious to oblige every one as far as lay in his power. Commanding an excellent income, he was always ready to assist the improvident who had expended theirs, and with such a disposition, you may be certain that the calls upon his purse were by no means few. He formed a strong attachment to me, and we usually spent most of our time together.

“ Cornelius invited me to pass the Christmas vacation with him in town. When at home he resided with his aunt, a widow lady who had brought up his only sister, who had been left an orphan at a very early age. Charlotte Laurie was several years younger than her brother ; and in speaking of her he had always told me that she was a very pretty girl, but I was not prepared to behold the beautiful and fascinating creature to whom I was introduced.

“ Charlotte Laurie was a child of nature, without display or affectation ; conscious of her great personal attractions only so far as to render her more agreeable—for what beautiful woman was ever ignorant of her charms ? My pretty Lotty knew perfectly the power they gave her over the restless and inconstant heart of man, but she did not abuse it.

“ My passions, Geoffrey, by nature, are as warm and impetuous as your own, and they soon betrayed me into love ; and I thought that the fair girl to whom I had lost my heart was not insensible to the passion she had inspired. But when I recalled my obscure parentage, of which Cornelius was perfectly ignorant ; and the uncertainty of my future prospects, I felt that it would be dishonourable in me to advance my suit to the young lady. To remain in the house and keep silent upon a subject so important to my peace, I found would be impossible ; and I feigned a letter from Mr. Mornington, whom I called my uncle, requiring my immediate presence in York.

“ My departure caused great regret to the family. Cornelius remonstrated ; Mrs. H—— questioned the necessity of my journey ; Charlotte

said nothing, but left the room in tears. Strongly tempted as I was to stay, I remained firm to my original purpose, and bade adieu to my amiable friends, without breathing a word even to Cornelius of my attachment for his sister.

“On my way to York I called at my old home, and was received with the most lively demonstrations of joy by Alice, whom I found a blooming girl of fifteen. Old Dinah told me, as she scowled at my handsome dress and improved appearance, ‘That she supposed I was now too fine a gentleman to call her grandmother, or Alice sister?’

“I assured her that my improved circumstances had not changed my heart, nor made me ashamed of my old friends. Something, I fear, in my looks, contradicted my words, for she turned from me with a scornful smile:

“‘The world,’ said she, ‘was a good school for teaching people the art of falsehood.’

“Her sarcasms made me very uncomfortable—for my conscience convicted me of their truth—and turning to Alice I begged her to tell me the news, for I was certain a great deal must have happened in the neighbourhood during the four years I had been absent.

“ ‘No,’ said Alice ; ‘ we go on much as usual. Sir Alexander and Margaret are very kind to me, and I go every day up to the Hall. But she is Miss Moncton now, and I am plain Alice Mornington. Mr. Theophilus is often there ; and he is so much improved, Philip, you would never know him. He is no longer proud and disagreeable, but so affable and kind, and always sees me safe home to the Lodge. People say that he is to marry Miss Moncton ; but I don’t believe a word of it. He does not love her I am certain ; for he told me so a few days ago ; and that he thought me a thousand times handsomer than his cousin !’

“ While Alice ran on thus, I kept my eyes fixed upon her beautiful face ; and from the heightening of her colour when speaking of Theophilus, I was convinced that young as she was, she was not insensible to his flattery. Anxious to warn her of her danger, I drew her arm through mine, and we strolled together into the park.

“ ‘ Dear Alice,’ said I, affectionately ; ‘ do you love your brother as well as you used to do in years long past ?’

“ ‘ Philip, do you doubt my love ?’ she answered, reproachfully.

“ ‘Not in the least, Alice. I know your heart to be warm and true ; but years make great changes. Four years have fled away since we met, and you are nearly grown into a woman. Perhaps you will be angry with me if I venture to give you a little brotherly advice.’

“ ‘Not without you scold me too much.’

“ ‘My lecture, Alice, I will confine to a few words. Do not listen, dear child, to the flattering speeches of Theophilus Moncton. He means you no good.’

“ ‘How can you know that?’ she said, quickly.

“ ‘From the general character which the man bears. From my experience of him when a boy. Avoid his company ; he means to deceive you.’

“ ‘Philip, you wrong him, indeed, you do!’ she cried, with flashing eyes. ‘He never talks to me of love, he only seeks to be my friend. I am too young to think of love. I don’t know what being in love is—but I do feel very grateful to one so much richer and better than me, and who is heir to all these beautiful groves, and that fine old Hall, taking such an interest in my welfare—particularly,’ she added, with great

emphasis on her words, ' after he received such unworthy treatment from a brother of mine.'

"You surely do not mean what you say, Alice?"

"I never say what I do not mean; and if you come back to us, Philip, only to quarrel with us, you had better have stayed away.'

"For a few minutes I felt terribly annoyed; but when I recollected that these words fell from the lips of a spoiled child, I restrained my anger, in the hope of saving her from the ruin I feared might be impending over her.

"Alice, you are a simple, little girl; as such I forgive you. You are not aware of the danger to which you are exposed. Young people are so ignorant of the treachery of the world, and so confident in their own strength to resist temptation, that they easily fall into the snares laid for them by wicked and designing men. If you persist in receiving the attentions of this man, who would consider it the utmost degradation to make you his wife, I, as your brother and natural protector, will consider it my duty to remove you from this place.'

"I will not go!" she cried; stopping suddenly and looking me in the face with an air of

defiance. 'You are not your own master yet, much less mine. I shall remain here with my dear, old grandmother, as long as she lives. And let me tell you, Mr. Philip, I am as competent to manage my own affairs as you are !'

"Could this be Alice ?

"I looked at her, and looked again. The beauty of her countenance seemed changed. I turned from her with a deep sigh.

"'Oh, Alice, sister Alice ! I tremble for you ; so young and so self-willed. This is not my Alice, the happy, confiding Alice, who once loved me so tenderly.'

"'I did love you, Philip, very much,' she replied, in a softened voice ; 'but how was my love returned ? You quarrelled with the only friend we had in the world. One, too, who had done so much for us. To whose bounty we were indebted for a home and daily bread ; for the clothes we wore, for the instruction we received—who treated us in every respect more like his own children, than the poor recipients of his noble generosity. You forgot all this. You insolently refused to apologize to his young relative, the heir of his title and wealth, for having grossly insulted him, and left your home

and his protection without bidding this dear sister, for whose well-doing you are so deeply concerned, and who shared in your disgrace, one short farewell.'

" ' Alice—Alice !'

" ' Hush, sir ; hear me to the end, if you please. You acted more ungratefully still, when you sought employment from one of Sir Alexander's bitterest enemies ; and never wrote a single line either to your injured patron or to us. Was this love ? Young as I am, Philip Mornington, I could not have been guilty of such baseness. I despise your conduct ; and advice comes very ill from a person who could be guilty of such.'

" She turned haughtily away ; and I, Geoffrey, I stood overwhelmed with confusion and remorse. I had never seen my conduct in this light before. I had all along imagined myself the injured party, and looked upon Sir Alexander as an unreasonable persecutor. But I felt at that moment, as I stood humbled before that proud girl, that I had not acted right—that some concession was due on my part to the man from whom I had received so many benefits ; and but for very shame I would have sought

his presence, acknowledged my error, and entreated his pardon.

“Oh, why does this stubborn pride so often stand between us and our best intentions. I let the moment pass, and my heart remained true to its stern determination, not to yield one inch of what I falsely termed independence. My reverie was dispelled by Alice. She took my hand kindly.

“‘You look grave, Philip. I have put these serious thoughts into your head, and you feel sorry for the past. My anger is all gone. I forgive you from my very heart. So give me a kiss, and let us be friends ; but no more lectures if you please for the future. I will not stand a scolding—not even from you. You need not fear that I shall disgrace you : I am too proud to place myself in the power of any one. I like, yes, I love Theophilus Moncton, but he will never make a fool of me, or any one else. But—hush—here is Miss Moncton.’

“The blood crimsoned my face as a sudden turning in the woodland path, brought me within a few paces of one whom at that moment I would gladly have shunned. To retreat was

impossible. I raised my hat, and with her usual frankness, Margaret held out her hand.

“I pressed it respectfully between my own without venturing to raise my eyes to her face. She perceived my confusion, and doubtless defined the cause.

“‘You have been a sad truant, Philip. But you are welcome home. I, for one, rejoice to see my dear foster-brother again.’

“‘Is that possible?’ I stammered out—
‘Dear Miss Moncton, I am only too happy to be allowed to plead for myself—I feel that I have sinned against my good and generous benefactor; that this kindness on your part, is wholly undeserved. What shall I do to regain your good opinion.’

“‘Say nothing at all about it, Geoffrey. It was a boyish fault, and my father has often repented that he treated it so seriously. For my own part, I do not blame you for thrashing Theophilus; had I been provoked in the same manner, and a lad of your age, I would have done it myself. My quarrel with you, is for leaving the Park, and deserting us all, before a reconciliation could take place. You knew

that my father's anger was like dew upon the grass, evaporated by the first sunbeam, and that we loved you dearly—so that your conduct appears inexcusable and heartless.'

“‘ Oh, do not say that, Miss Moncton. What I did was perfectly impulsive, without thought or premeditation. I could not imagine that I was in the wrong, and Sir Alexander's conduct appeared to me cruel and unjust.’

“‘ Come with me to the Hall, Mr. Mornington, and I will plead your case to this cruel tyrant. My eloquence with papa is quite irresistible ; and he, poor dear, is more ready to forgive, than you are to ask forgiveness.’

“ This was said, with one of her bewitching smiles, which lighted up like a passing sunbeam her calm, pale face.

“‘ You are too good, Miss Moncton. I would gladly avail myself of your invitation, but I must proceed on my journey to York immediately. I hope, however, soon to visit Moncton again ; when I will, with Sir Alexander's permission, explain my conduct, and ask his pardon.’

“‘ I hate procrastination in these matters, which pertain to the heart and conscience,’ said

Margaret. 'My motto, when prompted by either, to perform an act of duty, is—*now*; when we seek forgiveness from God, or from a friend, we should never defer it to the future, for the opportunity once neglected may never again be ours.'

"This was said with some severity. A sort of mental cowardice kept me back and hindered me effectually from profiting by her advice. Just then, I felt it was out of my power to meet Sir Alexander. I had not courage to enter his presence in my present mood.

"'Alice,' said Margaret, turning from me with a disappointed air, 'what has kept *you* so long away from the Hall?'

"'I grow too proud to visit my rich friends,' returned Alice, in a tone between sarcasm and raillery.


"'There is only one species of pride, that I tolerate,' said Margaret, calmly—'the pride of worth. That pride which enables a good man to struggle successfully against the arrogance of the world.'

"I turned to the speaker with admiration. Had she been born a peasant, Margaret Moncton would have possessed the dignity of a lady,

and the little lecture she thought fit to bestow upon my beautiful wayward sister, was dictated by the same noble spirit.

“ ‘ We should never, be proud, Alice, of the gifts of nature, or fortune, which depend upon no merit of our own. Beauty and wealth have their due influence in the world, where their value is greatly overrated; but they add little in reality to the possessor. Deprived of both, persons of little moral worth, would relapse into their original insignificance; while those, who improve the talents entrusted to their care by Providence, possess qualities which defy the power of change. Such persons can alone afford to be proud, yet these of all others make the least display and think most humbly of themselves.’

This was said playfully, but Alice did not at all relish the reproof; which, though, disregarded by her, made a deep impression upon me.



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MEETING.

“THE next morning I arrived in York, and hastened to the house of Mr. Mornington. I found the dear old gentleman ill in bed, but in his usual excellent spirits.

“On expressing my concern for his illness, he laughed at my long face ; told me it was a trifle, and he should soon be well again. Alas, he was not a true prophet ! In a few weeks I followed my worthy friend to his grave ; and found myself at the age of one-and-twenty, my own master, and sole heir to his large property.

“The joy felt at this unexpected good fortune was more than counterbalanced by the loss of the generous donor. Gladly would I have resigned the wealth he so nobly bequeathed me, if

by so doing I could have recalled the dear old man to life. I was detained for several months in York, settling my affairs. I lost no time, however, in acquainting Cornelius, by letter, of my good fortune. I took this opportunity of mentioning my attachment to his sister, and urged him, if he valued my happiness, to plead with her in my behalf. His answer, though kind, was far from satisfactory to a young and ardent lover.

“ He informed me that Charlotte was not insensible to my passion ; and that he knew that she entertained from me a sincere esteem ; but it was entirely out of her power to accept any offer of marriage without the consent of her guardian ; or she would lose the property bequeathed to her by her father ; who had left this stringent clause in his will.

“ For himself, he continued, nothing would give him greater pleasure, than to see his beloved sister united to a man whom he loved, and whom he considered worthy of her regard ; particularly, as he found his own health daily declining, and was about to take a journey to the south of France, in the hope of deriving some benefit from change of climate and scene.

“He urged me to return immediately to London; to plead my own cause with Charlotte, and to spend a few days with him, before he left England; as he felt, that it was more than probable, that we might never meet again.

“The last mournful sentence decided me, and the next morning found me on the road to London; and I determined to take Moncton Park in my route, and seek a reconciliation with Sir Alexander. After what had passed between me and Miss Moncton, I flattered myself that this would be an easy matter.

“I was no longer a poor orphan boy, dependent upon his bounty; but a well-educated, wealthy man, whose fortune was equal, if not greater than his own. There was no favour I could ask, or that he could bestow, beyond the renewal of that friendship which formed the delight of my boyhood, and of which I had been so suddenly deprived.

“As I rode up the noble avenue of oaks which led to the Hall, I felt so confident of success, so vain of my altered fortunes, so proud of the noble horse I rode, that my spirits grew buoyant, and my cheeks glowed with anticipated pleasure.

“ ‘ Is Sir Alexander at home ? ’ I eagerly demanded of the liveried servant that opened the door.

“ ‘ He is, sir. What name shall I send up ? ’ I gave him my card, and was shown into the library, while he carried it up to his master.

Years had fled away, since I last stood within that room, a happy thoughtless boy. How vividly did every book and picture recall the blessed hours I had passed there, with Margaret and Alice, when the weather was wet, and we could not play abroad ! It was in this apartment, with its carved oak wainscoting and antique windows of stained glass, in which we generally held our revels, turning over the huge folios in search of pictures.

“ There was the Book of Martyrs, with all its revolting details of human bigotry ; and its dreadful exhibitions of human endurance amidst scorn and agony. On these we gazed in mysterious awe ; and as we turned over the horrible pages, we said to one another, ‘ that we were glad we were not Christians in those days, ’

“ Then, there was Descartes’ ancient philosophy. A huge tome, full of quaint pictures of gods and goddesses, and angels and devils, on which

we were never tired or gazing; infinitely preferring the latter, with their curious tails and horns, to the former; whom we called, 'Fat lazy-looking children with wings.' 'Goldsmith's World,' 'Buffon's Natural History,' and the whole family of Encyclopedias, with their numerous prints, were among our chief favourites, and helped to beguile the long wet day. Sir Alexander often assisted himself at these exhibitions, and seemed as much pleased with showing us the pictures as we were in looking at them.

"From the cherished memories of former years, I was recalled by the entrance of the servant, who, with an air of rude familiarity, told me—that Sir Alexander Moncton would never be at home to *Mister Philip Mornington.*'

"Thunder-struck with this unexpected blow, and writhing under a bitter sense of humiliation, I affected an air of contemptuous indifference and turned to depart; when a light grasp was laid upon my arm, and I encountered the dark soul-lighted eyes of Margaret Moncton, moistened with tears, and fixed upon me with a gaze of mournful interest,

"'Stay, Mr. Mornington. Dear, Philip! stay, I beseech you, for one little moment.'

“ ‘ Let me go, Miss Moncton. You deceived me into the belief that my reception would have been very different—I feel that I have no business here.’

“ ‘ That was your own fault, in deferring the *now* of to-day, to the *future* of the unknown to-morrow,’ said Margaret, sadly. ‘ But you must stay ; I insist upon your hearing me speak a few words before you leave this house.’

“ I remained silent and passive, and she continued—‘ There was a time, Philip, when your sister Margaret would not have asked anything of you in vain.’ The tears flowed fast down her pale cheeks, and I felt the small hand which lay on mine tremble violently.

“ ‘ Dear Miss Moncton,’ said I, gently leading her to a seat, and taking one beside her, ‘ you must make some allowance for mortified pride and wounded feelings. Time has not in the least diminished the affection and respect I have ever felt for you, and which your present kindness is not at all likely to lessen. I should, however, be deeply concerned, if your condescension should draw down upon you the displeasure of your father.’

“ ‘ Philip, I never do aught which I should be

ashamed of my father witnessing. Nothing would give me greater pleasure, than to see him enter this room ; and it is to lead you to him, that brought me here.'

" 'He has once forbidden me his presence,' cried I, rising from my seat ; ' I shall seek an interview with him no more.'

" 'Let me seek it for you.'

" 'What good would it answer ?'

" 'Can you ask that question, Mr. Mornington? Remember all you owe to my father's kindness. I do not want to reproach you with benefits which he felt pleasure in conferring. But surely some feeling of gratitude is due from one whom he loved for so many years as a son ; whom I am certain he still loves ; whom, if he could once see, would be as dear to him as ever.'

" 'Could I feel that his anger was just, there is no concession, however great, Miss Moncton, that I would hesitate to make: I love and revere Sir Alexander, but he has taken up idle prejudices against me, and I am too proud—obstinate, if you will—to ask his forgiveness for what I never can look upon as a fault.'

" 'One would think, Philip, that you were a

Moncton, so hard and obdurate are their hearts,' said Margaret, weeping afresh. 'How gladly would I be the peacemaker, and reconcile you to each other, but you love strife for its own sake—are too proud to acknowledge an error. Philip,' she cried, passionately, 'do you remember my mother?'

"She had struck a chord which always vibrated intensely in my heart. 'How can I ever forget her? And yet, Miss Moncton, dear Miss Moncton, I do not wonder at your asking the question.'

"As I said this tears rushed to my own eyes, as a thousand sad recollections crowded into my mind. The mournful chamber—the bed of death—the calm, sweet face of the expiring saint; and her last solemn injunction, for me to look upon her grave when I came to be a man, and remember her who had loved me as a son. Had I done this? Oh, no! The world had obliterated her pure and holy image from my mind, and all her tenderness and love had been forgotten.

"I stood there before her daughter, whose mind was a perfect transcript of her own, a stricken, self-condemned creature, overcome by

emotions which I struggled in vain to repress. "Margaret perceived the advantage she had gained, and taking my passive hand led me from the room.

"Slowly we paced up the marble staircase into the drawing-room, where we found Sir Alexander reading at a table. He did not raise his head as we entered; and I could not help remarking the great change which a few years had effected in his appearance. His fine chestnut hair was nearly gray, his cheeks had lost the rich vermilion tint which had always given such lustre to his fine dark eyes, and clear olive complexion. He was much thinner, and his lofty figure had taken a decided stoop between the shoulders. The handsome, generous baronet was but the wreck of what he once had been.

"'Papa,' said Margaret, stepping forward, and laying her small white hand upon his shoulder, 'I have taken the liberty of introducing a very old friend.'

"The baronet raised his eyes. The blood rushed into his pale face, as he replied with great asperity of look and tone, 'Margaret, you have taken an unfair advantage, and abused

the confidence I reposed in you ; I did not expect this from you.'

" 'Dearest father, you have suffered my cousin Theophilus to prejudice you against one whom you once loved—whom my dear mother loved : let him speak for himself.'

" 'Well, sir,' said the Baronet, holding out his hand, 'what have you to say in extenuation of your past conduct ? You found it convenient, no doubt, to forget an old friend.'

" 'My excellent, kind benefactor,' I cried, pressing his hand warmly between my own, 'how can you imagine me guilty of such base ingratitude ?'

" 'I judge your feelings, young man, by deeds, not by words. It is not for a boyish act of indiscretion I blame you. You thrashed an insolent lad of your own age for insulting you ; and in your place I would have done the same. To appease his wounded pride, I demanded of you an apology, as the lad was my guest and near kinsman—no very great sacrifice of pride, one would have thought, to a penniless pensioner on my bounty. This, you audaciously refused, and, without waiting for my anger to cool (for I was not acquainted at the time with the real

circumstances of the case) you abandoned your home, and sought protection in the house of my enemy—a man who had thwarted me in every way which lay in his power. His favour you gained by traducing your benefactor and friend; and you now come to me, after the lapse of years, to make a boast of your wealth. Philip Mornington!’ he cried, rising from his seat, and drawing himself up to his full height, ‘I loved you as a spirited, independent boy: I despise you as a wealthy, treacherous, vain-glorious man!’

“‘Dear papa,’ said Margaret, greatly agitated, ‘you cannot mean what you say.’

“‘I do mean what I say. My words are plain and straightforward; let him refute them if he can.’

“‘To such accusations as you have brought against me, Sir Alexander, there can be but one answer: they are false! I will not, however, lessen myself by attempting to vindicate my conduct from such base calumnies, but leave it to time to convince you of your error, and prove my integrity.’

“Without waiting for his reply, I left the room, with a bearing as haughty and inflexible

as his own, and flinging myself into the saddle, rode from the Hall. Disgusted with myself for having yielded to the entreaties of my amiable foster-sister, I could not master my indignation sufficiently to call at the Lodge, but pursued my journey to town with a heavy heart.

“From Cornelius and his sister I received the most cordial and affectionate welcome; but my pleasure was greatly damped by the bad state of my friend’s health: he looked so thin and consumptive, that I apprehended the worst. This impression gradually wore off; but a few months confirmed my fears. He was to commence his journey to Dover early the next morning; and after passing a delightful evening in company with his aunt and Charlotte, I rose to take leave, as I well knew that my invalid friend retired at an early hour to bed.

“‘Do not go to-night, Philip,’ said he. ‘It is the last we shall spend for a long time together. I wish to have a friendly chat with you in my dressing-room. Charlotte will make one of the party.’

“In a few minutes we were comfortably seated in the snug little room, before a cheerful fire. My friend in his easy-chair, wrapped in

his dressing-gown, and my own beautiful Charlotte seated on a gaily-embroidered ottoman at his feet.

“ ‘ Here, I feel myself at home,’ said Cornelius, taking a hand of each, pressing them warmly between his own. ‘ How much I dread this journey! how painful it is to part with all we love on earth!’

“ ‘ Dearest brother, you will return to us quite strong and well after breathing the warm air of the south,’ said Charlotte, who could never be brought to consider her brother in any danger. ‘ When we meet in the spring, you will laugh at your present fears, and we shall be so happy together.’

“ Cornelius smiled faintly. ‘ I hope it may be so, my sweet Charlotte; to that hope I cling, though I feel it daily becoming more feeble. Nor would I leave England, did I not consider it my duty to embrace every means which may tend to restore me to health and usefulness. But if I should never return, my little Lady Bird, the world will run on as merrily as heretofore. I should only be missed by a few faithful hearts.’

“ Poor Charlotte did not answer. Her head

sank upon his knee ; and I thought I heard the tears, one by one, fall upon her rich silk dress.

“ ‘ Do not anticipate grief, my little sister,’ said he, laying his hand caressingly upon her drooping head. ‘ Let us be happy to-night, for we know not what the morrow may bring forth. I wanted to speak to you and Philip upon a subject very near my heart.’

“ After a short pause, he continued with a lively, cheerful voice—‘ You and Philip love one another ; nay, do not turn away, Charlotte ; there ought to be no shame in confessing a virtuous attachment to a worthy object.’

“ Charlotte raised her eyes, moist with tears, and tried to smile ; but her head sank back to its resting place, and her blushing face was hidden on his knee.

“ ‘ Now I am perfectly satisfied of the warmth and sincerity of your affections, and will do all in my power to bring them to a happy issue ; but there are some difficulties in the way which must first be surmounted, before you can hope to realize your wishes. You have wealth, Philip, and moral worth ; these ought to be sufficient to satisfy the objections of the most fastidious. But your birth is obscure, and your connexions

not such as most old families would wish to incorporate with their own. You will ask me how I came by this knowledge. It does not matter ; for these worldly objections have no weight with me. It was, however, told to me by one well acquainted with your history—who, as a guardian to Charlotte, will, I fear, never consent to your marriage.'

" 'There are few persons with whom I am sufficiently intimate to obtain this knowledge,' I cried. 'His name—tell me his name.'

^ 'Robert Moncton—Sir Alexander's cousin and man of business.'

" I felt a cold shudder thrill through me. The hopes lately so gay and buoyant shrunk back faded and blackened to my heart. 'Yet why should I fear this man?' I argued ; but I did fear him—like the ghost of the dead *Caesar* in the camp of Brutus : he was my evil genius. I turned very faint and asked for a glass of water.

" Charlotte gave it to me with a trembling hand. The brother and sister exchanged glances of surprise ; suspicion was aroused by my emotion.

" 'Strange !' said Charlotte, musingly : 'he was always kind to my brother and me. What have you to say against him ?'

“ ‘ Not much ; but I have a secret antipathy, a horror of this man, though I never saw him but once, and that when quite a boy. I had a quarrel with his son when a lad, which produced a rupture between Sir Alexander and me, and neither father nor son ever forgave the imagined injury.’

“ Charlotte looked thoughtful. It was evident that she was fond of her guardian ; while Cornelius continued the conversation, which was to me both painful and embarrassing.

“ I know Mr. Moncton to be implacable when he takes a dislike, and considers himself ill-used, but we always have regarded him as a just and honest man. The circumstances at which you have hinted, and which I am rather surprised, that with all our brotherly intercourse, you never mentioned before, will not increase your chance of success in gaining him over to your wishes. But if I live, Philip, you will have little to fear from his opposition. Charlotte and myself are both above the common prejudices of the world, and prize you for your worth, which we consider more than places you on an equality with us, and my little sister here (and he fondly patted her head) has too high a sense of honour to

encourage hopes which she never meant to realize.'

"I took Charlotte's hand—our eyes met. Her face was again hidden on her brother's knee; but my drooping heart began to revive, and I turned to listen to the long harangue of my good friend with more interest and attention, especially, as Charlotte's small white hand remained firmly clasped in mine, to repay me for its dullness and prolixity.

"Now, my advice to you both is, not to enter into any engagement, and to keep the matter of your affections known only to yourselves. Confidence reposed in a third party is always hazardous, and generally betrayed. This will lull Moncton's suspicions, for he can greatly annoy you, should you marry Charlotte without his consent, before her minority expires. Her property, which is considerable, would then go to a distant relation.'

"'I have enough to support us both handsomely—why should our union be delayed on that score?' I cried.

"'Softly, my dear friend. Lovers always talk in that strain—husbands think differently. Why should Charlotte lose her just inheritance

to gratify the ardour of your passion? You are both young: Charlotte far too young to marry. Four years is not such a great while to wait. At the expiration of that time you can meet on equal terms, without making such an enormous sacrifice. Am I not right?’

“We said he was, and tried to think so; but I am certain that in the estimation of both his listeners, that that four years which seemed to him so short, with us spread over a period as long as the life of Methusalah. We tried to look forward, but shrunk back to the present. Everything in prospective looked cold, blank—nay, even ugly and old, at the end of the long vista of four years.

“We promised, however, to abide by his advice. I was sad and low-spirited; and Charlotte, pleading a bad head-ache, kissed her brother, received one from me, or, what in *his* estimation, only passed for *one*, and retired in tears, and I felt that the joy of my heart had vanished.

“‘Do not look so grave, Philip,’ said my worthy friend: ‘you will overcome all these difficulties.’

“I shook my head, and sighed doubtfully.

“‘I am sure you will. I have a presentiment to that effect. I saw you in a dream last night, surrounded by a thousand dangers. As fast as you got out of some trouble, you fell into a worse, and after I had given you up for lost, you were rescued from the fangs of a tiger by a mere lad, who led you back to Charlotte, and joined your hands.’

“He told this with such earnestness, that I, who was no believer in signs and omens, laughed outright.

“He looked serious—almost offended.

“‘You forget,’ he said, ‘that when man draws near his end, God often opens the eyes of the soul, and reveals not only what is, but what shall be. Oh, Philip, you who are so eager to win the affections of a timid girl, how can you be so indifferent to the love of God?’

“‘Nervous debility has rendered you superstitious, Cornelius. I have no faith in the religious cant of the present day, in priests or priestcraft.’

“This was my case two years ago. I was young and strong then. In the possession of wealth and all those temporal blessings, for which wiser and better men have to toil through

a long life, and seldom obtain. The world was before me, and death far distant, in my thoughts. But now, the world is receding, and death is very near. You start! Have not you discovered that truth before? Soon, very soon, nothing will remain for me, but that blessed hope which I now prize as the only true riches. I am happy in the prospect which I know awaits me, and consider those only miserable to whom God is a stranger, and the love of the Saviour unknown."

"His words affected me strangely, and yet I felt that they were distasteful. Sorrow had not taught me the knowledge of self. I had yet to learn that religion alone can do that. My soul was grovelling in the dust; my thoughts wholly engrossed by the world. Religion was to me a well-invented fable, skillfully constructed, and admirably told, being beautiful and artistic in a literary point of view, but altogether too shallow to satisfy the reason of a clever fellow like me. Oh! how repugnant are its pure precepts to those whose hearts are blinded by vanity; who live but for the pleasures of the day, and never heed the to-morrow in the skies.

"I sat down at a table near my friend, and

began hastily to turn over the pages of a volume which lay before me. It contained the admirable writings of the Rev. Robert Hall. I pettishly closed the book, and pushed it from me.

“As I raised my head, our eyes met. He evidently read my thoughts.

“I do not wish to lecture you, Philip, nor do I condemn you. Your mind, in its present unawakened state, cannot understand the sublime truths you affect to despise. The blind see not; they cannot comprehend the light, and we are not surprised that they stumble and fall. But I love you too well, Philip, to wish you to remain in this state of mental darkness. Read the Bible with the eyes of faith; think and pray, and the true light will dawn upon your soul, as it has on mine. Let not the ravings of fanaticism, nor the vulgarity of low cant, frighten you from the enjoyment of the highest and noblest privilege granted to man—the capacity of holding converse with his God. And, now, farewell, my dear friend. I shall see you again—in the morning; think over twice what I have said to you before you go to sleep.’

“I retired to my chamber, but not to rest. I sat before the fire, musing over, and trying to

feel an interest in, the advice of my friend ; I knew it was good ; I felt it was right and very natural, for Cornelius, in his diseased state, to regard it as a subject of vital importance, to cherish it as the last hope which could beguile his mind, and reconcile him to the awful and mysterious change which awaited him. ' Poor Cornelius,' said I, ' dying men catch at straws ! Will your straw float you safely across the waves of the dark river ? I fear not.' And in this mood I went to bed, dreamt of Charlotte, and awoke in the morning to regret the long years which must intervene before she could be mine."

END OF VOL. I.

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