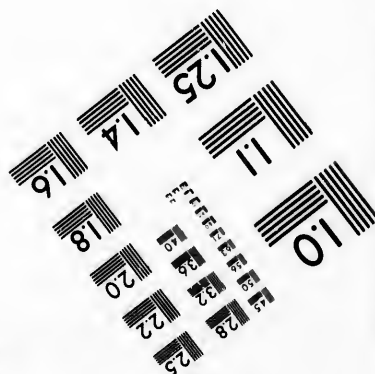
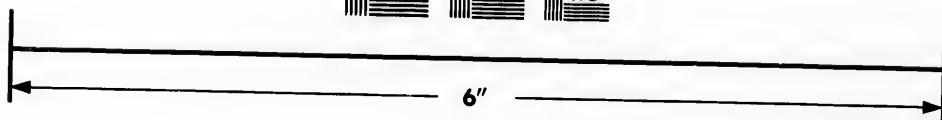
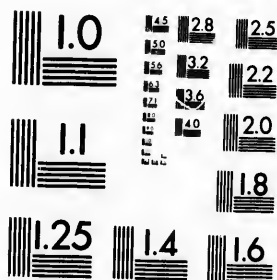


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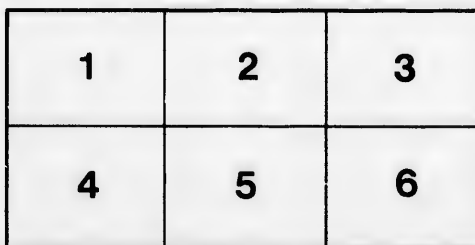
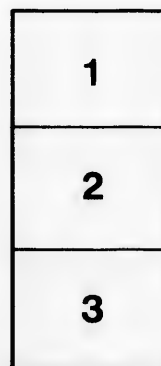
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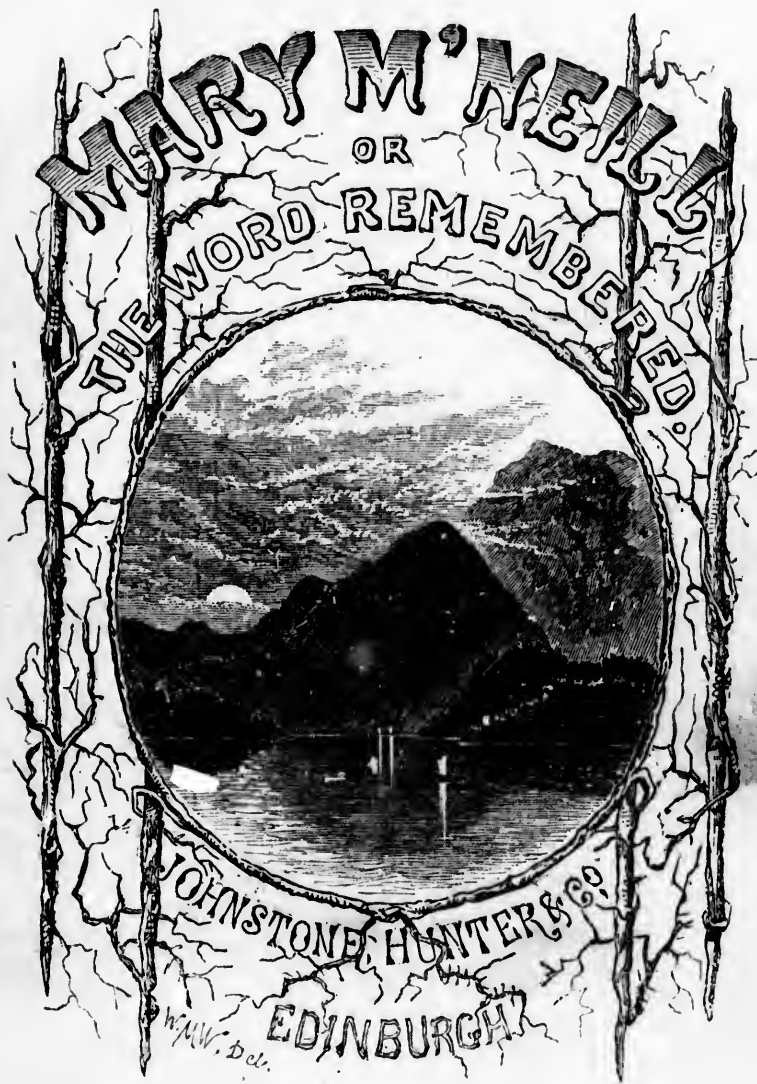
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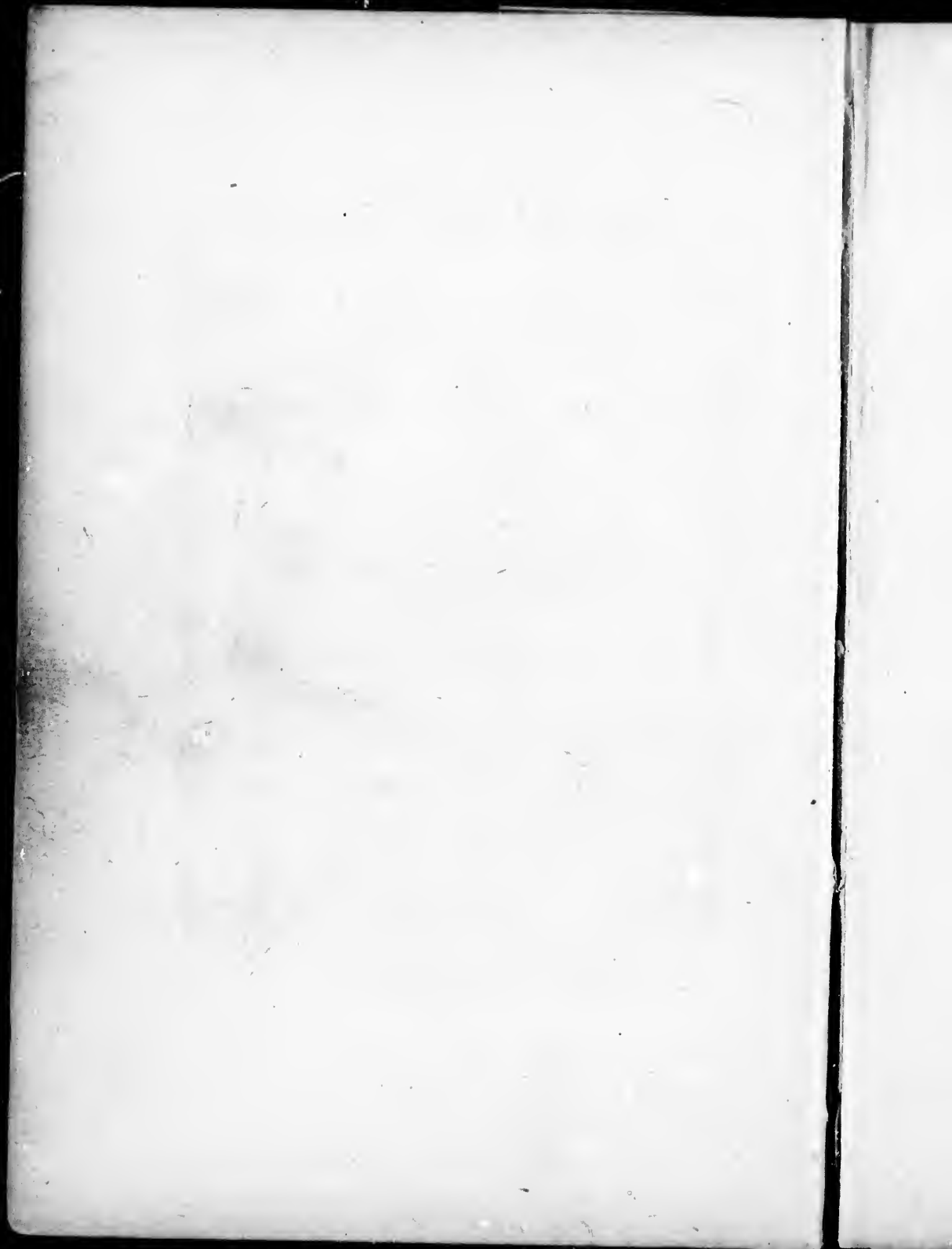
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MARY M'NEILL;

OR,

THE WORD REMEMBERED.

A Story of Humble Life.

By J. W. C.,

AUTHOR OF 'ALICE LOWTHER,' ETC. ETC.


MONTREAL AND TORONTO:
JAMES CAMPBELL AND SON.



2050
(R.A.)

MARY M'NEILL;
OR,
THE WORD REMEMBERED.

CHAPTER I.

N autumnal sunset was leaving its parting glories on a Highland landscape, which, for picturesque loveliness stands unsurpassed by any rival. The 'slow descending sun' had just plunged behind a lofty range of hills, which bounded the far horizon ; and the gentle breeze which stirred the meadow grass seemed to bear a farewell message from the bright orb to the

spectator, as he stood gazing on his receding path, and to say,

‘Go, to-morrow we shall meet again.’

Each cottage in the romantic little village of Glentree reposed in a perfect halo of golden sunshine, and the grey steeple of the primitive old church looked serenely bright, emerging from its verdant mantle of ivy, every leaf of which was quivering and glancing in the soft sunlight. The toils of another day were past, and the labourers slowly wended their homeward way, some to the straggling cottages which dotted the landscape in the far distance, others to the more sheltered village in the glen.

It was a peaceful hour, and a peaceful-looking scene. The smoke breathed forth languidly from chimney, or window, or door, as the case might be; and the sweet music of a ‘burnie,’ running merrily past, mingled with the lowing of the cattle, the herd-boy’s call,

and the hum of the labourers' voices homeward-bound. A rustic bridge spanned the stream, connecting the woodland and fields beyond with the village of Glentree. A knot of villagers had gathered together on the bridge, chatting over the incidents of the day, and watching the rise of the trout in the water below.

Suddenly the sound of carriage wheels attracted their attention, and speedily was seen proceeding up the village towards them, a handsome carriage and pair. It must cross the bridge, and as it came near, the group moved to the side. The horses trotted leisurely along, and standing in the open carriage were several figures, who, with guide-books in their hands, were ascertaining the names of the places they passed, and apparently wrapt in admiration at the scenery through which they were driving.

Just as the horses stepped on the bridge,

the shout of a boy who was fishing, and had taken a trout, startled them, and they dashed off in frantic haste, threatening to pitch the whole party over the little archway. Providentially, however, by the presence of mind of a young man who saw the danger, this dreadful catastrophe was averted; he rushed forward, and with a firm hand seized the horses' heads, and saved the awful leap. All his courage and energy, however, could not tranquillize the startled animals; and the moment they felt the solid ground again beneath their feet, they flung off the brawny arms which had grasped them, and set off at full gallop.

At this rapid pace they proceeded until their career was stopped by a log of wood, which, in his haste to go and see 'what all the stir meant,' a lad had carelessly dropped on his way from the plantation, whither he had gone to fetch it for his mother's fire. The carriage was overturned, and the whole

party sent sprawling on a bank at the side of the road.

The villagers, foreseeing that an accident of some kind would in all likelihood overtake the travellers, had instantly followed the carriage from the bridge, and on arriving at the spot, found that their assistance was greatly needed. Two gentlemen, evidently father and son, had escaped with mere bruises; a young lady looked pale and trembling; but the one who had suffered most seriously from the overturn, was an elderly lady, who proved to be the wife and mother of the little party. Round her the family gathered in anxious solicitude, as she lay on the grass with closed eyelids in a faint; and the kind, sympathizing villagers rendered valuable assistance, one starting for the medical man, and others fetching water to sprinkle on the poor lady's face, while the more courageous secured the still excited horses, and lent timely aid

to Evans, the coachman. Evans was not altogether unhurt, but he said nothing of his bruises.

The only one who seemed to have sustained no injury whatever, and who yet was the most useless and helpless of all, was Miss Briggs, the lady's maid. Seated on the box beside Evans, she had managed to fall lightly on the projecting bank,—which had so providentially intercepted between the whole party and the ground,—scatheless and safe. She, nevertheless, claimed her own share of interest, and by a rapid succession of interjections, pretty little screams, shakings of her head and limbs, to make sure that each was in its proper place, she attracted considerable notice and attention.

All anxiety, however, ere long concentrated on the still insensible lady, who, as yet, had manifested no signs of returning consciousness. The grief of her family was extreme; everything was done to restore

animation ; and at last, to their inexpressible thankfulness, she opened her eyes and smiled faintly on her husband and children, who stood around her.

‘ Grace, love, you are better,’ said her husband, tenderly, as he took her passive hand.

‘ Oh, yes,’ she murmured, ‘ but where are we ?’

This question recalled to mind the fact of their present position ; and hastily looking round, Colonel Whitmore—for such was the gentleman’s name—inquired of the bystanders if there was any inn near, not having observed anything resembling such a place of refreshment in the village or neighbourhood.

‘ There be’nt na inn till you comes to D——,’ answered one of the men.

‘ That is where we intended stopping all night,’ said Colonel Whitmore ; ‘ but we are several miles distant yet.’

‘ Six an’ a bittock, guid,’ interjected a

second brawny Highlander. Mrs Whitmore shook her head languidly, signifying her total inability to proceed so far.

'Is there any house where we could find accommodation close at hand?' again asked the Colonel, with a look of concern, for he greatly feared the effects of the night air on his wife.

'No that I ken o', said one. 'No for gentry folks like you, fir.'

At this moment a horseman appeared, coming from the village direction.

'There's "Tonal" M'Neill, he'll gie us a helpin' haund, as he aye does,' exclaimed several voices, eagerly. 'There never was a knot sa fair tangled that his fingers could na unravel.'

The so-called 'TONAL' immediately advanced, and inquired earnestly what had happened. All was explained to him, and the unfitness of the 'leddy' to be moved to any distance.

‘Well, sir,’ said he, addressing the Colonel, and respectfully touching his hat, ‘I see nothing for it but for you to come to my bit house, just down the brae here, and in at a long avenue ; my gudewife and dochter Mary will make ye hearty welcome.’

This proposal seemed to give the most unbounded satisfaction to the kind-hearted villagers, who would, any one of them, have gladly put his own dwelling at the service of the travellers, but felt instinctively that their accommodation would have been quite unsuitable for ‘nobility folk.’ Donald’s house, however, was quite superior, and worthy to receive any ‘gentry.’ ‘Och, an’ wha but Tonal his ainsel’ wad ever hae thocht o’ that plan ?’ ‘Hech but they will be weel put up there,’ and such like phrases met the Colonel’s ears, and induced him to think favourably of the kind proposition. There was something about

the man himself that at once commended him to the whole party, and with grateful thanks the travellers accepted his hospitality, and very soon found themselves comfortably housed in Donald's cottage.

CHAPTER II.

DONALD M'NEILL was head gamekeeper to the Duke of B——, and resided within the beautiful grounds of Glentree Castle. High-principled, shrewd, and intelligent, he had not only become a favourite and trustworthy servant of his Grace, but had won besides the esteem and affection of the whole country-side. In all difficulties or disagreements appeal was made to the worthy man, and under his bright, sunny temperament many a cloud and shadow were smiled away.

His house—for although it had originally been a cottage, it was now a slated house—was a picture of beauty and neatness. Inside

and out, all was clean and in order, for Margaret M'Neill was a notable house-keeper. The garden was famed far and wide for its luxuriance ; and flowers and plants which others failed to cultivate, flourished under M'Neill's skilful hands. At this season there were but few flowers in the garden, but in Donald's home there was one fair flower which bloomed alike in winter and in summer, and which gladdened and blessed his home ; and that was his young daughter and only child,—sweet Mary M'Neill.

Such was the humble but interesting family group amid which Colonel Whitmore and his party found themselves located one hour after the occurrence of the accident, which had threatened such serious results. Cheerful fires soon burned in the rooms, the best parlour was put at their disposal, and suitable accommodation provided for each and all. The round table

in the parlour was spread with a plentiful repast of tea, game, home-made scones, and delicious butter and cream. Writing to some English friends after a few days' residence at the cottage, Colonel Whitmore remarked, 'By a striking accident I have found the first realization in this lovely Highland retreat of many a day-dream. Far from bustle and business, surrounded by scenery which neither in foreign nor continental travel have I seen equalled, one has, besides the addition of all good creature comforts, a dry and warm house, and the inhalation of the purest oxygen. It is a rare spot.'

The family at the castle was abroad, being, from the delicate state of the Duke's health, reluctant absentees from their fine estate. Had they been at home, M'Neill assured the Colonel that they would have received all kindly attention from them. It did not, however, seem as if this were

wanted to enhance the enjoyment of the Whitmores. Young Mr Edward proceeded home to resume his business in London, after seeing a marked improvement in his mother's health ; the others, however, appeared in no hurry to go. The Colonel made generous arrangements with the M'Neills as to board for himself and family ; and so greatly did the fine air seem to conduce to Mrs Whitmore's restoration, that six weeks had passed ere any final plan for leaving was made.

If things had been going on harmoniously up stairs, the watchful eye and heart of Mrs M'Neill had been full of anxiety as regarded matters within her province below stairs. The only one of the English party whose society and influence she disliked was that of Briggs, the lady's maid ; or, as she called herself, ' Miss 'Arriet Briggs.' Showy and frivolous in her tastes, nothing but the express order of her mistress kept her within

rational bounds as to dress and manners. She winced and smarted under the restraint, but knew too well the value and ease of her situation not to yield obedience. On all occasions, however, when she could exercise her love of dress and finery among those of her own class, she came out, as she expressed it, 'extra strong.'

Very soon her influence over the young country girl Mary began to be observed. Mary's imagination became dazzled with pictures of London life, and the simple pleasures she had hitherto known began to lose their relish. Little bits of finery, manufactured by Briggs' really tasteful fingers, adorned the beautiful girl's person, and under the practised eye of the London waiting-maid, her natural taste for millinery became cultivated and improved. An evil change, however, passed over her spirit; a shade fell across her path; the little wedge of envy insinuated itself into

her heart, and her sweet face, from growing discontent with her lot and position, began to grow clouded and peevish.

'I'm rale uneasy Donald,' said Mrs M'Neill to her husband, one evening, as together they sat by the cheerful fireside; 'I'm rale uneasy about Mary. She's fair altered since that weak — that vain silly woman cam.'

Donald started; a new light seemed instantaneously let in upon a subject which had been perplexing him. 'Eh, Maggie, do ye say so?'

'Yes,' replied the poor woman, bitterly; 'she's no the sweet, fresh rose-bud she once was.'

'No, she is not,' again spoke out Donald, emphatically and sadly. 'I've wondered what it was; but thought it was some love story, and that, like a summer cloud, it would pass away.'

'Oh, that woman!' groaned out Mrs

M'Neill, heedless of her husband's words ; oh, that her glamour should ever hae fallen into my Mary's blue een ! How Mrs Whitmore should ever hae ta'en siccan a vain, frivolsome woman into *her* service, beats my understanding outright.'

'She did it from the kindness o' her nature,' interrupted Donald ; 'she told me herself one day that the lassie was the dochter o' an old coachman o' theirs, who, with her mother, died when the bairn was young and filly, and that she had promised the puir mother that she would take notice o' the little lasfs, and try to help her on in life.'

'She'll never do ony good—never, no never,' replied Mrs M'Neill ; 'her deceitfu' ways and impertinent pride will be brought low some day !'

'She's our fellow-creature, Margaret, woman,' said Donald quietly ; 'dinna be sae hard on the mitherless bairn. God

is mair pitifu' to us than we are to one another ; and ye know His grace can fathom the deepest gulf o' sin. But what makes you think Miss Briggs has ought to do with the change in Mary ?'

'She never lets the lassie alone,' answered Mrs M'Neill, 'and Mary is completely captivate' with her, and has lost her taste for the Sabbath school, and her reverence for the Sabbath itself, for only yesterday I found her readin' some play-book with Briggs, when I thought it was her Bible.'

'You surprise me,' said Donald, gravely ; then startin', and looking at his watch, he said, 'Where is the lassie the night ?'

'She said she was going to the school library,' replied Mrs M'Neill, 'but that she might be late, as she had promised to go with Miss Briggs to Saunders Frazer's, an' take tea wi' his mither an' him.'

Donald looked troubled. For some time past he had noticed a change in the treasure

of his heart. Once funny, affectionate, and transparently open, she had become shy, and, as he had discovered to his grief, expert in devising excuses for her conduct. She who had cheered him on his return at night, sat by his side, or sprung on his knee, and, with her pretty arms twined round his neck, had sung him his favourite songs and hymns, where was she? The twilight hour, to which he had looked forward throughout a toilsome day, to reward and gladden his heart—the happy little fireside circle, the evening meal, the family worship—all came and passed in cheerless disappointment. Ten o'clock struck, then eleven; and Donald had just taken down his plaid, and, wrapping it round him, was about to set out in quest of his daughter, when a timid rap at the door announced the return of Mary and Briggs.

The latter having whispered into Mary's ear, 'Put a bold face on it, and brave them both,' uttered aloud a careless 'good night'

to Donald and his wife, and swept on to her own room. Mary looked pale, and, it must be confessed, her heart quailed under the cruel words of Briggs. Her father did not reproach her, but looked sadly enough on his treasured child, and quietly said, 'Mary, where have you been all this time?'

'Takin' a cup of tea at Saunders Frazer's,' she replied; 'I'm surely old enough, now that I'm seventeen, to go that far my lane,' and she gave a slight toss of her head; 'and, father,' she added hurriedly and with flushing cheeks, 'I want to go to London and be a lady's maid, and not stay moping here among heather and rocks.'

Had Briggs heard this speech, she would have been proud of her pupil: as it was, however, it fell upon no ears but those of her parents, and went like a barbed arrow to their hearts. 'Mary, you'll kill your father an' me, if you speak this way,' at last murmured Mrs M'Neill; 'how could

we ever live without ye, lassie ?' Mary was touched ; but the unhappy remark which followed awakened again the bad feelings of her heart.

'That huffy ! O that vain, foolish, up-settin', empty woman, it's she's done the whole mischief. Wae's me that ever her shadow darkened my house door.'

Mrs M'Neill, although a worthy woman, wanted the prudence which so strongly characterized her husband, and the present instance called forth an angry reply. 'Mother, you don't know Miss Briggs, or ye wadna misca' her. She's a very fine person indeed, and I just wish I was like her.'

We stay not to detail this and other similar conversations which followed. Mrs M'Neill spoke immediately on the subject to Mrs Whitmore, who, along with her husband and daughter, lamented exceedingly the determination which Mary had taken to leave her home. No remonstrance,

however, availed ; and the contrast which the ladies drew to the young girl, between her present happy home and the bustle and temptations of a city life, fell unheeded upon her ear. Mrs M'Neill next appealed to the sensibilities of Miss Briggs herself, which were, however, so blunted and seared, that her 'cool insolence,' as the good woman called it, 'nearly drove her demented.' Had the subject been a less touching one, a bystander would have listened to the dialogue with amusement.

'Miss Briggs,' said Mrs M'Neill, entering the serving woman's room one afternoon, and closing the door significantly behind her, 'Miss Briggs, I want a word or twa wi' you.'

'A thousand if you choose,' said Briggs, officiously bustling to set her by no means welcome visitor a chair.

'A hantle fewer will serve my purpose,' said the poor woman somewhat ungraciously ; 'I've come to speak to you about my Mary.'

‘Sweet dear,’ replied Miss Briggs, with a patronizing bend of the head. ‘She’s a fine young girl, is Mary; and it is a thousand pities she should waste her sweetness on the desert hair, and be buried alive all her days within them rugged ’ills. I hope you are no longer goin’ to withhold your consent to her accompanyin’ me and the family to town.’

Mrs M’Neill, so soon as she could command herself to open her lips after this rude speech, spoke her mind very plainly, and accused Briggs of injustice and ingratitude in stealing her daughter away.

‘Me, Missus M’Neill; um—no lady nor gen’lman neither would ever say them words to me. Says Mr Saunders Frazer to me the other night, Miss ’Arriet Briggs, um—says he, you’re the finest, most beautifulest young leady I ever feed—’

‘Stupid fool!’ broke in Mrs M’Neill, now thoroughly exasperated, ‘he *is* indeed a fool, but for all that, I’m *very* sure he

never slipit them h's, like you an' your Cockneyfied tongues.'

From this specimen of a single interview, it will easily be inferred that no satisfactory impression could be made on Briggs; and, after a time, Mrs M'Neill ceased all efforts to move such cold affections. Briggs had worked very effectually on Mary's mind, partly by fulsome flattery, and partly by false but highly painted pictures of London life. She had, however, as is often the case with double-minded persons, somewhat overshot her mark by altogether ignoring the authority and wishes of Mary's parents. Besides the popularity of patronizing so young and pretty a girl, and introducing her into service and company, Briggs had counted upon Mary's friendship being of service to herself, and pictured in imagination an occasional pleasure trip together to the beautiful Highland home. She had, too, matrimonial visions floating airily in

imagination between Mary and a brother of her own, a footman in a high London family; and she counted on a nice little dowry accompanying the Scotch bride, which would be superlatively welcome to Frederick, whose habits were of a somewhat loose and expensive kind. These aspirations, however, received a check when the undisguised displeasure of Mrs M'Neill was made known. But, had Briggs even wished now to recant from her proposal, Mary's own resolution would have rendered that difficult, if not impossible.

The time was now at hand when the Whitmore family must go, being anxious to spend Christmas in their own home, and, as was their custom, surrounded by relatives and friends. With many kind wishes and grateful thanks to those who had proved such true friends, they bade farewell to the cottage and glen, leaving behind them substantial proofs of their grati-

tude not only to the M'Neills, but to many with whom, in their walks and drives, they had become acquainted in the district.

Mrs M'Neill having found that neither entreaties nor reasoning could prevail to alter Mary's desire, put forth her maternal authority, and forbade her to go, or to speak any more on the subject. Mary was forced to obey, and with a fullen heart and pouting face, down which the bitter tears flowed, she saw the carriage roll away, and found herself again surrounded with the monotony and solitude of country life. Letters from Briggs came, announcing their safe arrival, and the convivial gaiety of the Christmas season; and Mary's spirits drooped, and she pined in melancholy grief.

At the end of a few weeks, a perceptible change had passed upon her; and in answer to the anxious and tender inquiries of her parents, she fullenly replied, that if she

were longer thwarted in her wishes, she would soon sink into her grave.

Such being the case, and all expostulation, however true and affectionate, having failed to produce any effect, her poor mother saw no alternative but to allow her to write to Briggs, and intimate that her parents no longer withheld their consent to her going to London. In reply, she received a wordy but constrained letter from Briggs, whose ardour time and distance had cooled, and who had begun seriously to reflect that it was quite possible the Highland beauty might outshine her own attractions, and prove a rival to her own important and consequential self.

The letter, however, satisfied the ignorant Mary, and all preparations were speedily made for her departure to the great city. When conscience and natural affection spoke out loudly, Mary strove to quiet them by assuring herself that her parents could know but little of life, or of what was advanta-

geous for a young girl like her, compared with Miss Briggs. Besides which, when she had succeeded in advancing and raising herself in the world, would they not share in her triumph, and come to see that she had been wiser and further-seeing than themselves? 'And what,' whispered doubt, 'what if you should be altogether disappointed in your expectations?' 'Then I can come back to the old folks at home, who will be ready to receive me, I know.'

Mary had a solemn interview with her minister before she left. He had known her from a child, and had at one time hoped that there was some gracious work begun in her soul. He had marked the change which had passed over her spirit from the moment of her intimacy with Briggs, and, with a father's heart yearning towards her, he wept tears of sorrow over the prodigal daughter leaving her home, her parents, her Sabbath school, and all her sweet and sacred

associations. Like an unfledged bird, he beheld her springing from her fond parents' bosom, and plunging into an untried and dangerous course. 'Mary,' he said, at the close of the interview, 'I know not what is before you in the future ; but of this I am sure, that you will have difficulties and trials to meet ; and when you come to know what it is to be sick, and lonely, and weary in heart, remember who hath said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."'

CHAPTER III



MARY'S first set out on her self-willed course was not very elevating to the spirits. We pass over the anguish of her parents' hearts when, the morning of departure having arrived, they bade farewell to their tenderly loved child. Donald's simple Christianity sustained him under a trial which, but for this support, would have crushed him to the dust. He said little, but that little was much from him. He had instilled Christian principles into his child's heart from the time she could lispen his honoured name, and his whole life was a felt expression of that religion which sprang from a living union to a living Redeemer.

He had knelt for the last time with Mary in her small sweet room, and commended her to her father's God, who would ever be near her wherever placed ; and as he pressed his lips on the soft cheek, down which the tears flowed fast, Mary's resolution faltered. But pride intercepted, ' What ! give in now, when on the very threshold of hope's realization : what would Miss Briggs think of such simple softness ? ' The tempter triumphed over the true love of those who would willingly have laid down their lives for her. Mary strove to be quiet, and the volubility of her mother's grief, and the ceaseless injunctions which, up to the last moment, she poured forth, somewhat counteracted the effect of her father's deep silent sorrow.

She was to proceed to the railway station under the charge of Saunders Fraser, who happened to be going, and arranged to take her with him, her father being prevented

by urgent business. In Saunders' company Mary regained a little cheerfulness. She did not wish him to see her grief; and he, having paid one memorable visit to London, could talk learnedly about the Strand, the Tower, St Paul's and its wonderful whispering gallery,—thus beguiling the way till they reached the railway station. There they parted, but not until Saunders had seen Mary properly accommodated, and charged her 'to give Miss Harriet Briggs his compliments, and he should make a point of calling on her the first time he was in London town.'

The journey to Edinburgh was performed without incident, and the young traveller was in time for the Granton steamer, in which she took her passage. The voyage was extremely rough, and Mary suffered severely from sea-sickness, and thought, if she were once more on solid ground, she would not put foot on shipboard for very long

again. Amid the bustle and confusion at Blackwall, she followed strictly the written instructions she had received from Briggs, and proceeded from the wharf to Colonel Whitmore's, whither she had a warm invitation, the family having promised the M'Neills to take every possible charge of Mary, and to keep her with themselves till a suitable and proper situation opened up.

Mary approached the city with an imagination greatly excited. If she did not actually expect to find gold lying on the streets, she did imagine that she was about to enter precincts of wealth and splendour so vast, that she had only to step within the enchanted circle to be enriched and blest. She was seated in a cab, and free to look about on every side. Notwithstanding her excitement, however, she became greatly alarmed as they rattled along through what appeared to her to be an ever-gathering mob; and recalling to memory scenes of

Chartist riot, of which she had heard her father speak, she trembled lest she should be deliberately landing herself in the heart of such disturbance, and longed greatly to be at her journey's end. Unable to control her anxiety, she at last put out her head at the window, and called, 'Stop, coachman, stop a minute, I want to speak to you.'

'Speak, Miss?' exclaimed the surprised cabman, as he glanced at the labyrinth through which he was carefully threading his way; 'speak on, Miss; but it aint possible to stop here.'

Mary saw the truth of his remark, and then added, 'Well, please tell me when we are near London.'

'What, Miss?' said the coachman, this time gently checking his reins, and leaning back to catch the words, which he thought he must have mistaken.

'Tell me when we are near coming to

London,' repeated Mary slowly and emphatically.

'Why, Miss, where is it you think you are? where *has* you comed from, that you don't know that you're at this present moment *in* London?'

Mary's eyelids drooped, but she merely said, 'We are *in* London, are we? I thought we were only on the way yet.'

It was a heart-crushing announcement; and, sorely disappointed at this first glimpse of the fairy fancied city, she with difficulty repressed the rising tears. 'Well,' she thought, 'Grosvenor Square will come up to my expectation at any rate.' Away they jostled through the crowded thoroughfare, until finally the cabman pulled up at the door of a handsome, but, to Mary's roseate imagination, a very grim and solemn-looking mansion. A powdered footman opened the door, and Mary started

The cabman, who was just lifting her

box up the steps, noticed her surprise, and muttered to the man, 'Well, I *never* feed such a hignorant young 'ooman—no, never'

Mary overheard the words, and a deep blush suffused her face. She had, however, no time to cogitate; for, having paid the coachman and dismissed him, she found herself in a large, spacious hall, and greeted by the powdered head with the words—

'You are the young person master and missus is expectin' from Scotland, aint you?'

'Yes, I am Mary M'Neill,' said the young girl.

'Come this way then;,' and he ushered her into a neat library, where the Colonel and Miss Whitmore were seated.

On her entrance, they immediately rose and welcomed her warmly, making many kind inquiries after all at Glentree. Mary, having answered their interrogations, asked for Mrs Whitmore, and learned with surprise and sorrow that that lady was very

poorly, and confined to her own room. A feverish attack had succeeded the exertions she had made while some of the absent members of the family had been with them during Christmas, and anxious fears were entertained concerning her. Not to dwell on this part of our narrative, we anticipate the fatal termination of Mrs Whitmore's sickness, which plunged her devoted family into the profoundest grief.

No one unconnected with the family had more cause to mourn the loss than Mary McNeill. During the first weeks which had succeeded her arrival in London, none of the household, owing to Mrs Whitmore's critical state, felt able to look out for a situation for her. She was thus thrown much on the friendship and kindness of Briggs, who, by fits and starts, lavished on her favour and frowns. The feeling that she was of no use, and dependent in the house, roused the Highland blood

in Mary's veins; and having become acquainted with a grocer's family, to whose shop she frequently went errands, she asked them to help her to a situation.

At the end of a month's residence in Grosvenor Square, and when her temper had been soured and irritated by the conflicting circumstances in which she was placed, Mary heard from the grocer one morning, to her great joy, that he had recommended her to a customer who was in want of a lady's maid, and that he had given her the 'highest of characters.'

Mary repaired to the lady's house—Mrs Sealing by name, and a lady of fashion and style. Each was mutually pleased with the other, and an engagement was made ere they separated,—Mary having stated that Miss Whitmore would give her a recommendation at once; and Mrs Sealing, on the other hand, saying, that the fact of her being resident in Colonel Whitmore's family

until suited with a place, was sufficient testimony of her character ; and considering the alarming state of Mrs Whitmore's health, she could not trouble the family on the matter. Mary returned home in triumph, and informed Briggs that she had got a situation, and should leave the following day. Miss Whitmore was closely confined to her mother's room, and, without her knowledge, Mary entered the next day on her first service.

Mary very soon found that her situation differed entirely from the quiet, easy one of Briggs ; still the novelty pleased her, and her spirits rose. Mrs Sealing was, as we have said, a lady of fashion—a woman of the world. She and her husband lived upon the principle, that life is not such a bad thing as many seem to imagine ; and that if people laid themselves out to enjoy it, they might extract a good deal of pleasure. Notwithstanding all their projects

and plans, however, they found it pretty hard work to kill time, and the drops of pleasure were muddy enough. Nevertheless, they pressed their eager lips to the broken cistern, and turned their backs on the pure river of living water, which can alone satisfy the thirst of an immortal spirit.

Under their roof Mary gradually lost the outward respect for religion which she had brought with her from her father's house. There was no family worship, no word spoken to any about another life, and the Sunday was as busy and restless as the other six. Mr Sealing being necessarily free from business on that day, and very much disposed to see a select number of friends to a family dinner, the ordinary bustle of the house knew but little intermission.

Mary's chief duties were with the lady. She attended to her varied wants, exerted her taste and neat-handedness on her bonnets and dresses, and made such advances

in style and trimming that Mrs Sealing gradually transferred her entire millinery and dressmaking to her care, and poor Mary's slender fingers were fully occupied. It was, however, work that interested her, and her mistress bestowed warm eulogiums on her performances, increased her wages, and gave her many articles of dress, which, although most unfuitable for her, pleased the young girl, and gratified her taste for finery.

The most trying part of her occupation was sitting up for her mistress at night. Never happy except when in the gay whirl, Mrs Sealing seldom spent an evening at home, and one, two, nay three o'clock, found the young maid watching her return. These late hours produced a visible change on the health and temper of the young girl, so unaccustomed to such a life. However late of going to bed, she was expected to be in attendance upon her mistress in the

morning, who, although she rarely rose to breakfast, had ever a thousand things for Mary to do and see after.

There was one advantage which, if Mary had wished, she might have derived from her late hours, and by which others in like circumstances have often profited. She had leisure for reading the word of God, but Mary had no such inclination. Her neglected Bible lay in a corner of her box ; and although she had at first maintained the practice of reading from its sacred pages a short portion every Sunday, that casual glance soon became discontinued, and step by step she descended to the low moral scale which pervaded this, her self-chosen home.

Mary was a favourite with her fellow-servants. Her gentle manners had charmed them at first, and her fresh beauty attracted universal admiration. This might have engendered envy on the part of the maids,

had not Mary disarmed such feelings by her obliging readiness to assist them with her taste and neatness in trimming caps and bonnets, and various other little acts of kindness. In return, they invited her to accompany them in their evening visits to friends, and brought her favourite books and plays to wile away the long sitting-up hours.

These little attentions were not confined to the maid-servants; the footman and butler vied with each other in showing her marks of admiration. In particular, Thomas the butler was fertile in expedients for relieving the tedium of her vigils, and he was by no means scrupulous of the means he employed. A glass of wine from his master's cellarette, a 'tasting' of some delicious liqueur or cordial, proved very acceptable to the jaded girl. At first she hesitated to receive from Thomas what she knew was not his to give; but gradually and insidiously he overruled

her scruples, saying that 'she was such a favourite of missus, she would not object to anything she had a mind to; at the same time, it would be much pruder to say nothing whatever of the matter.'

In such an atmosphere Mary lost much of her sweet simplicity, and her pretty face became pale and peevish-looking; but she was considered only more stylish and interesting from these alterations. Step by step she glided into the unprincipled ways of her fellow-servants,—losing thus sadly her uprightness, and consequently her peace of conscience. Occasionally thoughts of her father's counsel and precepts visited her, but so tormenting were they, that she drove them forcibly from her mind. Sometimes, however, they refused to be thus summarily dismissed, and haunted her painfully. Then she readily yielded to the solicitations of her fellow-servants to join them in clandestine visits to the theatre, or to the houses of

friends, where, amid drinking, singing, and vain conversation, the poor votaries of pleasure tried to cheat themselves into the belief that this was happiness.

Mary contrived all this time to keep up a proper appearance before her mistress. That lady's hours were generally so late, and her mode of visiting so systematic and constant, that her domestics had ample opportunity for spending the evening, either abroad or at home, exactly as it pleased themselves; and, provided that all was quiet in the house when she returned, and Mary ready to receive her with her pleasant face, and nice fire in the dressing-room, Mrs Sealing cared not how or where they had passed their time.

CHAPTER IV.



MARY remained in her situation for six years, and during all that time had not once visited her home. She had, however, had many thoughts about her parents, from whom she received letters regularly, and had many times longed for their true-hearted love and counsel; yet the consciousness of her altered character, and the new tastes and habits she had formed, had hitherto kept her from asking leave from Mrs Sealing to visit Glentree. A letter, however, from her father, stating that her mother was ill, brought her to the resolution of seeking permission to return home for a short time. Mrs Sealing gave her consent, although well

aware how greatly she should miss her services ; and kindly hinted to Mary how valuable she was to her, and that she should trust to her own consideration not to extend her visit too long. With mingled feelings, Mary arranged her preparations, when an event occurred which changed not only the current of her present circumstances, but of her whole future life.

Mary, with coquettish vanity, had received the marked attentions of Thomas the butler, without the remotest intention that these should ever go beyond the similar proofs of admiration which she received from many others. Thomas, however, was not to be thus indifferently treated, and was extremely indignant when he discovered the real state of her feelings towards him. He renewed his addresses, but with the same result, and became nearly desperate when he heard of her intended visit to Scotland, imagining that her beauty would be sure to captivate some

Scotchman, and that he should never see more of his blue-eyed beauty. He resolved on one more effort to change her resolution towards himself ; and knowing Mary's passion for dress and jewellery, he determined to win her love by the gift of some article of finery. To obtain this, Thomas, whose whole wages were swallowed up in dress and self-indulgence, found his purse inadequate. What was to be done ? An easy mode suggested itself. His master was very careless about his loose money, leaving it in open drawers, or otherwise exposed ; and Thomas extracted various sums, at different times, until the necessary amount was within half-way of being made up. Contrary, however, to his expectations, Mary resolved, in consequence of more serious tidings relative to her mother's state of health, to leave a week previous to the time originally fixed, and her mistress made no objection.

This greatly disconcerted the plans of

Thomas, who, in his weak-minded conceit, had calculated that the presentation of a certain gaudy trinket would operate as a spell over Mary to bind her within the sphere of his attentions, and possibly set aside altogether the dreaded expedition to Scotland. But now what was to be done? The feller of the bauble would take no promise: he was too well aware of the common value of these to trust them; and once allow Mary to go, she might never return.

It happened one evening, when in this perplexity, that Thomas repaired to the lady's dressing-room, carrying with him a glass of claret and some biscuits for Mary's refreshment. Glancing round the room, he observed various jewels and ornaments of Mrs Sealing's scattered about upon the toilette table. One was a remarkably pretty ruby ring. He lifted it, and remarked on its beauty to Mary. She fell into raptures

on its 'elegant look,' adding coquettishly, 'A thing like that would have some effect on a girl, Mr Thomas ; but such things as them is scarce.'

A sudden thought struck Thomas, and he answered falsely, but with easy indifference, 'Well, it is a curious fact, Mary, that I've been savin' an' scrapin' up off my money to buy you a beauty like this,—the identical same. Mary, would you look kindly on me if I placed such a jewel on your finger?'

Mary turned away her head to hide a smile at the ridiculous speech ; but Thomas, imagining she was hesitating, assured himself that the bait was swallowed.

The following evening there was a gay ball at Mrs Sealing's. Carriage after carriage rolled to the door, and set down the fashionable company who did Mrs Sealing the honour to crowd her rooms, eat and drink at her expense, and then depart to

criticise and laugh. Mary, sparkling with smiles, excited much admiration in the cloak-room, as she waited to assist the ladies in taking off their hoods and cloaks, and tastefully adjusted their wreaths and dresses.

When a short respite came, after the party was assembled, Thomas eagerly sought Mary. Considerably excited, he took from his pocket a tiny parcel; and opening it, he displayed to Mary's dazzled eyes a small but beautiful ring, which he assured her was 'as like that which at this moment sparkled on missus's hand, as the reflection in the mirror before them was of her own sweet person.'

Mary took the ring, and was just going to remark upon it, when the sound of voices approaching the room where they were, made her slip the parcel hastily into her pocket, without more than a glance having been bestowed upon it. She did not get it again looked at until the close of the busy

night, when, having listened to the fretful remarks of her mistress, whose temper had been sorely irritated by the unexpected absence of some of the 'stars of her ball,' she retired to her own room, wondering much that ladies like Mrs Sealing should expend so much money and anxiety on entertainments which, instead of giving any apparent pleasure, seemed only to fret and discompose.

Next morning, before Mary had any opportunity of seeing Thomas, she was hastily summoned by her mistress. On entering the room, she found the lady up and bustling about, as if searching for something.

'Mary,' she instantly said, as her maid appeared, 'have you seen anything of my ruby ring?'

Mary started,—she hardly knew why; but answered quickly, 'You wore it last night, ma'am; it can't be far off.'

‘No, I did *not* wear it last night,’ replied Mrs Sealing, whose quick eye had marked Mary’s momentary confusion ; ‘I could not see it, but, as I sometimes mislay things, I trusted to you to find it.’

Mary soon resumed her self-complacency, and sought in every corner for the missing jewel, but it could nowhere be found. At breakfast, Mrs Sealing related the circumstances to her husband, with her usual modicum of exaggeration, adding that her ‘suspensions were reluctantly roused against her maid.’ Mr Sealing declared that he did not know where the mischief lay, but that his cash was certainly diminishing in a way which was not to be accounted for, except by the instrumentality of some light-fingered people, and that possibly this ‘ring affair’ might lead to the detection of the culprit. Neither Mr nor Mrs Sealing attached the smallest blame to themselves for the constant temptation which they so fin-

fully put in their servants' way, but resolved to sift the affair thoroughly and at once. Mr Sealing summoned the whole of the servants to his library, informed them of the present loss, of the suspicion that some of the household were parties concerned in that loss, and asked each one in succession whether or not he or she knew anything of the missing ring.

All replied in the negative ; when Mr Sealing added, authoritatively, ' Then no one will object to their room and boxes being searched ; it can only confirm their innocence, and will quash the whole matter.'

Two constables were soon in attendance ; and, after a careful investigation of all the worldly possessions in the servants' apartments, the ring was discovered in Mary's box.

Nothing could exceed the dismay and distress of the poor young woman on learning that the ring, which she had received

from Thomas, was 'her missus's valuable ruby hoop.' That it closely resembled it, she was aware ; but she had implicitly believed Thomas, when he assured her that he had gone that morning from one jeweller's shop to another, until he had satisfied himself with a ring 'as like as possible to that which was then sparkling on missus's hand in the ball-room.'

Mary, although used to deception and prevarications, had never imagined anything so daring as a theft like the present ; and having very excitedly stated the facts, as to how the ring came into her possession, she received, in reply from the constables, the cool remark, that such a story, though a pretty enough one, would scarcely stand in a court of law, and that she must instantly prepare to accompany them. Mary appealed to her mistress, in looks and tones of despair, to save her from such degradation and ruin.

Mrs Sealing was really grieved at the discovery, not having anticipated, when the search was made, that anything so serious would have resulted, or that proof so direct would have been found against her maid. But now, with that proof, what could she do? The officers of justice took the matter into their own hands, and, amid passionate tears and expostulations, Mary was driven off to the police office, accompanied by Thomas, and each was placed in a separate cell—all communication with one another being precluded.

The trial came on; and on Mary being ushered into court, a marked change was perceptible in her appearance. She had hardened and steeled her heart to brave out this exhibition of herself unflinchingly; '*she* would not whine and fret, not *she*—no one should discover from her whether she felt her position or not.' From what she knew of Thomas, she was quite as prepared to

hear him swear falsely as to the truth. Great, then, was her surprise, when, in the open court, which was thronged with spectators, she heard him, when under his examination, confess the whole. He candidly declared that his love for Mary had led him to the perpetration of an act which, on his Bible oath, he declared was only meant to be a mere temporary one. Stung with apprehension, that were Mary suffered to visit her home, she would never return to London service, he had resorted to the plan which had proved so disastrous to them both.

Imagining, in his weak-mindedness, that the possession of a trinket would mollify her feelings towards himself, and induce her to postpone her journey to Scotland, and possibly lead her to consent to a private marriage with himself, the foolish man had, in an evil hour, glided into his mistress's dressing-room, and abstracted the ring, with every intention, he averred, of restoring it, all the

time flattering himself, that the lady who left valuable things so carelessly about would never miss it off her table ; and, as soon as his wishes in regard to Mary should be realized, he would, without delay, procure for her an inferior ring, as close as possible in resemblance to the valuable one of her mistress's, which should then be restored to its place on the pretty toilette table. The whole was to be accomplished in so skilful a manner, that Mary should never detect any change or substitution in the glittering gem.

It was not likely that a story so garbled could produce any favourable impression on the jury ; and granting that his intention was genuine enough,—which was plainly not the mind of the court,—to restore, when it suited himself, the ring to his mistress's toilette table, the abstraction of the jewel was virtually and truly a theft on the part of Thomas.

At the close of his statement, Thomas made a touching appeal to the judge on Mary's behalf, praying that the innocent should not share the punishment of the guilty. The appeal produced effect, although it was evident that the court was not altogether without suspicion towards Mary, as the recipient of the stolen jewel ; while her own proud and supercilious manner throughout the examination did not lessen the prejudice entertained towards her.

Due consideration having been bestowed on the subject, the judge sentenced Thomas to a short imprisonment, while he dismissed Mary with a strong and severe reprimand : cautioning her against the love of dress, which was the ruin of so many of her sex ; and reminding her that but for the confession of her fellow-servant, the consequence of her share in the present transaction would have been much more serious to herself.

Mary listened to the stern but salutary

admonition with flashing eyes and haughty look; and walked out of the court with a proud step, and a spirit still more proud and unsubdued. The searing process in her heart was going on steadily and surely.

CHAPTER V.



AS Mary quitted the court, she felt conscious that her appearance had excited interest among the crowd; and many remarks, expressive of admiration and sympathy, fell upon her ears.

‘Shame, that such a sweet-faced creature should have been treated so shockin’ bad,’ said one, ‘and brought amid a court rabble.’

‘Well, but they couldn’t make out nothin’ against her,’ said a second. ‘But her character’s broke, notwithstanding,’ said a third; ‘broke, an’ no mistake. She’ll do no good after this business, I promise you. No high lady will take her into service after this day’s work.’ This last remark fell

like a knell on Mary's heart, in the midst of the mob laudations, which were so gratifying to her self-love. The recollection of her lost situation,—for Mrs Sealing had provided herself with another maid,—and of the possible difficulty she might have to procure a similar service, together with her friendless condition in the great city; these considerations, for a moment, pressed heavily on her mind, and somewhat tempered the proud feelings with which she stepped into the street,—a fine specimen of injured innocence, she thought—a sort of martyr of fraud and injustice.

At the turn of the street she caught sight of a familiar figure,—no other than that of Briggs, flauntily dressed, who had evidently just left the court, in company with another woman. Mary sprang towards her. It was some years since they had met—Briggs having accompanied the Whitmore family to Bristol, whither they had gone to reside

soon after Mrs Whitmore's death. Mary had received letters both from Miss Whitmore and Briggs, the former expressing great satisfaction that she kept her place, and proved so good and faithful a servant. Her communications from Briggs had been few and fitful. It was, therefore, with glad surprise that Mary's eye fell upon her early friend, whose influence and advice might prove extremely helpful in the present critical juncture of her life's history.

Very great, then, was her discomfiture, when, instead of her warm greeting being responded to, Briggs drew back haughtily, and refused the proffered hand which was eagerly held out by poor, friendless girl. Mary bit her lip to restrain the deep emotion she felt.

'You won't speak then, Brig — Miss Briggs; *you* don't believe any of them lies that has been told against me?'

Briggs, who disliked the idea of being

seen in the public streets, 'hand and glove,' as she expressed it, 'with one fresh from the law court, and whom all the ladies and gen'lemen had been starin' on as a thiet,' said quickly and stiffly, 'Mary, don't talk to me about your good ways. It's all rank hypocrisy: for you've proved yourself to be exactly like your neighbours, with all your Highland pride and prudence, forsooth. What will your grave saint of a father think, when he sees his doated Mary's name flung high and dry in the public prints? My heart! I would not like to be in your shoes, when you meets him for the first time after this nice scrape. You've gone and done for yourself now, I promise you.'

As she finished her heartless speech, Briggs jerked herself off, and was lost among the crowd. Brief as was this interview, Mary saw enough of her *quondam* friend, to note a marked change for the worse in her whole appearance. Her gaudy

dress told of unrestrained licence to exert her own taste in the adornment of her person, while a certain rosiness of complexion and blearedness of eye, spoke unmistakeably of the confirmation of long established habits of intemperance. These growing habits had, for a lengthened period, been carried on so secretly by the cunning woman, that they had evaded the observation of the Whitmore family. Plausible and fawning, she had continued to keep up appearances before her unsuspecting mistress, and prided herself on the skill with which she practised her evil courses, and avoided detection. But eventually, in her case, as in all others, was fulfilled the Divine declaration, 'Be sure your sin will find you out.'

On the occasion of an evening party, Briggs, having rendered the necessary services to the ladies, betook herself hastily to her own room. So confirmed a drinker had she become, that she now preferred the

secret indulgence of the bottle to the more social but more restrained conviviality with others. Having bribed a young fellow-servant to call her at a certain hour, when she should again be wanted to attend upon the ladies, she closed her door, and, with grim satisfaction, drew from its hiding-place a bottle of ardent spirits. Her usual plan was to throw herself in bed, when her senses were sufficiently impaired to render every other position untenable ; and should any one unexpectedly come to fetch her, she was found with her face plunged in the pillows, apparently, to uninitiated eyes, in the enjoyment of profound natural sleep.

This evening, however, she lingered over her potations, and, at the moment in which she rushed towards her bed, she overturned the small table drawn close by the fire, on which stood the remainder of the liquid poison. The bottle fell with a crash on the grate, and the contents flared up furiously.

The flames darted out, and licked up sundry articles of finery, which lay scattered about, spreading conflagration with fearful rapidity. Very soon the flames and smoke made known to others their alarming proximity ; and just as the gaiety had commenced in the superb drawing-rooms, the company was startled with the cry of ' Fire,' which was raised throughout the house.

Panic-struck, the guests fled from the house in a way much less ceremonious than they had entered it, and the brilliant scene was soon desolate. Miss Whitmore, whose presence of mind did not for one moment leave her, having succeeded in constraining her father to quit the house along with some of their friends, hastened to the apartment occupied by an old and valued nurse, whom, she feared, might be forgotten by the other servants. On her way thither she had to pass close to the room whence the flames were issuing. It was Briggs's, who,

at the moment her young mistress appeared, having managed to roll herself out of the burning room, fell down in the lobby without.

Miss Whitmore seized her by the arm, and dragged her from the dangerous spot to another room, where, leaving her, she pressed forward to the rescue of her dear and valued nurse. How she managed to save the trembling old woman, and to shake Briggs from her drunken sleep, and jostle her along the corridor to a place of safety, Miss Whitmore could never explain ; but certain it was that she saved from a torturing death the woman whose wicked habits were the cause of this night's catastrophe.

The damage done to Colonel Whitmore's beautiful mansion was great ; and his indignation at the ascertained cause of the conflagration knew no bounds. His first act was to turn Briggs from his house, assur-

ing her that no apology or repentance could avail for the injuries she had done. Briggs was the very last person to dream of being either apologetic or repentant, and, with a contemptuous toss of the head, she listened to her master's stern address as if she had been the injured person and he the aggressor. Drink had seared her conscience, and, apparently, burnt out the natural feelings of her heart; for even towards her gentle young mistress, to whom she owed the preservation of her life, and who offered her words of kindly counsel, she turned a deaf and insolent ear.

She quitted the house, which had for so many years afforded her a comfortable home, destitute and without a character. Miss Whitmore furnished her with money sufficient to carry her to London, and pay for a week's lodging there. All her wages were due to shops; and fundry bills were left altogether unpaid. At the time of her

present rencontre with Mary, she was living with a former acquaintance, whose husband kept a gin shop, and who permitted her to carry on a small millinery business in an unoccupied garret of her house. Her character was openly pointed at as unrespectable, and she was not scrupulous of the ways and means she adopted to eke out her scant subsistence, and to satisfy her craving for drink.

Although Mary had missed the full meaning of some part of this unhappy woman's cruel address, yet she had heard enough to open her eyes clearly to the fact of her present circumstances. She was now unfit company, it appeared, for such a woman even as Briggs, with all her loose principles and low morality: possibly others of her acquaintance would have the same feeling towards her.

Then her parents. Oh! the thought of them seeing her name branded as a thief,

although, happily, the allegation was not proven, and false. Still the fact that she had been suspected, imprisoned, tried, and severely reprimanded, were elements of disgrace sufficient, she knew, to bring down their grey hairs in anguish to the grave. Home to these wounded friends she would not—could not, go; and the woman who had been the instrument of inducing her to leave her home, was now the means of preventing her return to it, and of well-nigh driving her to despair.

As Mary passed along the streets, she became giddy and faint, and was forced to grasp the railing of a shop to keep herself from falling. She tottered along, scarce knowing how; and she heard rough voices, uttering words terrible to her ear—‘She’s been taking a drop to cheer her up a bit.’ ‘She knows the virtues of a glass, that’s plain enough,’ said a second. Other and harsher words were repeated, and rude looks were cast

upon her, which, feared as her heart had become, brought the blood flushing to her face.

At last she reached Mrs Sealing's house. She had merely returned to fetch her things, having heard that her place was already filled up, and that her mistress had openly expressed her satisfaction that she had got rid of so plausible a woman, with no serious loss of jewels or valuable property. Mary, to whom this was eagerly repeated, longed to have had an opportunity of speaking to her mistress in vindication of her character; but, besides that the lady was 'not at home,' Mary now found that her word was no longer trusted either by her superiors or her own equals. She bade a hasty farewell to her late fellow-servants, who, to do them justice, expressed sincere sympathy for her, and transported herself and her belongings, in a cab, to the kind-hearted grocer's who had helped her to Mrs Sealing's situation,

and who consented to 'take her in,' provided she kept things quiet and close, as his kindness to a discarded servant might injure him in Mrs Sealing's estimation, who, although 'she did not pay very reg'lar, was certainly one of his best customers.'

CHAPTER VI.

THUS surreptitiously received into a temporary home, Mary exerted herself to obtain another situation. After many fruitless efforts, —for no one would take her without a character, and Mrs Sealing refused to say anything for her, or to take any trouble, —Mary, through the kind recommendation of her friend the grocer, who perfectly believed in her innocence, succeeded in getting a vacant place in a large millinery establishment.

The situation of this shop was widely apart from the fashionable square in which the Sealings resided; and so obscurely had she kept herself while resident at the grocer's,

that no identification was made, and she once more started afresh in this new line of life. Her hopes of success were great, and her really good taste, and still extremely prepossessing appearance, soon rendered her services most valuable to her employer.

She was, ere long, advanced to the saloon, and appointed one of the showwomen there. Here she was surrounded by many temptations, the most powerful of which, to her, were the gay acquaintances she made. Dress and amusement were the ruling passions of most of her companions, and were, alas, her own besetting sins. Her salary was expended on the adornment of her person; and the evening hours, after quitting the shop, were spent at the theatre or dancing-rooms, or otherwise vainly and sinfully. She seemed to human eyes past all reclamation, so infatuated and worldly had she become; for God's word says, 'She who liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.'

But Mary heeded not what God said. Her Bible was now never opened, and her Sundays were passed in visiting, or in excursions out of town.

These expeditions were generally made in the company of a young man—Arthur Jones—who acted as a clerk in a mercantile house in the city, and who had fought and won Mary's heart. She loved him deeply, and considered herself a favoured one to be the object of his affection and choice. So intense and concentrated was her love for Jones, that she became indifferent to the friendship of others ; and even the anxiety about her parents—and specially her mother, whom her father, in his letters, described as being extremely unwell—changed into cold neglect.

Had Mary at this time been taxed with ingratitude and want of natural affection towards the two beings on earth whose hearts yearned over her with tenderest, truest love,

she would have angrily scorned the allegation ; yet her conduct, and real forgetfulness of their feelings and counsel, justified the assumption, that at least she felt independent of their love and care, her heart being filled with other and new objects.

It happened one Sunday that Mary went, in company with Arthur, to spend the afternoon in one of the suburbs of London. As they were strolling along a shady lane, they met a party who had evidently come thither to pass the afternoon like themselves. One of them looked earnestly at Mary, and then accosted her in a familiar and easy way.

It was Thomas, who, at the expiry of his imprisonment, had made many attempts to see Mary, and had latterly greatly annoyed her by going to the shop where she served. Her aversion to Thomas was greater than ever, and she indignantly drew back as he approached. He was not, however, to be repulsed ; and Arthur moved

on, to allow them free converse. Mary vehemently assured Thomas that she would no longer be tormented with his attentions ; that he had known her mind towards him long ere now ; and that surely she had good cause to dislike him, seeing his deceitful ways had cost her so much. ' I thought you were going out of London,' she remarked ; ' and,' she added contemptuously, ' I would not have been surprised to hear that you had gotten a free passage to the colonies.' As Mary uttered these words, she gave her head a toss, and was moving on.

Thomas, whose regard for Mary was great, and whose affection for her had induced him to come forward at the trial, as he imagined, so magnanimously in her extenuation, was nettled at her taunt. Evil passions rankled in his breast ; and pride, anger, and revenge, swept like a torrent across his heart.

‘ You shall rue your words, Miss, I promise you. That young gen’lman there thinks you as perfect and good as I once did. But I’ll treat him to a passage or two of your history, in case you should have forgot them, Miss.’ Mary, pale with terror, convulsively broke away, and rejoined Jones. Just as she was explaining to him that Thomas and she were old acquaintances, but that she had always disliked his company, a voice uttered in Arthur’s ear, ‘ Take care of your pretty jail-bird, my young gen’lman. She’s slippery game, and will bring you, mayhap, to the court, as she did me, and break your character for life, too.’

Mary shrieked, and turned to look whence the voice came. But Thomas, who had glided along the soft grass which grew on one side of the lane, was gone. He had dropped his poison, and he left it to rankle and fester, to the destruction, as

he maliciously hoped, of the prospects of her whom his own arts had so shamefully misled.

Arthur turned to look at Mary. Her pale face and trembling frame gave assent to what had been declared. Yet, struggling to be calm, she said, with affected indifference, ' You don't believe such nonsense, surely. He's a discarded thief, is that Thomas; and is notorious for his efforts to ruin other people's good name, and make them out as bad as himself.'

It was a lame speech which poor Mary delivered in her extreme agitation, and the quick perception of Arthur detected that. Although a man destitute of Christian principle, and completely absorbed with business and pleasure, he had a correct moral nature as far as regarded outside respectability of character, and shrank with horror from the society of any whose fair name was stained with even the breath of sus-

picion. It was quite enough to excite his doubts about Mary, to hear her own avowal that Thomas was a discarded thief, and an old acquaintance of hers. He had often marvelled at the fact, that Mary, after a residence of so many years in London, had no friends of influence or substance of any kind ; but he had willingly lulled to sleep his fears, in the belief of the story of her life which she had told him,—a story of mingled falsities and facts. The events of this day, however, made him resolve to investigate the whole matter ; and the result of his inquiries was the painful discovery and conviction, that the suspicions excited were only too well grounded. It was a discovery which nearly broke his heart, and filled him with anguish and dismay.

Yet, with the knowledge of all this, he felt that their engagement must cease. It had been formed under impressions erroneous as regarded her past character ; and he could

not respect any woman as a friend, far less make her his wife, who had spoken to him false things. Gently, but firmly, he wrote to Mary on the sad subject, telling her what he had learnt,—and his information was a greatly exaggerated account of the catastrophe in Mrs Sealing's, and given by one who was jealous of his love for Mary,—and representing to her the impossibility for a mind that had been so deceived, to repose any longer trust in the deceiver. He spoke of his deep love for her,—of the sunshine she had cast across a path friendless and solitary,—assuring her that his heart should never recover the wound inflicted, and that he never could feel towards any other as he had done to her. He concluded by saying, that he had accepted an offered situation abroad in a branch of the house in which he now served, and that by the time she received his letter, he would be speeding rapidly away from scenes and associations

now rendered to him altogether insupportable.

Mary received this communication after a day of unusual worry and work. It was the busy season, and her brain was giddy with the various orders and duties she had had to perform. Ever since the Sunday on which the fatal interview with Thomas had taken place, she had seen less of Arthur than was usual; and she failed not to perceive that when they were together, his manner was changed and constrained. Again and again she had determined to tell him all, and to assure him of her innocence and her grief at the past event of the trial. But then came the remembrance of her share in the unfaithfulness of her fellow-servants towards her mistress, and she felt how difficult it would be to disentangle the true from the false accusations against her, and how startling the whole confession would be to a man so upright and truthful as Arthur. Bitterly

did she afterwards lament that she had not carried out her intention, and cast herself at once upon his manly generosity. Truly 'the way of transgressors is hard.'

As Mary entered her apartment at a late hour at the close of this toilsome day, with a mind sorely perplexed about her own affairs, and her temper soured with harassing labours, her eye fell on two letters which the post had brought. The one was in her father's handwriting, the other in Arthur's.

Snatching up the latter, she tore it open. The reader already knows the sum of its contents. As Mary's eye ran rapidly over the lines, her mind seemed to reel. Still she grasped the paper, and read with the feelings of one who is tracing out the characters of a death-warrant, and who yet, with a strange fascination, lingers over the terrible deed. When, however, the poor young woman arrived at the closing sentence of Arthur's letter, in which he told her that

while she should be perusing this last epistle he would be on his way to a distant land, her fingers relaxed their firm grasp of the paper, and uttering one wild shriek, she fell senseless on the floor.

Her landlady, alarmed at the scream, hastened to the apartment, and was greatly shocked to find Mary in a death-like faint. Mrs Carr administered the needful restoratives; and, after an unusually protracted time, the closed eyelids opened, and the sufferer.

‘Woke, alas, to weep!’

Before morning she was in a raging fever; and the medical man, summoned by Mrs Carr, pronounced her illness an aggravated case of brain-fever. For some weeks Mary continued in a critical state, with only occasional intervals of unclouded reason. At the end of that time, however, she began to recover, and to wake up slowly to the recollection of the painful past.

Surely, if there were any circumstances fitted to make one think of 'a holier, better life' than the present, they were those in which Mary M'Neill found herself at this period of her history. She was friendless in a large city, a disowned outcast. Lover and friend had forsaken her, and she felt as if she had no help in man at all. But she had struggled to live without God in the world; and how, whispered the tempter, could she now look for anything at His hand but anger and righteous retribution?

She questioned Mrs Carr as to which of her companions had asked for her in her sickness. A few had come to the door, but, on learning that her complaint was fever, had, as Mrs Carr expressed it, 'gathered in their clothes as if the fever was a running out of the door to catch them in its arms, and fled as if the house was on fire.'

Her friends, Mary bitterly remarked,

were summer friends, who loved in sunshine and smiles, but utterly failed and disappeared when the deep shades of sorrow settled down.



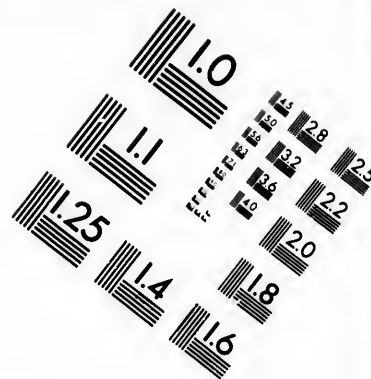
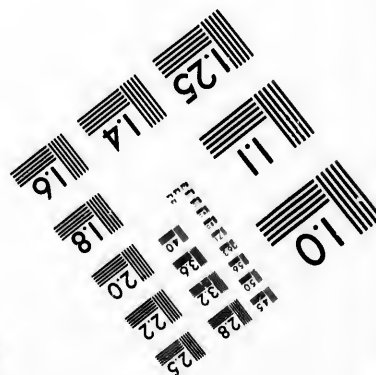
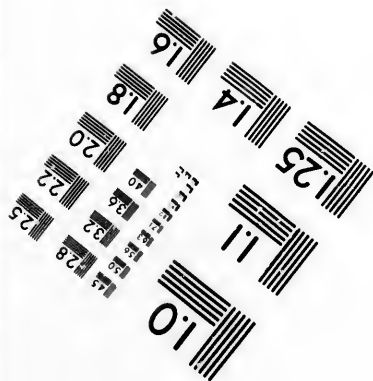
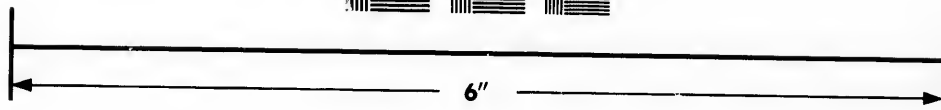
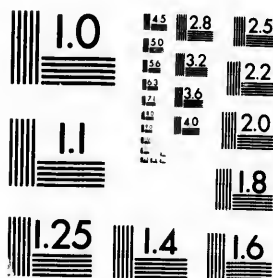
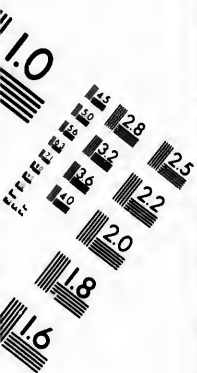


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CHAPTER VII.



It was not until the expiry of four months, that Mary, pale and haggard, sallied out from her lodging, and with feeble steps tottered to the establishment in which she had laboured with so much acceptance. As she entered the shop, her changed appearance was marked by all; and her master, in reply to her request to be allowed to resume her situation, assured her she was as yet unfit for the exertion, coldly adding, that another now filled her post in the showroom, and was the best hand he ever had.

Mary asked if she might look forward to being resumed at a future time, when the master said, he must frankly tell her,

that during her absence he had heard strange rumours about her, which had compelled him to insist on her friend the grocer making 'a clean breast of it;' and that with his knowledge of the past, he must altogether decline receiving her back to his place of business.

Mary saw, from the look and tone with which these words were spoken, that his decision was irrevocable; and in a tone of anguish besought him to remunerate her late services in a manner to save her from ruin or death. The master withdrew into himself at once, and, with a look of great surprise, asked her what title she had to make any such demand.

Mary replied, with proud scorn, that she had slaved for him and his interests until she could work no more; and she thought his feelings as a parent, if not as a master, might dictate some act of kindness to a poor friendless woman.

‘ Whatever my emotions as a parent may dictate, Miss M’Neill, my feelings as an upright man teach me not to take what is due to honest folk, and give it to a ——’

‘ To what ?’ exclaimed Mary, with the old flashing look in her eyes.

‘ To a branded thief ! if you will have it, Miss ; and now, I wish you good evening.’

As he spoke he placed in her hands a small sum of money which was due to her, and with a bland smile on his face, waved to her to be gone.

Mary suppressed the burning tears which sprang to her eyes, and, with a firmer step than that with which she had entered the shop, she walked out into the crowded street. It was evening ; and as she crept along the busy thoroughfare, she trembled and shivered at the rude looks which were cast upon her. Sick and faint, she strove to quicken her tottering pace, and stumbled along to her cheerless garret. She breathed freely

as she found herself once more safe within the scant dingy room ; but the feeling of relief was quickly succeeded by the awful reflection, ' What shall I do when forced to leave this shelter ? whither can I go ?—all London seems to know my history, and the echoes around Glentree itself will be resounding with the tale of my blighted life.'

The thought of Glentree and the cottage recalled to memory her father's forgotten letter, received on that dismal night, the recollection of which constantly haunted her imagination ; and Mary sought for the packet, vexed at her neglect. She opened the letter. It contained tidings of grief. Her mother was worse, and would, it was feared, not survive another week. Her father conjured her, by every tie of affection and duty, to go directly home, if she wished to see her mother again, and receive from her own lips a pardon and a blessing. The letter

was written in strains of touching tenderness, assuring her of welcome to the hearts and home she had so sadly forsaken, if she would but return.

‘Return!’ shrieked Mary, in terrible emotion, as the past, with its dark memories of self-will, disobedience, and disappointment, rose up to mind—‘return to the home I have dishonoured—desolated! Oh!’ and she burst into a wild hysteric laugh—‘home—my mother dead—my father too, perhaps—Arthur gone—drowned, mayhap—and I—the dreadful cause of all—friendless, miserable—I go home—where is there such a spot for me? Yes,’ she again exclaimed, after a silent pause—‘Yes, I’ll go home—that I will—to the home that takes all comers!’ As she spoke, a sigh of relief breathed forth from her bursting heart.

The awful idea which now resolved itself into a fixed purpose, had floated through

her brain again and again in the agonizing days that were past ; and now her resolution was made.

Mrs Carr, hearing a voice, entered the room, and caught the last words. ‘ Well, Miss, I’m glad to hear you saying that, for I’ve let your room to a new lodger, and she comes in a day or two ; and I’ve just made out your note, Miss, for as you’ve been to the shop, you’ll have money to-night, and it soon slips away. But who was you talkin’ to, Miss ?’

Mary took the account mechanically from Mrs Carr’s hand, without uttering a word. It was much larger than she had expected, for the landlady had provided everything for her during her illness.

‘ And this is Mr Pratt’s bill too, Miss,’ added the landlady ; ‘ I’m sure he was exceedin’ attentive and practical in his visitings.’

Had anything been wanted to make Mary's cup of distress flow over, the necessary drops were furnished by the bills now presented.

'I shall attend to all, Mrs Carr,' said Mary, in a voice which sounded calm, but whose strange tone startled Mrs Carr. 'I have other matters to settle to-night; and if you will wait till to-morrow, you shall be satisfied.'

'As you choose, Miss,' said Mrs Carr, who felt deeply interested in her friendless lodger, but whose poverty precluded the possibility of her any longer keeping a tenant whose supplies seemed stopped, and who, no doubt, argued the poor woman, had friends more able than she was to provide for her—'as you choose, Miss; but do not be a sittin' up this night, for you're tired to death, and ought to take sleep and rest.'

'I shall have both to-morrow, that I

shall,' said Mary, the excited laugh returning—'a long, long rest, but

"Men must work, and women must weep;
And the sooner it's over, the sooner to sleep."

And I must both work and weep to-night,' she added, speaking to herself—'one more night.'

Mrs Carr, who imagined that Mary purposed returning to her home on the morrow, and that she looked forward to rest and quiet then, retired, wishing her good night, and enjoining her not to sit up late in her jaded and exhausted state.

Heedless of the kind injunction laid upon her by her landlady, Mary busied herself in her room. What she did she scarce knew herself. Her first act was to write a note to Mrs Carr, telling her of her sheer inability to pay more than a portion of her debt or the surgeon's, but leaving the entire sum of money in her hands which she had received at the shop. She stated, also, that

if she would write to an uncle, whose address she gave, and who, in former days, had loved and cherished her fondly, she believed he would repay her and Mr Pratt for their care and money expended on his unfortunate niece.

Nothing but a strong feeling of honesty would have induced Mary to devolve her debts on one who would thus learn her destitution and despair ; but she could not tolerate the idea of Mrs Carr and the surgeon, both industrious, hard-working persons, losing through her misfortune.

A second note was penned—much less coherent—and addressed to ‘ Mr Saunders Frazer, Glentree, Pall Mall, London.’ This Mary pinned carefully inside her bonnet. Her system was painfully exhausted, but the almost frenzied state of her brain banished sleep from her eyelids, and there was no friend near to speak a word of consolation—no kindly touch was ap-

plied to still the throbbings of her fevered pulse.

One there was, not far from her, nearer than any friend could be, even Him in whom she was living and breathing ; but she would not think of Him, she was deaf to the music of His loving voice, and insensible to the longings of His heart towards her.

It was near midnight, and the stroke which should next fall on the ear would sound the parting knell of the old year and usher in the new.

Mary moved noiselessly through the room, tied on her bonnet and cloak, and with the look of one who is resolved to do the deed, but cannot linger over its contemplation, she stole down the narrow staircase, unlocked the door, and glided into the cheerless midnight air.

As she closed the door, and hurried along the street, she started at every sound and

footfall, glancing timidly at the passers-by, and shrinking, in imagination, from the powerful grasp of some strong arm stretched forth to arrest her in her fatal purpose. Onwards she pressed, till, leaving the public thoroughfare, she fled towards the river.

The chill air had cooled her heated brain and nerved her limbs ; and, as she reached the bank, her mind, hitherto so troubled, resumed its clearness and intelligence. She felt for a moment the fearful solemnity of the step she was about to take ; but when tempted to pause, she rebuked the thought, reminding herself of the agonized past, and the terrible present, with its aggravated woe.

‘I can bear it no longer,’ she mentally cried ; ‘ my miserable spirit, my jaded being, must now have rest.’

These thoughts swept through her mind in a shorter moment of time than we have taken to relate them ; and, having chosen her spot, she untied her bonnet, and placing

it on the bank, rushed to the water's edge. Just as she was going to plunge into the deep dark stream, she heard, by her side as it were, a clear, strong voice, uttering the words, 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

Mary started, and turned to look ; but none was near—no human voice had spoken. It was but the impression of divine words hid deep down in her heart, buried alive beneath the rubbish of sin, and now called forth and revived by the omnipotent Spirit of Life. 'Come unto Me, weary, heavy-laden soul, and I will give you rest,'—again the sweet words seemed breathed into her soul. The remembrance of her pastor,—his study, where often he had knelt with her in prayer and spoken of the things of peace and heaven ; in especial, the memory of their farewell interview, when, as he parted with her, ere she left her home, he said, 'When you come to know what it is to be

sick and lonely, and weary in heart, *remember* Who hath said, "*Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" All this rose to Mary's mind with the vividness of reality. Faithful hands had stored her mind with God's word. Faithful hands had filled the water-pots with water, trusting to the Divine Spirit to turn that water into wine. And now the expectations of parent and pastor were being fulfilled. The divine word had come forth with power—the power of a sharp two-edged sword, not to destroy, but to conquer; not to condemn, but to deliver, by leading a poor tempest-tossed soul to the haven of rest.

Scarce knowing what should follow, but irresistibly delivered from the perpetration of her rash act, Mary shiveringly retreated from what had well nigh been to her a watery grave, and snatching up her bonnet, tied it firmly on, and wended her way back

to the streets, with their lamps, and noise, and throng.

Onwards she walked,—expectant, yet not knowing of what, but calmer in spirit,—until her eyes fell on a large building, from the windows of which lights streamed forth. She paused—attracted by the sound of singing; then advancing to the threshold, she peered within. There was no one observing her, and she entered the church. The singing had ceased; and just as she had sunk into the first vacant seat, the clergyman, opening his Bible, slowly and solemnly read the words, ‘Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’

Surprised — impressed — Mary remained riveted on the spot, and, with open eyes and ears, listened to a thrilling and tender appeal. It was a strange, an unexpected scene to her, and at a no less singular hour. The congregation, devoutly anxious to pray

out the dying year, and praise in the new, were in the custom of meeting thus together on the last night of the year; and not a few had found it a birth-place to their souls.

Mary drank in the words, and could have almost believed that the preacher knew her sad story, and was speaking to her. After addressing those who were God's happy children, and counselling them to memorialize the moment by taking a fresh start in the heavenly road, he turned to weary souls and sorrowful spirits, should any such be among his audience—many carrying burdens 'greater than they could bear,' and which threatened to crush them beneath their weight—and conjured them to flee with those burdens to Christ, who, in words of love and truth, cries, 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' The preacher drew many life portraits of waywardness and sin; but however dark those might be, he re-

minded his hearers, that if they would return to their God and Saviour, they would be joyfully received,—nay, that the Father had been seeing afar off such as were perhaps only looking homewards, and had Himself been drawing them with His own cords of redeeming love.

The clergyman concluded, by entreating any who were anxious about their soul's concerns, to remain and converse with him at the close of the present service. As the congregation passed out, Mary, with drooping head and beating heart, still sat: and from the depths of her soul there rose a cry to God for mercy. Motionless she remained, until the sound of retreating footsteps had died away, and she ventured to lift her eyes.

The kind pastor marked the shrinking figure, and came forward to where she was. Tender, inquiring words greeted Mary's ear, such as she used to hear from

her father's lips ; and, completely overcome, she burst into a flood of tears. They were blessed tears, melting the icy barriers by which they had been so long pent, and relieving the poor agonized mind and heart.

The clergyman's wife, who had waited for her husband, was quickly by Mary's side, and left alone with her, a brief sketch of her history was breathed into the lady's sympathizing ear. 'And oh!' she added, 'how I have sinned against God and that Saviour who has said these words this night to me, ma'am!—so bad, that although afraid to live, I dared to die; and oh! where should I now have been had His hand and word not held me back?' and she shook with emotion.

The lady spoke gentle, faithful words to the agitated young woman; and learning her dread of returning to Mrs Carr's, she insisted on her accompanying her and her husband to their own home. There was

an air of truthfulness in Mary's still interesting countenance, which convinced both Mr and Mrs St Clair that her story was real.

The workings of Mary's awakened conscience were sharp and fore ; and so terrible for a time was her anguish of spirit, that her kind friends feared her already shattered system might be altogether impaired. Hers was literally the fulfilment of the Psalmist's words, ' My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning.' More skilful and tender counsellors Mary could not have had than those to whom she found herself so providentially led. They sought to lift her altogether out of herself to Christ, and God blessed their efforts ; and Mary M'Neill was found, ere long, seated at the foot of the cross, and drinking in the double stream of justifying and sanctifying grace.

Oh, what a change did this grace work on her proud, rebellious, disobedient heart !

The scales had fallen from her eyes, and she saw what she was in herself, and what a Saviour she had found.

Under the hospitable roof of her spiritual parents, she quietly remained for several months, filling a situation in their family, which was vacant. She had thus time to review the past, and to see the error of her ways, and the dismal fruits of disobedience and sin. The dark, dark cloud had lowered grimly over her; yet, through God's goodness, instead of crushing her, it had burst with blessings over her head.

In her experience, she began now to see fulfilled the promise, that they who 'seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, shall have all other things added thereto.' Her spirit being at rest,—for God's peace now reigned in her heart,—her health gradually recovered; and her strong character and warm feelings, now sanctified by God's grace, exerted an unusual influence

for good. In her case was manifested the truth, that religion does not change or spoil one's individuality, but only sanctifies and stamps that individuality with a divine impress.

Greatly satisfied and interested with Mary, and her earnest, consistent life, Mr and Mrs St Clair pressed her to continue in their service. With feelings of deepest gratitude towards her benefactors, Mary's heart yet pined to revisit her own home. She dared not write. She believed her mother to be dead and gone, and she trembled lest her fond father too might have sunk heart-broken into the grave. Yet she longed to know the worst, and to visit again the scenes of her happy childhood's days. So, with the hearty acquiescence of Mr and Mrs St Clair, she resolved to set out for Glentree.

'I shall at least,' she said, with trembling lips, 'see their graves, and hear from some

one what I cannot live without,—that they left a pardon for their prodigal child.

Mr and Mrs St Clair provided her with the requisite money for her journey, assuring her, that should it prove true that she was left an orphan in the world, their house should be her home, and her faithful exertions should be recompensed with just remuneration. Full of thanks and gratitude, Mary bade her friends farewell, promising to write them particulars of her arrival at Glentree



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CHAPTER VIII.



MARY, neatly attired, proceeded to the railway station, and took out her ticket for Edinburgh.

Her impatience to know about her home and parents induced her to choose the speediest mode of travelling; and she was soon whirling rapidly along, and taking her last tearful look of the great city. She had leisure to contemplate anew the past, and to review the events of the last nine years of her life.

Bitter as the retrospect was, and fierce as the storm had been which her own folly had raised, there was a calm now; and she felt that there might even have been streaks of sunshine in her sky, had only her parents

been spared. 'But,' she mentally cried, and the tears flowed fast at the thought, '*that* cloud must ever shade my life's horizon.'

It was a lovely summer afternoon when the train from Edinburgh to the North stopped at —— Station, and Mary, alone and shrinking from observation, stepped upon the platform. All the faces she saw were strange; and, afraid to meet any friend who should hastily tell her about her beloved parents—what, she knew, must soon be told—she left her luggage in charge of the station-master, and set off to walk to the cottage. She knew all the shady paths, and was glad when she found herself alone on the old familiar road.

The air was delicious, and the scenery intensely beautiful; but Mary, although sensible of both, could not linger on either, so great was her eager solicitude. Quickly and lightly she trod the meadow grass, now

exchanging it for the heathery moor, and again finding herself by the side of the musical 'burnie.' Her plan was to go to Saunders Frazer's, whose house was a little beyond the cottage, but which she could gain by a short cut, without passing her former home.

As, however, she drew near the avenue leading to the cottage, she felt it impossible to pass without one look at the sweet spot, now possibly inhabited by strangers. Her anxiety increased as she walked down the avenue; and when she stood in sight of the cottage, her heart seemed to have ceased its beatings. The pretty grass was soft as velvet. The bright flowers were flinging their fragrance on the evening breeze, and the warbling birds mingled their parting song with the gurgling of the mountain stream. The latticed window of her mother's room, which opened on the grass, was pushed back. Mary sprang towards it.

a glance, she felt, would tell her whether or not she could still call it *home*.

Seated at a neat table, on which were spread letters—her own, she afterwards learnt—and one single volume, the Bible—were two figures. Mary started, and cried, ‘Mother, mother! and father, too!’ and fell insensible to the ground. But oh, what a joyful awakening was poor Mary’s this time!

It was to find herself laid in her mother’s arms, as of yore, when a child, and her father bending over her with looks of ineffable love.

‘Oh, my Father!’ she exclaimed, with her first conscious breath, and glancing upwards. ‘Oh, blessed Jesus, it is too much, too much joy!’ The parents looked at each other as the words were uttered. It was enough. Their prayers were answered; and she, the erring lamb, was not only brought back to the earthly fold, but had

been drawn into the arms of the good and great Shepherd.

‘I never thought to lie here again, mother,’ said Mary, as, resting her head on her mother’s bosom, she wept tears of thankfulness; ‘but it is true indeed that God gives more than He promises, and specially true that *with* Jesus Christ, He giveth us all things richly to enjoy.’

Much and long they talked, and Mary told her story with unvarnished simplicity. The fact of the trial had never reached the secluded glen; and even had her name appeared as connected with such a case, none would have believed that Donald M’Neill’s Mary was the party arraigned for crime. That she was innocent, her parents assured her they never would have doubted; but her questionable connection with the affair would have sorely grieved them.

Mary did not gloss over her sins while at Mrs Sealing’s, or afterwards, but frankly

confessed them all,—touching lightly on the pain of parting with Arthur, and the misery she had suffered. A sad story she felt it to be of pride and self-will, and of the ruinous effects of bad company.

‘I am a brand plucked from the burning, father,’ she added; ‘and the Divine Word, *remembered* in a time of extremity, saved me from death. How glad Mr Campbell will be to know how God honoured his faithful dealing with my soul!’

Her parents wept with her at the recital; no reproaches passed their lips, no reminder of *their* sorrow; yet she knew it all; and, as she received from them that night their forgiveness and blessing, and felt their cheeks’ warm pressure on her own, she marvelled that the cold, worldly-minded Briggs should have ever succeeded in drawing her away from home, and hearts so lovely and loving.

There was a sweet gathering round the

family altar that happy night. At Mary's request, the story of the prodigal son was read; and when her father closed the Bible, she exclaimed, clasping his hand, 'Oh, father, once I had no home, and was wretched; now this blessed book has given me three homes,—a home for my heart in Christ, a happy home with you and mother now, and a bright home coming above; Christ in all, and all in Christ.'

Mary lay down to rest in her own snowy bed, and in a chamber which was peace. Long she gazed out upon the soft, clear sky, glittering with the angels' lamps, and thought of Him who upholds them by the word of His power, and who, with His loving eye bent also down to earth, had watched over her and protected her in her wayward path, and saved her by the power of His word. At peace with God, in peace and love with her beloved parents, and once more restored to their tender embrace, what

wonder that sleep stole gently over her, and calmed the tumult of excited joy which filled her bosom ! And even in dreamland the shadows were gone, and scenes of home and sunshine flitted in glad visions before her. With noiseless footsteps the father and mother glided into Mary's room, and, with full hearts, bent over their sleeping child. Tear-drops glistened on her cheeks and dark eyelashes, but a smile of heavenly peace irradiated her fair countenance.

'I told you, Donald, that God would give her back to us,' said Mrs M'Neill, as they left the room ; 'but I little thocht it would be with a penitent heart, and so sweet and simple a faith in our dear Redeemer.'

'God gives like Himself, Margaret,' answered Donald ; 'I never doubted that He would bring the lassie some time into the family of the redeemed, in answer to the pleadings o' His own word ; but I had

almost despaired of seeing her wi' my ain auld een here, and, as she is, a happy follower of the lowly Jesus. We have baith got mair than we asked, mair than we looked for, and far, far mair than we deserved, and for it a' the Lord's name be praised.'

'Amen!' said Mrs M'Neill, as she softly closed the door.

CHAPTER IX.



MARY M'NEILL grew day by day in grace, and in the knowledge of her God and Saviour Jesus Christ; and as the inward man progressed, so her outward appearance visibly improved. Her beautiful blue eyes beamed with intelligence and love, and her complexion, which had become so pale and delicate, wore again a healthful glow. Her enthusiastic nature regained its full tone and energy, and with sanctified aims and objects. 'To her to live was Christ.' Hers was no sentimental religion, expending itself in words and aspirations, but a healthful Christianity, which taught her the true end of her existence, and how to accomplish

it aright. Thus the comfort of her parents, and the welfare of all whom her influence could reach, afforded abundant employment for her time.

It may be easily imagined that a strong bond of love was cemented between her and her minister, Mr Campbell; and she soon proved a valuable assistant to him in the Sabbath school, the visitation of the people in Glentree and neighbourhood, and in all his plans for Christian usefulness. She felt how many years of her life had been spent in the service of Satan, and she panted to redeem the time.

Thus two years glided happily away. During this period Mary had kind letters from Mr and Mrs St Clair, encouraging her in her work, and rejoicing with her in her happiness. She also received one letter from her former landlady, acknowledging, after a long interval, the money which Mary had promptly forwarded, for the

full payment of her own debt and Mr Pratt's.

Mrs Carr, after many apologies for her delay in writing, and thanks to Mary for her 'unexpected honesty,' went on to say — 'By the way, I must tell you, Miss, that the young gentleman you used to keep company with, Mister Arthur Jones, has returned from the East. He called here to ask for you, and made many particular inquiries for you. He had lost his health abroad, and was just goin' off to settle in some far distant country, an' turn farmer, which he thought would do much for his health. I devoutly hope it may, Miss, for he is an uncommon nice gentleman, and is greatly improved with his Eastern travels. He was looking very well, and told me he had derived great benefit from some German spars.'

This piece of intelligence caused a great tumult in Mary's heart. Arthur had been

ill, and at home, and now was gone again abroad,—that was all she could gather from Mrs Carr's communication. Mary carried this burden where she now took all her cares, and committed this beloved friend to her Father in heaven. She feared he was not ready to die, and she prayed that God would spare him till salvation was found for his soul.

Mary attracted many to the sweet cottage ; and there were not a few who sought her hand and sung her praises far and wide. But to each and all she turned a deaf ear, assuring herself that all her desire now was to live and die with her parents, and cheer them in their declining years. That she could never love another than Arthur, she knew full well ; and, with her altered views and spiritual desires, she as truly felt that she could not marry a worldly man.

So to a life of single blessedness Mary destined herself, not without emotions of

sorrow, which her religion alone saved from being repining and sad. She strove to believe that 'all was well;' and by giving herself heartily, as we have seen, to the Lord's work, her faith in His love received new strength, and her cheerful temper retained its sunshine.

It was towards the close of a cold winter's afternoon, when Mary, having tastefully arranged the snug sitting-room, drawing the curtains, and making the cheerful hearth bright and neat, drew her stool to her mother's side, and laying her head confidently on her parent's lap, gazed up into the loving face.

A great change, the reader may have discovered, had passed over the spirit of Mrs M'Neill. Her past grief and delicacy of health had been blessed to her soul. The hard lines of her character had become shaded and softened, and the proud temper had yielded to the grace of Him who is

meek and lowly in heart. The ardour of her temperament remained, but its channel and course were changed from the poor vanities of earth to the great things of God and eternity. And her influence for good was great, alike with that of her husband and child. As burning lights, they each shone forth brightly, and many rose up to call them blessed.

‘Mother,’ said Mary, ‘what a wonderful thing Christianity is,—I mean *heart* Christianity! How it sweetens everything! Oh that men would taste for themselves, and see that God is good!’

‘Oh that they would!’ responded Mrs M’Neill, as she stroked her daughter’s sweet face, and pressed the small hand locked in hers; ‘but we are slow, backward learners in a’ that is good, though apt enough in sinfu’ ways.’

‘It is a blessed thing, mother, to feel one’s feet on the Rock, after having sunk

in the horrible pit so low as I did. I can now sing that sweet song of old, "He took me from the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, establishing my ways." But oh, mother, you can't think how bitter a thing it is to look back on a past life of disobedience and sin. If young persons would but trust the wisdom and love of their parents, they would be saved many a fore heart ; and often the sacrifice of home, and friends, and peace of conscience, is made for the heartless acquaintanceships of the wicked, who deceive them in the end, and not unfrequently drag them down along with them. Briggs was my evil star, mother ; and how low she has fallen now,—in a pauper's lunatic asylum, the victim of intemperance ! If there are those in the world whose life I envy, it is that of young Christians,—those whose early bright days, and buoyant, ardent hearts, are sanctified to God and His Christ.

I can never give my best days to God, mother.'

'No, my bairn ; but bless the Lord that He has given you Himself, and a heart to trust and love Him ; and many years may you be spared, my lassie, to serve Him wi' gladness, redeeming the time.'

'I little thought, mother, when father taught me the Bible, and bore so patiently with my wicked temper and ways, that ever I should sink so low, and find the word so precious to my soul. But it is a lesson to sow the seed beside all waters ; for though it may seem to be choked and buried, God's Spirit, as in my case, can call it forth, and cause it to be savingly *remembered* and blessed. For, mother, had not the word been hid in my heart, it had not been there to be remembered, and but for it I had perished ; and you cannot think, mother, how all throughout my spiritual struggle, after that terrible night, I was

helped by passages and texts coming to mind which father had taught me long ago. Even when I was so perplexed, that, unable to read, I could only pray, texts exactly suitable to my state were recalled as by an angel's touch. It is a great encouragement in working for God, to remember, as Mr Campbell has often said, that while it is God's prerogative to bless, it is man's privilege to work. But oh, mother, how many I know who, I fear, had no such sowing time, and no such sowers, as I have had !' Mary was thinking of Arthur.

Her mother replied, knowing of whom she thought, ' Dinna limit God's love, my bairn ; you know that the shortest way to win a soul is round by heaven, and that whatever our Father sees to be good for us, He will not withhold.'

' I know it, mother, I know it,' said Mary, earnestly ; ' but how good it is to be reminded of His promises !'

In sweet converse the mother and daughter remained. The labours of the day were past, and they expected Donald every moment. He had been absent all day, at a neighbouring farm, to which a new tenant had come ; and as the Duke had let it to an Englishman, Donald had many kind instructions to bestow.

At last the tread of his horse's feet was heard, and Mary flew to the door to welcome him. His slippers were warm and ready, and the table was spread with a snowy cloth, on which tea and toast, cold meat, home-made scones and cakes, looked most inviting. But as the dear old man alighted, and, giving his horse to the boy who awaited his coming, walked briskly into his cheerful home, the fairest sight in his eyes was his child, sweet Mary M'Neill.

There she stood at the door, simply but prettily attired, in a dark stuff dress, with white collar and sleeves, and her rich

brown hair wound in filken folds round her beautiful head ; her eyes sparkled with delight, as she met her father, and the glow on her cheeks spoke of health and peace.

Donald pressed a kiss on her cheek ; and then turning to a gentleman who was with him, and who had just jumped from his horse, he said, ' My daughter, Mr Jones Mary, the new tenant to Glenrioch.'

Mary, who, in the gloaming, had not observed another horseman, looked towards the stranger, and was just going to welcome him to their evening meal, when another glance made her start—was it a dream, or a mere momentary and fancied resemblance ? No ! it was no delusion, no dream ; and the next moment Mary found her hand pressed as none but Arthur could, and the words fell like music on her ear, ' Mary, my love, do you—can you forgive me all ?'

Donald had passed into the house while

this brief interview took place. Mary, recalling the terms on which Arthur had parted with her, strove to retain her woman's dignity ; but no sooner had Arthur walked into the lighted parlour, and been introduced by Donald to Mrs M'Neill, than, without explanation or apology, he entreated to be left with Mary alone, and the kind couple, wondering at the request, immediately withdrew.

Arthur's tale was quickly told. Distressed and nearly heart-broken at the garbled and very exaggerated account which he had elicited of Mary's past career, he had, as he informed her in his letter, proceeded abroad to take up the situation he had obtained. But his health failed, and so seriously was his constitution impaired, that at the end of a few months he was obliged to resign his appointment.

Then, when set aside, and compelled to look into the dismal grave, as his possible

speedy resting-place, his alarmed conscience had spoken out, and forced him to think of a future life. He sought, by change of scene, and plunging into such excitement as the feeble state of his health permitted, to drive the 'serious fit' from his mind. But it would not be driven away, and his mental condition became more painful than his physical, and he had no friend to speak a word of counsel in that strange land.

Ordered by his medical man to leave a climate which had proved so hurtful to his constitution, Arthur proceeded homewards, by gentle stages—diverging from the direct course to a continental town, where the mineral baths, he fondly hoped, would do much to restore him. And here he found not only healing for his weak body, but balm for his wounded spirit.

By a singular coincidence, the Duke of B—— and his family were resident at this celebrated spa. His eldest daughter and

her husband were also with their ducal parents. Both earnest Christians, Sir George and Lady Eleanor Hay fought, wherever they were, to do good as they had opportunity, and were ever on the outlook for occasions of usefulness. They heard, in the course of their visitings, of the sick young Englishman, and Lady Eleanor paid him an early visit, carrying with her some delicious fruit and flowers.

Arthur was charmed with the unaffected piety and elegant manners of the high-born lady who had come to cheer him in his loneliness, and begged her to renew her visit. To this she readily assented; and having obtained entrance for herself into his heart, she rested not till, with God's blessing on her efforts, she had gained entrance, too, for her precious Saviour. By line upon line, and precept upon precept, as the invalid could bear it, this instrument of the Holy Spirit led Arthur to see his

own vileness and Christ's suitableness to his condition, and, with simple faith, he cast himself on the word and work of Christ. Oh, what rest ! Oh, what peace, flowed, for the first time as a river, in the young man's heart !

Lady Eleanor soon gained from him his history—how he was an orphan and friendless in the world, and fearful lest his health might prevent him being again engaged in commercial pursuits. He found his kind friends interested in all his plans and projects ; and when Lady Eleanor suggested a farm as an occupation, she but anticipated the wishes and longings of the young man's heart. But how could such hopes be realized ? More easily than Arthur could have deemed possible. The Duke had become interested in his daughter's protégée, and said to her, that as his farm of Glenrioch would be to let by another year, he should be willing to take Jones as his

tenant, if he would, in the intervening months, study agriculture and fit himself for a farmer's life.

To so kind a proposition Arthur joyfully consented ; and having ample means of his own, increased by the recent death of his last surviving uncle, he had no barrier in the way of making himself master of his new profession. His recruited constitution improved steadily with his healthful life and occupation, and a spirit at rest with God conduced to the vigour of his physical being.

At a subsequent period Lady Eleanor heard from him the passages of his life, which were, he told her, indissolubly interwoven with Mary M'Neill. He reproached himself bitterly with having treated her cruelly, and possibly driven her to ruin, and with deep emotion, added, that he prayed for her as for his own soul, and that he never should cease to intercede for her while life was

granted. Thankfully aware of the gracious change in Mary's heart also, and of her return home, Lady Eleanor told him all she knew. With wonder and love, Arthur adored God's goodness; and when he learned that she resided within two miles of Glenrioch, whether he was so soon to be removed, his joy knew no bounds.

'And now, Mary,' said Arthur, as he finished his history, which, for the sake of our readers, we have thus condensed—'say, are you free to love me again?' He paused, anxiously.

Mary flushed crimson; and, as she hid her face in her hands, she whispered, 'Again—Arthur—again—I have never ceased to love you, and never—never shall.'

'Be mine, then, dearest,' said the fine young man, his voice tremulous with deep feeling; 'and oh, shall it not be the one aim of our happy lives to glorify that God and Saviour who has led us both by a way that

we knew not, and has brought us thus together, never again to part.'

At this stage of affairs, Mrs M'Neill, having fruitlessly repeated a series of knocks at the parlour-door, entered the room. Mary sprang to her mother; and her father appearing at the same moment, she exclaimed, 'Father, mother, it is Arthur—my own Arthur—Arthur Jones!' With unaffected simplicity the worthy couple welcomed the new young farmer to Glenrioch; and such good use did Arthur make of his time, that when he left the cottage that night, he carried with him the full consent of Mary's parents to her speedy union with himself.

These passages from this 'story of grace' have already extended so far, that we must, however reluctantly, forbear following Mary to her new home, or even glancing at her happiness. One great purpose, however, in recounting the past scenes of her life,

shall be accomplished, should we have succeeded in showing that God's ways, and only His, are ways of pleasantness, and that all His paths are peace. In the Holy Spirit's hand, it was God's word of promise, *remembered* in the perilous hour, which saved Mary M'Neill from death, and led her to a Saviour God. That same word proved ever afterwards 'a lamp to her feet, and a light to her path.' In her happy experience, and in Arthur's too, was fulfilled the divine declaration, that in Christ Jesus all the promises of God are yea and amen; and that, having first the kingdom of God, all things should be added thereto.

But let it be yours, dear reader, to remember *now* that word, and ere your best days are squandered and spent, yield yourself *now* to that God and Saviour who gave Himself for sinners, and who, knowing well the sin and temptation which should visit us each one, cries in accents of love, 'Come

unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' 'Now is the accepted time; behold, this is the day of salvation.'

And to parents and teachers we say, Sow the good seed; sow it whether it be watered with tears or funned with smiles—sow it faithfully, even though the soil on which it may be cast appear sterile and dead; and looking up for God's enriching blessing, it shall produce in some thirty, in some sixty, and in some even an hundred-fold.

HE liveth long who liveth well,—

All other life is short and vain ;

He liveth longest who can tell

Of living most for heavenly gain.

He liveth long who liveth well,—

All else is being cast away ;

He liveth longest who can tell

Of true things truly done each day

Waste not thy being ; back to Him
Who freely gave it, freely give ;
Else is that being but a dream,—
'Tis but to *be*, and not to *live*.

Be wise, and use thy wisdom well,
Who wisdom *speaks* must *live* it too:
He is the wisest who can tell
How first he *lived*, then *spoke* the true.

Fill up each hour with what will last ;
Buy up the moments as they go ;
The life above, when this is past,
Is the ripe fruit of life below.

Hymns of Faith and Hope.



