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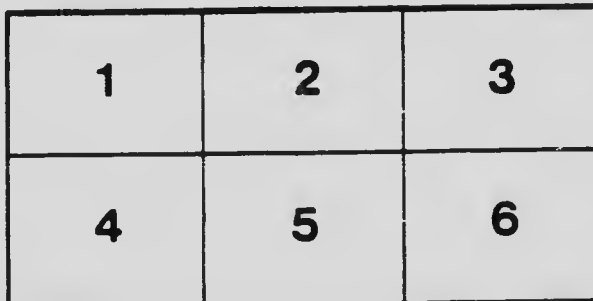
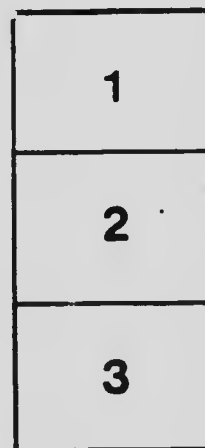
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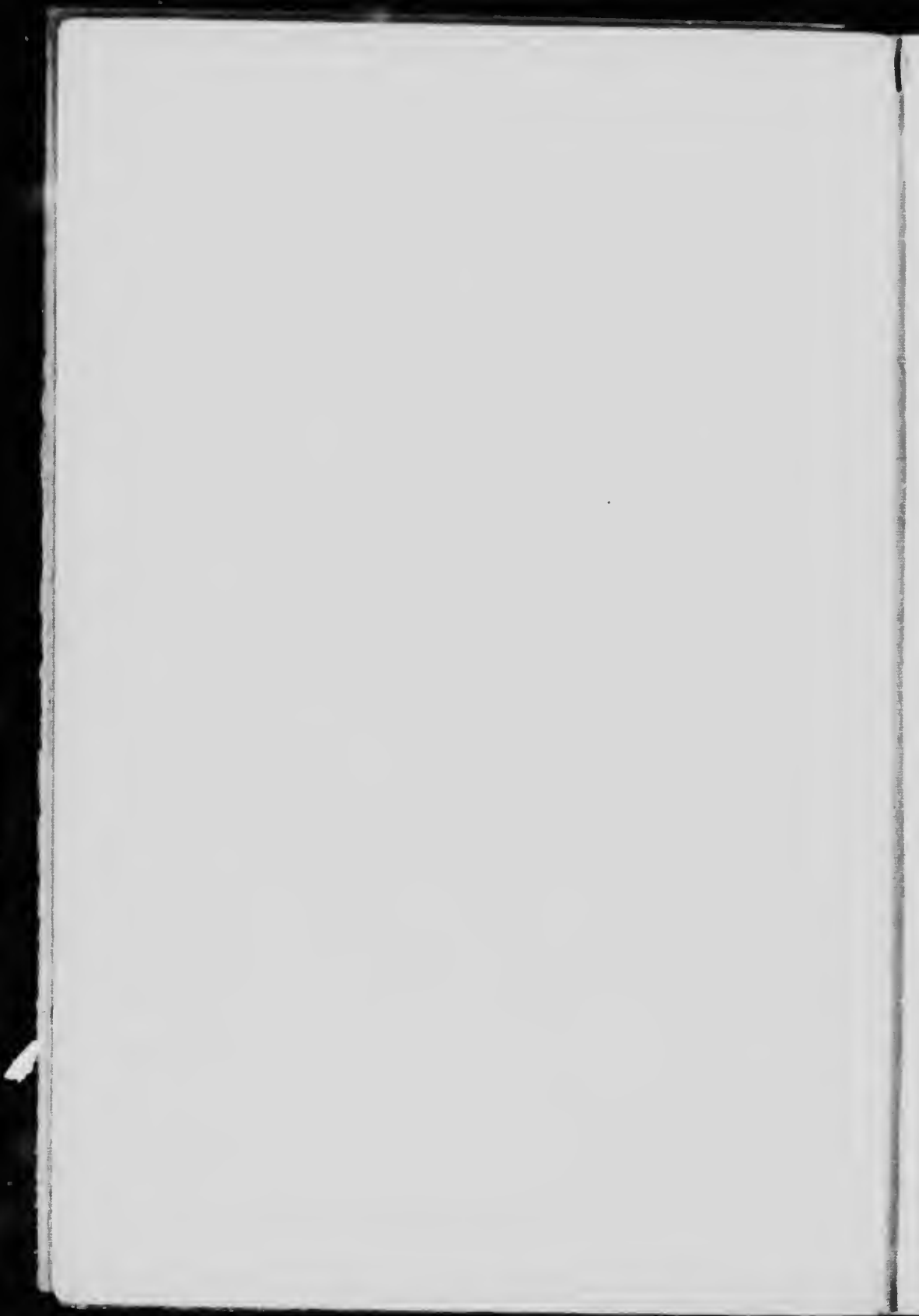


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CHAPTER I

OONA

It was on a Sabbath morning, about a hundred years ago, that our story opens. The Sabbath was then a high day, north of the Tweed, for the people were still overshadowed by great memories of stress and turmoil, when men and women had dared and endured much for conscience' sake. The day was therefore prized, not only on account of its sacred origin, but also because it was linked in the national mind with convictions and institutions which had become a part of the people's existence.

There were, of course, not a few exceptions, and some of these were sufficiently flagrant to challenge attention.

Among the stricter sort the Sabbath really began on the preceding day, with a brave effort to collect their thoughts and adjust their emotions for the supreme events of the sacred services before them.

For the rest, it must be confessed the fun ran fast and furious until the parish clock chimed twelve, and then by common consent they stopped, and began to make excuses with some amazement at their own temerity. Their religious life, though in its measure sincere, was for many sapless and uninteresting, and once in a while not a few plunged into a wild world of their own after this fashion, and cheered their flesh with wine, and played the fool, and forgot the Catechism and the Covenant, only to fall back again to the dead calm and decorous dulness of their existence. The impressive stillness which settled over the whole community among the wee sma' hours, by morning had passed into a general solemnity which was positively oppressive. Yet for all that, most of the men-folk had gone home as fou' and happy as usquebaugh could make them; but thanks to their tough constitutions or their judicious choice of liquors, or both, they

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were now on their way to the Kirk without any outward and visible sign of their late indulgence. In short, the turn-out partook somewhat of the character of a Church parade, and a man's ability to make a creditable appearance was taken as a fair test of his moderation. He was set down as a 'poor feckless creature' who could not carry his liquor like a man, and be douce and pious withal.

The village, from an architectural point of view, was very much like the people themselves, solid, sturdy, and unadorned. The houses were built of stone, for stability, with small regard to beauty of form, and with such severe uniformity that you might imagine they had been set down there 'en bloc' by wholesale contract, as a standing warning against the deadly sins of beauty and harmony. And now upon this blessed Sabbath morning, to add to the general 'doolness,' all pious, kirk-gangin' folk were careful to draw their window-blinds down to the sills as a token of respect for the sacred day. In fact, the cheerful Sunday was treated to funeral honours all over the town.

What was called the town proper consisted of two straggling streets, which crossed in the centre of the business part of the village, and ran for many miles far beyond the parish limits. A few isolated cottages and farm-houses were scattered on the outskirts over a considerable area, looking like stranded wrecks past which the tide of life had swept, leaving them high and dry and solitary. Some of these continued to maintain an air of superiority, as though scorning to stoop to any new-fangled ways introduced by mere men in the pride of their hearts, though the world that had suited their fathers was not, forsooth, good enough for their sons.

Of a different sort was a cottage off the main road, and about two miles from the village. It was of more recent date, and showed many signs of taste in its construction. The situation would have pleased an artist or a student, for it looked out on the one side upon a grass-grown lane which led down to a charming stretch of ancient woodland, of some extent, and

on the other offered a fair prospect of moor, broken here and there by deep ravines cut into fantastic shapes by spring torrents, impatient to reach the sea.

The occupants of the cottage were three in number, and as we shall frequently hear of them in the course of this story, we must take time to make their acquaintance.

Mrs Janet McLean was at this time a widow well on in years, but still hale and hearty. She was a native of the district although born in another parish, and was married at seventeen to Peter McLean. Sometimes in the gloamin', when the spirit of the past moved her, she had much to say about this great event of her life, which darkened so soon after so bright a dawn, and left her for a time in mirk night.

At the time of their marriage, Peter was under-steward at Fosseway Hall, then a gay, heartsome place, although at times a trifle wild. It was not for some years afterwards that the fearful doings at the Hall attracted attention, and became matter of common talk. Peter McLean was a proud man when he became steward in his own right, for the McLeans had served the Aynsworths for many generations, and wherever you found an Aynsworth of the North, you were sure to find a McLean as his trusty henchman.

When the dark days overtook Fosseway, and the old Lord left his country, never, as events proved, to return, Peter McLean refusing to serve another in the old place, moved away from the district and eventually drifted into England, a downcast and broken-hearted man. The years passed, and the McLeans prospered in their new home, continuing as they began, a devoted, wholesome-hearted couple, their simple faith and sturdy independence never forsaking them.

But sorrow at 'ast shadowed their little household, when their only daughter, Marion, died after a brief illness. 'The Lord hath long spared us affliction,' Peter said softly, in his native tongue, 'but now His hand is heavy upon us, yet we maun trust to Him to gi'e us strength to larn that it is His hand, even tho' the licht o' our een is ta'en awa' frae us.' It was at

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once a brave and a consoling thought, and fitted well the character o' the man.

Only two years afterwards the crowning sorrow of Janet's life overtook her, when Peter McLean followed his daughter into the land of shadow—perhaps, we should say, of supreme realities. It was a sorrow to the dying man that he should be laid in English earth, 'far away from blithe and bonnic Scotland,' but he faced the end as only good men can, comforting his wife to the last. 'Dinna greet sair, Janet,' he said with his last breath, 'it is just hame-gangin', and we maun lippen to His sure word that we sal meet at the lang last!—Yea, tho' I gang thro' the dead mirk, e'en thar sal I dread nae scathin'—The Lord is my herd, nae want sal ta' me!' And so he fell asleep.

Janet was thus left in a strange country, as she said, to face the future alone with Oona, her foster-child for whom she had cared from her early childhood, and who was now a sweet young maiden, just entering upon womanhood. She had promised her husband before he died to return to her own country, and fortunately the return of her half-brother, Alan Graham, from the Peninsula, smoothed the way. He had been invalided with many others who had seen war in its most terrible form, and had earned a pension for his long service.

Alan had been prudent as well as brave, and had secured a good few hundred pounds besides prize-money, which seemed a little fortune in his modest circumstances. When, therefore, he cast in his lot with his widowed sister, it was as a man of substance whose gear entitled him to comfort and consideration.

On the rare occasions when Alan spent an evening in a cosy corner of the Black Bull Inn, mine host treated him as a distinguished guest, and listened breathlessly while he fought his battles o'er again, between whiffs of tobacco and sips of strong waters. His tales provoked thirst in others, if not in himself, and many a sturdy fellow tossed off bumpers to the confusion of Bony and the success of General Wellington, while the old soldier talked of his battles past and to come, for at these times of exaltation he felt

equal to anything. Old soldier as he was, he disappointed his cronies by refusing to drink as much as an old campaigner was supposed to be entitled to, and when urged on that score he was apt to grow testy.

'Caramba man!' he would say, wrathfully, 'I ken what I am aboot. Thunder and lightning! Do you expect Alan Graham to pay forfeits to that tune? I am no coward, I tell you; I have stood shoulder to shoulder with the old "die hard" at Albuera; but I would sooner face a French army than Oona's brown een if I sud disremember mysel' in ony sic manner! Trust an auld Fusilier for kennin' what he daurna' do! Aye, trust him, I say!'

Oona was the gentle genius of their home, and when Alan invoked her name thus, there was nothing more to be said, and all his cronies soon found that out.

On the Sabbath morning referred to, the occupants of the cottage were thrown into an unwonted state of excitement, the cause being out of all proportion to the storm which ensued. Janet was getting ready for the Kirk, and Alan was similarly occupied, when Oona, who had been wandering about the cottage garden, and had turned to enter the house, was accosted by a gentleman whose approach she had not noticed, and who wished to learn the nearest way to a neighbouring village. Having given the information asked for, she lingered, watching the retreat-in figure. Strangers were not very numerous in the neighbourhood of the cottage, and this gentleman for some reason or other awakened uncommon interest, and the looks which followed him were flattering enough, had he only known it, or been at leisure to think of such things.

Janet had seen the stranger approach, and now called Oona more than once, but called to deaf ears. She could stand it no longer, and in a storm of excitement, quite unusual with her, she rushed to the door, assailing her foster-child with words of strange bitterness.

'You muckle taupie, is that the way you glour at strange folk on a Sabbath morn, when you sud be thinkin' o' ither things?'

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Before the young girl could comprehend what was meant, for Janet was devoted to her foster-child, and uniformly gentle, a tall fellow who had been sunning himself unobserved on the other side of the hedge, pushed his way through into the lane, and raising his bonnet to the young girl, answered Janet in his own fashion, not without some heat: 'Hold hard, guid wife, a lass maun hae her fling, Sabbath or no Sabbath, and what for no? A'boddy canna be a saunt even if ye are ane yoursel' an' my faith, sair saunts are maist o' them!'

'Donald MacAlpin,' retorted Janet, delighted to find some way of giving vent to her righteous vexation without reflecting on Oona,—'haud your tongue, and mind your ain proper business. Ilka Christian body maun bring up their ain bairns in their ain way. An' my certies! the hale country kens the awfu' example you set your laddies, puir things!' Before Janet had finished, Donald, with a swift glance at Oona which brought the colour to her cheek, was out of ear shot, swinging along like a true Highlander and singing with all his might:

"No Churchman am I for to rail and to write,
No statesman or soldier to plot or to fight,
No sly man of business, contriving a snare,
For a big-bellied bottle's the whole of my care.
Tra la la——"

Janet forgot everything for the moment in her horror of such audacious profanity. 'Did ever onybody hear the likes o' yon, on the very Sabbath! Preserve us a', he is a very fearfu' mon,—an unco fearfu' mon!' And then, as a counter-blast and to calm her own mind, she sang in a quivering voice, which had seen better days:

'Oh taste and see that God is good!
Who trusts in Him is blessed.
Fear God His saints, none that Him fear
Shall be with want oppressed.

The lion's young may hungry be,
 And they may lack their food,
 But they that truly seek the Lord
 Shall not lack any good.'

Before she had finished, her ruffled plumes were smoothed, as became the day and her profession, and when the last quaver had been duly rendered she called to Oona in eager, caressing tones, 'Rin awa', lassie, an' pit on your brow claes, we mauna be late for the Kirk the day, an' dinna forget your bawbee, for you mind a' the siller is set apart the day for the missionaries wha preach to the puir black creatures in heathen lands. How thankfu' we sud be, lassie, that we were born a natural colour an' amang Christian folk; ah, how thankfu'.'

'Wha was the gentleman, grannie, that you wudna let me keek at the morn?'

'What for sud you be asking sic a question, lassie?'

'I dinna ken, grannie dear, only he looks like some-one I hae seen somewhere.'

'Na, na, lassie, ye hae never seen him onywhere. Happen he may be the young laird hame frae foreign parts. But what for dinna' ye speak the good English Mister Murray learned you?'

'Why, grannie!' Oona said, laughing merrily, 'you always speak Scotch, and you were just now scolding me in broader Scotch than ever!'

'I ken it, my bonnie bairn!' Janet said penitently, 'but I was taken unawares. Oh, Satan gangeth about like a roarin' lion, and an auld serpent, and an angel o' licht, and we fa' e'en when we least expect it! The Lord forgie us, lassie; the Lord forgie us a'.— But what for sud he look at you yon gate?' she continued in spite of herself.

'Oh, grannie,' the young girl said, in genuine surprise and with a touch of colour, 'I did not know that the laird as you call him looked at me at all. Did he really?'

'Oh, well,' Janet said, by no means satisfied, 'men folk are no to be trusted, and they do most onything whiles!'

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'The young laird?' Oona said questioningly.

'I dinna ken aught about the young laird, lassie,' Janet replied impatiently, 'I dinna ken!'

But Oona was not so easily satisfied. Her world had been a narrow one, and few outside interests had touched her life, and the coming of the stranger filled her thoughts unbidden with she knew not what. 'Will he gang to the Kirk?' she ventured to ask after a pause, but the subject was for some reason uninviting to her companion.

'I ken naething about the laird's ganging's!' Janet answered, with an unusual touch of impatience. 'Young men dinna gang to Kirk as they once did. I mind my grandfather once telling of the God-fearing laddies who were as blithe and braw as ony, and as brave as they were braw; naething could make them lee to their ain sel's or to ony ither body, nor deny Christ their King,—and while we are ganging to the Kirk, I'll tell you what my grandfather tell't me lang syne.

'It was in the days o' the Covenanters, when not only men, but women and bairns were ready to die for the very truth o' the Most High. Atweel! there were four bonnie laddies aboot ane-an'-twenty, an' when in sore danger they took to the hills, like sae mony mair, for the awfu' Claverhouse was on their track. He was cruel and heartless beyond most, and did his work like a blood-hound eager for slaughter, and not like a man hunting men. Ah, me! Ah, me!

'The four laddies wandered about the hills o' Lanark, taking refuge, as their necessities became sharp, in the nooks and crannies o' the rocks aboot the Falls o' Clyde, and at ither times in the Loudon Hills, or in the desolate bits o' muirland where gullies had been dug out by the mountain torrents. Their dark plaids blended so weel with the heather that only a practised e'e, trained to take in the least feature o' the landscape, could find them.'

Oona had heard so many of Janet's Covenanting stories that she felt in no way constrained to listen with very close attention, and had abandoned herself to her own world of dreams when her attention was arrested by the closing words.

'It was on a July day,' Janet was saying, 'when they were foot-sore and spent with hunger and watching, that they sat down to rest, and consider what was best under the cruel circumstances.'

'The spot was not well chosen, but as it was only for a short time they were less careful than their wont. They were, however, more spent than they knew, and in spite of their fears and best resolves they were all soon asleep. Their sleep was long and deep, and their dreams were full of haunting terror. They heard the trampling of horses, the oaths of Claverhouse's dare-devil troopers, and felt the touch of cold steel.'

'They started up with a confused sense of horror, to find themselves surrounded by soldiers of the King, and knew that neither resistance nor flight was possible. A recent law had empowered Claverhouse to pass sentence and to execute his prisoners three hours afterwards, and the laddies were ordered to prepare to die.'

'One was held as a prisoner to be sent to Edinburgh, and so was compelled to witness the execution of his friends. He was my grandfather, lassie, and lived to a good old age. He escaped from his cruel persecutors. Oh! it was fearsome, sudden and terrible! They were young, and life was strong within them and sweet withal, but deliverance there was nane! They sang the twenty-third psalm together, and were lifted far above fear as they sang; then they shook hands with one another, and stood up to die. Soon the report of carbines smote upon the summer air, and the three brave laddies lay stark among the heather. Claverhouse examined the bodies carefully to make sure that the work was done effectually, made a note of the execution in his pocket-book, and then calling his men together rode off, leaving death in possession of the desolate moorland.'

This account is given as Oona recalled it long after. Janet seemed different that day, somehow. There was a mental elation about her which for the moment touched common things with new life and gave vividness to the past. Oona had at last caught the infec-

tion of the moment, until the tragedy moved her to passionate indignation.

'The wretches!' she exclaimed, 'I loathe and hate them! I could kill them without mercy, without pity, without sparing; they should have in full measure what they have given others!'

Janet was startled—was this her foster-child whose sweet gentleness had never once been ruffled? What if the time should come when this young girl should discover she had personal wrongs to resent, and should shew the same fierce spirit—what then? Ah! What then!

Janet's hand trembled as she laid it upon her child's arm with a strange, insistent pressure. 'Hush, lassie,' she said, searching Oona's face with keen scrutiny, "'Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord.'" They have a' gone to their account lang syne. It is a fearfu' thing, lassie, to fa' into the ha:d o' the leevin' God, but to fa' oot o' His hands, lassie, and to be left to the just misery we have earned is warst o' a'. Dinna think mair aboot it the noo, ma bairn, ye are young, and the warld is a gey sweet and bonnie place, even tho' mony be wicked and cruel whiles to ane anither. The Almighty maketh the grass to grow green and tender over the graves o' the warst, as well as over the graves o' the best and dearest, and daisies look as bonnie over the one as over the other. It is His way, lassie, and it maun be best. When the wicked were a' drowned, and only Noah and two or three or mayhap mair were saved in the Ark. He set a bow in the very clouds and made it beautiful e'en over a drowned warld, na doot to help the leevin' to forget the misery and sin, and trust Him that a' would be well in the end. And syne we mauna think owre muckle o' the past, but tak' tent o' the present, and thank Him for a' cor mercies, for they are neither few nor sma'.'

How far Oona followed Janet in her sage advice it is hard to say. They were now no longer alone, many groups and families had lingered, like themselves, on their way to the Kirk, for the day was perfect in all the brightness of Spring sunshine, and the beauty of the new-born leaves and the cheerfu' buoyancy of life

had touched more than one. Why should we not oftener sing the perfume of the flowers, and listen to the voice of nature, chanting hope and love in the sunshine and the clinging vine, and drink in the glory and beauty of the blue sky and the far distant hills?

They were a little late, but just in time to see Alan Graham, who had been Beadle now for more than a year, march into the Kirk with solemn state, and then carry the Bible and Psalm-book from the pulpit into the vestry, that the Minister might make his selections for the day, and place the broad book-markers in their proper places. The Kirk was never addicted to an ornate service, the main thing was to get the Minister into the pulpit: but to accomplish this, the service of a grave, dignified and discreet man was indispensable. Once the Minister was safely in the pulpit, he was generally able to acquit himself creditably, but to get him there required both time and skill. The man upon whom this important duty rested had of course to be uniformed with becoming care, and the garb in use was of a somewhat curious semi-clerical fashion. A dress-coat well cut away, a shirt-front of ample dimensions, and a neck-cloth deep and stiff, over a collar well up to the ears—thus attired, had he been carrying the colours of his regiment into action, he could not have walked with greater majesty; and yet there was a touch of awe and reverence peculiar to the occasion which moved the old soldier strangely. To be sure, the Minister was a great man, and had to do all the praying and preaching out of his own head, but he, Alan Graham, had to carry the Bible into the pulpit, and see that a' things were in order before the Minister could do anything whatever!

The preliminaries were not all complete even when Alan had shut the pulpit door on the Reverend David Fordice, and left him in solitary grandeur high above the heads of the congregation; his appearance in the pulpit was the signal for the entrance of two sedate men from another vestry, who gravely took their places in a lesser pulpit immediately in front of the Minister's distinguished position. Their duties began after the offering of a short prayer by the Minister—

not that the prayer was short, except as compared with the long prayer, which occupied half an hour or more for its full utterance, during which the congregation stood with bowed heads.

On this occasion the Reverend David Fordice looked over his audience with the keen and commanding eagerness of a man who had a message, and who would speak it without faltering. Then with ungloved hands, he opened the Psalm-book and announced in a clear voice, the one hundred and forty-fifth Psalm, second version. There was a flutter of leaves of the books all over the congregation, and a hush of expectancy. To lead the singing was the part of the sedate persons already mentioned. They rose slowly, and producing a pair of tuning-forks, struck them skilfully on the desk in front of them, touched them with their teeth, then held them to their ear, hummed the note critically, cleared their throats, and with one or two little efforts started off at an easy pace, the congregation following at a proper distance, with unmistakable lung power and genuine fervour.

The old tune rose and fell as it went on its solemn way up and down the scale, and clear and sweet and bell-like came the sound of Oona's voice. The laird had vanished from her thoughts, and Claverhouse and his dragoons were clean forgotten as she poured out her heart in the quaint and grandly expressed song of praise. She sang with the joy and satisfaction of one able to let the pent-up fervour of the soul have full play. The ease with which she took the higher notes, the strength and certainty of every tone, had a restful fascination about it which took more than one heart captive. But the young laird was not there; had he been, the course of his family history might have been different. Perhaps! Who can tell?

Janet was greatly impressed by the sermon, and said so to an elderly neighbour, leaving the Kirk. A grand sermon, she remarked heartily; a very grand sermon!

'Ca' ye yon a graun' sermon?' said her companion. 'Weel, happen it may be as the world is the noo, but no' like the sermons I heard in my younger days! Na—no' like them ava!'

'Weel, I dinna mind ony muckle better,' said Janet, a little taken aback by Elspat Gilchrist's lack of appreciation of the Minister.

'Oh, but ye were sae lang sooth (south),' was the ready answer, 'and they dinna ken hoc to preach sooth like oor ain folk, but just hae puir playactor bodies, in white sarks and tippets, wha do a kind o' singin' o' their ain, with profane music-machines and sic-like! Na, na, they dinna ken aught aboot real sermons sooth!

'When I war young the Minister always preached wi' a great power o' water, greeting and swating, an' ne'er forgetting the brinstane, an' the effectual callin', an' the predestination, an' changed his sark after a diet o' warship as it behooved him as ane wha wrestled wi' Satan for souls!'

'Weel, weel, ye may be richt,' Janet said meekly, knowing Elspat's capacity for talk. 'I like my ain Kirk, which has always stood for Christ's Crown and Covenant, better than ony ither, but I hae learned mony thing sooth, and when my daughter and husband were laid to rest and my heart was sair, sair, I didna' mind the Minister's bit tippets and things, but only the words o' hope and comfort, which helped me in my sair need to see beyond the bitter parting to a gladsome meeting in a better world! Ah, me!'

'Lack-a-day, Janet, my woman,' said the far from implacable gossip, 'we hae a' seen sorrow in oor time, and we maun a' think oor ain thought whiles!— Did ye no' hear that the young laird is hame from the Lord kens whare, and that they hae heard o' it at the Hall, and that the Squire has had ane o' his bad turns, and has sent for Master Reginald?'

All this was communicated breathlessly, while Janet stood pale and trembling, wondering what it could mean.

Elspat had a blissful moment of enjoyment as she witnessed Janet's visible agitation. 'I was a housemaid till ye,' she reminded her companion, as a parting word, 'in the auld Laird's time, and I mind mony things which ithers may hae forgotten.'

Janet was glad to reach her own cottage, and thankful that Oona had remained at the manse, so that she

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had at least until next day to think over many things and take counsel with Alan Graham. And thus it happens that the important events of our lives frequently steal upon us unawares, and when the moment has passed we have also passed into a new world of thought or purpose, which colours all our after years.

CHAPTER II

THE YOUNG LAIRD

THE young laird, as Janet called him—or Clifford Aynsworth, to give him the name by which he desired to be known at this time—after speaking to Oona, continued on his way, without noticing any one, and perhaps without even hearing the Church bells, nor did his presence challenge much observation in the little community, to which he had returned unannounced after an absence of many years. Small wonder if he was much absorbed in his own thoughts that morning. He was practically a landless laird, if he was a laird at all, yet the soil he trod for many broad acres had been his birthright, as it had been his fathers' before him for generations, and now he visited it once more—a landless man—a stranger in the very home and cradle of his race.

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune had fallen upon him and his. Should he succumb, bow his head, and accept defeat like a beaten man, submit to his lot as inevitable, and knock under, or take up arms against this very deluge of ill-fortune, and rebuild in despite of fate the shattered prestige of his name?

Such were the thoughts which surged through the young man's brain as he hastened on his way, oblivious of Kirk bells, or kirk-goers or aught else.

Twenty odd years had wrought many changes in the district, and well-nigh obliterated old rural landmarks.

The face of the country was now dotted for many miles with coal-pits and iron-works, and the mountains of débris resulting from their presence marring indeed the beauty of the landscape, but bringing in millions in hard cash to swell the wealth of the fortunate owners. It was not the prospect Aynsworth expected, and his surprise was great. He had dreamt of culti-

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vated lands, comfortable homesteads, neat cottages with trim gardens, and instead he found rubbish heaps and long rows of pitmen's houses, devoid of beauty or comfort, mere shelters rather than human homes. 'Truly,' he thought, 'these sturdy bread-winners are content with uncommonly small mercies while occupied in building up fortunes for other men, who care little for the human instruments that earn their millions!' He had thrown himself down under the sheltering branches of an ancient oak, after a long walk, and lost in his own musings he might have forgotten that the afternoon was well advanced, had he not been reminded by an uncomfortable sensation that he had eaten nothing since early morning, and had still some miles to go before he could procure food and lodging.

He was soon on his feet again and swinging along through the woods, whistling and keeping step to his own music soldier fashion. The well-beaten path he was on crossed a broad pasture field of several acres, where a few noble trees gave grateful shelter to a fine herd of cattle, as they contentedly cropped the sweet grass. Despite the change that were everywhere, there was something exhilarating in the prospect before him, and he found himself for some reason in joyful sympathy with all nature. The squirrels playing hide-and-seek among the branches, and scolding vigorously as they scampered off to a safe distance, fitted into the boyish mood of hopefulness which had crept into his mind unbidden, and gave him unspeakable delight. A lark rose from almost under his feet, and soaring skyward poured out his note as fast and numerous as rain-drops in a summer shower.

'Ah!' he said to himself as he stood looking up at the little songster, 'you keep tryst in the clouds although you nest in the dull brown earth—I take it as a good omen, little bird, and if I ever realize the dreams that have come to me this day, I will add a lark soaring to our ancient quarterings,' and at the quaint conceit of such a thing the young man laughed aloud.

After leaving the pasture field, the path led through

a clump of black alders, and emerged upon a well-kept carriage drive, which it crossed, and then taking a sharp turn to the right continued along the banks of a swift stream for many miles.

Aynsworth paused for a moment at the parting of the ways, in deep thought, and then turned into the drive and walked at a rapid pace until he came in sight of a noble mansion in the early Elizabethan style of architecture. It was indeed a picturesque old pile as it glowed in the light of the declining sun, which at the moment wrapped turret and tower in a glory of golden fire. There was no living soul in sight, he was alone with all the memories it awakened. And as he gazed upon it some strong emotion swept over his face. Every feature of the scene was in the brief space indelibly impressed upon his mind for all time. He raised his hat before retracing his steps, as though doing homage to some thought in his mind or in honour of the stately home before him. Thought is fleet-footed, and in that short time his mind had travelled far.

The evening was closing in and night had fallen before he reached the little Inn, and the glare of the furnace fires which ringed the country round were casting a lurid glow for miles. His boyish dreams of smiling orchards, and lonely uplands where the fleet-footed deer sheltered in the bracken and coppice, had vanished like a nursery tale. And yet, as he learned afterwards, there was something fortunately left of the old forest-lands, and herds of deer still roamed over miles of country in undisturbed possession, but for how long, no one could say; all such things seemed doomed by the fiat of mammon, with slight regard for things sweet and beautiful.

But the new inhabitants of the district had other interests to occupy them, the struggle for existence was upon them in full force, and the battle of life was being fought out in the coal-pits and iron-works. The half-naked men who flitted to and fro in the fierce light of furnace fires were a curious sight, and against the darkness of night they looked like escaped furies from the underworld engaged in the practice of some infernal arts.

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The light from the furnaces illuminated the country for miles, and made a startling picture not soon forgotten by one who had wandered for years amidst semi-tropical vegetation or eternal snows.

The men before the furnaces, begrimed and perspiring, were adepts in their own line, and churned the boiling metal until it became sufficiently solid to be taken in huge balls to the giant hammers to be beaten into bars, or rushed about running the molten mass in glowing streams of fire into beds of sand with numerous side channels branching off in all directions, while the roar of the flames as they passed through the tower-like chimneys sounded like a distant tornado.

The signs of man's wit and power roused him like a strong stimulant, and mentally set him upon his feet.

Some such thoughts were working in his brain as a great master has since set to the music of fitting words, when he declared that he could not express the amazed awe, the crushed humility with which he sometimes watched a locomotive take its breath at a station, and thought what evidence of brain force there lay in its bars and wheels and cylinders, and what manner of men they were who had dug the brown stone out of the earth and forged it into *that*.

He was conscious of a great excitement.

It was, in fact, a crisis in his mental history, he was being re-born into a new life of purpose and energy, a realization of the possibilities and scope of man's faculties had dawned upon him, until he felt himself a part of this wonder-working power.

What does it matter, he told himself, whether a man is born rich or poor, or whether or not he counts his pedigree from the far past; he can still stand upon the broad basis of his manhood. He has the power and capacity in himself to scorn unclean ways, to stand four-square to all the winds that blow, and live the life of thought and energy, and revel if he will in the subtle, far-reaching and transforming power of the human brain.

Mine Host of the little Inn waited upon his guest himself, keeping his natural curiosity under proper professional control. Aynsworth ate in silence

a relish which was most gratifying to his entertainer, who liked to see good victuals properly appreciated; but the Crown Inn was famous for its good liquors, as well as its good dinners, and the proprietor was eager to score a double triumph. Travellers of rank were not so numerous along the old route as they used to be, but Mine Host still prided himself on being able to penetrate all disguises and place persons of quality to a nicety where they belonged. This young man, however, puzzled the worthy boniface sorely. 'Port or sherry, sir?' he queried, as he deftly arranged the table service, studying his guest the while. Aynsworth answered briefly. The opening was sufficient, and the worthy man started off without more ado. 'I thought it would be sherry, sir; a genteel wine, sir; an excellent wine, sir—Come from foreign parts, sir? Oh, no offence, sir,' as Aynsworth looked up sharply and took in for the first time the man's perfect agony of inquisitiveness, and, with the ghost of a smile, relieved it by stating that he had spent several years abroad, was visiting for a short time in the neighbourhood, and desired a room for the night.

But these statements made things no clearer to the landlord of the old Inn, who was duly impressed but by no means enlightened.

Aynsworth strolled out to smoke a quiet pipe while his room was being prepared for him, and was just in time to hear our friend, Donald McAlpin, hold forth to a small but admiring audience on the merits of sack, usquebaugh, hollands, and mulled ale and such-like. It was indeed a subject Donald could discuss with complete knowledge, as well as illustrate from a very intimate experience.

McAlpin was aware of the young laird's presence, but continued his disquisitions without pause and with much learning: 'There is sack posset now, which comes down to us from Sir Walter Raleigh—who lost his head, poor gentleman—but what will be, will be, and I maintain that it was better he should have lost his head after the inventing this exquisite and delicious liquor than before the world was enriched by a know-

ledge of its merits. To make it exactly right,' continued McAlpin, glancing in the direction of Aynsworth, 'you must boil half a pint of sherry and half a pint of ale and a quart of cream, then you must add sugar and grated nutmeg, and allow it to stand for three hours in a warm room. It's worth a gold mine to any man to master the secret of this mixture perfectly. And let me tell you,' said McAlpin convincingly, 'if you can ride to hounds next morning, there is nothing much the matter with your liver. You can take my word for that.'

The conclusion was greeted with peals of laughter, in which the young laird perforce joined.

It was drawing towards sundown next day when Aynsworth reached Woodlands. It was a pretty enough domicile to satisfy an artist or a recluse, and although commonly called The Cottage in compliment or perhaps contrast to its lordly neighbour, it was in fact an ancient manor house, and still rejoiced in more than two hundred acres of its old domains.

It was indeed a charming retreat. A vigorous growth of ivy covered the walls, and here and there a spray of honey-suckle peeped out among the clinging vines, giving the whole an aspect of dignified repose.

The Cottage was in the hands of an old and faithful servant, who had served the old Lord, and whose son as foster-brother, body-servant and general factotum had been the young laird's constant attendant throughout the years of his wanderings.

The faithful fellow met his master now with a countenance clouded and perplexed. The young laird understood at once and his pulse beat a trifle faster, although he had looked forward to this meeting for years.

'Where is he, Munro?' he asked.

'In the library, my lord.'

'Hush!' Aynsworth said, with an unusual look of sternness. 'That must wait, perhaps wait a long time, perhaps it has passed, never to be revived. It really matters very little, Munro, so let us try and forget such things.'

Aynsworth had been looking forward to this interview with Maitland for a long time, and in fact he had been roaming about the district to kill time and collect himself, pending the eventful hour, which might mean—he knew not what. He had not seen the old lawyer since he was a small boy, and in spite of his twenty-five years he met him now a trifle shyly. Maitland had been true and loyal to his father's interests, and he knew he could count on him to the end. The dinner was excellent, thanks to Munro's many accomplishments, and they were soon ready for business.

Deep drinking was the vice of the age, but neither Aynsworth nor Maitland had any bent that way: they had both of them too many absorbing interests on hand for that. Maitland was an able man, shrewd and capable; he was not a man of miraculous forethought, but always able to make the best use of favourable circumstances, and he declined to muddle his brains according to the fashion in vogue. They were both, however, devoted to the 'weed,' which had become the fashion of the day. Tobacco has a curious history; from a rare and expensive luxury, it was then making its way into general use. There was a time when how to take it was a nice point. Maitland preferred to use it as snuff, and this required a small gold spoon to convey the fragrant mixture to his nose, which appeared to prosper under such delicate attention. The young laird smoked a long pipe, which was considered the correct thing. No one seemed to know then, any more than they do now, why the use of tobacco should capture the nation and triumph over all opposition. Satire exhausted itself in vain against it. The new indulgence held the field against all comers. A travelled man was expected to be proficient in the new art, and a man of fashion was of course bound to keep abreast of all fads and fashions, so that smoking and snuff-taking became a nice performance, suggestive of liberal ideas, culture and cash. Women had their full share of the new indulgence, and talked pleasantly of the time when children received instructions in the proper etiquette to be observed. Of course, those were not the days of mere vulgar

smokers: the business was a good deal newer than it is now, and was considered altogether a very fine performance. Its opponents assailed it from all sides—some confidently predicting that the use of the pipe would eventually extinguish conversation. It looked serious enough when a puff of tobacco smoke accompanied every sentence, and conversation had to be abbreviated to get in the comfortable whiffs. People complained that it was nothing but 'How do you do?—puff,' 'Thank you—puff,' 'Is the weed good?—puff,' 'Excellent—puff, puff,' 'What is the time of day—puff, puff, puff.' No wonder it looked to many serious folks as though the whole country was going to the dogs; and yet we have survived it all so far—whatever may be in store for us in the future—and in addition have discovered several new vices a good deal worse. Some complained that women of fashion deserted the fine exercise of the fan for the exercise of the snuff-box, and that women not only took snuff, but took it with such a bewitching air that no male creature had any chance of escape.

One celebrated beauty even produced her snuff-box in church, and offered the church-warden a pinch when he came to receive her alms. Both the laird and Maitland, however, had reached that stage when a pinch of snuff or a whiff of tobacco no longer disordered their wits, and the business which brought them together was sufficiently serious to conquer tobacco for once at least.

The interview had its difficulties for the old lawyer as well as for the young laird. 'I should have fulfilled my trust sooner, but your lordship's absence abroad rendered it quite impossible,' Maitland said a little uneasily, by way of opening the conversation.

'And now that I am here,' the young man said, with a touch of bitterness, 'we are no nearer a solution of the problem than before. It is all black, deep, unfathomable mystery.'

'Mysteries are sometimes solved, and cleared up to the very foundation, for all that,' Maitland said quietly; 'the burial places of the past sometimes give up their dead, and great wrongs are righted even in

this life. Yes, even in this life. Meanwhile I place this casket in your lordship's hands.' And, glad to have succeeded so far in his disagreeable mission, the old man left the room.

The story of his father's downfall and disgrace had never been authentically communicated to the young Glenmore. His father had decreed that not until his twenty-fifth year should the full details of that miserable chapter in his life be made known to his son, but then it should be fully placed before him, with all documents bearing upon it; and now the whole story was under his hand, and yet he hesitated, much as he had longed for it, afraid to plunge into the abyss of the unknown and unlock the dark dungeon of the past. His hand shook as he opened the casket, conscious that he was on the verge of a strange world of intangible things, where a plain straightforward man was likely to be more at fault than the subtle schemer who chose to live in an atmosphere of falsehood and crime.

He knew well there was no way out of the difficulty save patient investigation, but what he did not know at this moment was himself. Early left to carve out his own path, he had lived in a quiet, uneventful way, save for the haunting memories of his boyhood and the dark shadows which hung over his future, and in these things he desired no companionship and had none till now.

Here was the whole story, which led up to the final catastrophe. His family history as known to him was not altogether pleasant, but now with every circumstance elaborated it was terrifying, yet he told himself he must nerve himself to know all, even if it filled his eyes with tears—but when? It must be another time! He pushed the papers from him hastily, afraid of he knew not what, when a small silk sack, which he had overlooked, fell from among the leaves. He picked it up with more interest than had yet touched him, and turned it over in his hands with some wonder. The contents felt hard to the touch, and when at length he opened it it was found to contain a few jewels of rare beauty and great value, with a miniature of a

sweet female face and the words in a neat feminine hand, 'May Heaven in tender mercy keep my son. Such a discovery was wholly unexpected, and at once a rush of tenderness which filled his whole being obliterated all other emotions: the wind had suddenly shifted from north to west, the colour of earth and sky had changed, and the mysterious conflict of clouds was touched with the glory of sunlight. His eyes were moist, and his heart beat with a new tenderness. 'My mother,' he whispered, 'my mother!' as he pressed the new-found treasure to his lips and held it protectingly between his hollowed hands and laid it lovingly next his heart, a priceless talisman which had brought back in a flood the numerous streamlets of a child's recollection from the past years.

When Maitland returned he found him pacing the room in deep thought, without any sign of agitation. The lawyer waited for Aynsworth to open the subject. The young man's calmness surprised him. No man of his race he had ever heard of could be complimented on account of his meekness, but when he was shown the miniature he took in at once the fact that a new element of which he knew nothing had entered into his client's life.

'I have not read these papers,' he said in answer to Maitland's look; 'I cannot! I have looked into some of them, but to read them is impossible.'

'You should know their contents,' the lawyer said gravely. 'I can summarize the whole in a short time, but at your earliest convenience you should acquaint yourself with the whole case.'

'No doubt,' Aynsworth agreed, 'and I shall endeavour to do so some time, but not now.'

'It is a long story, a perplexing story,' Maitland said, not without feeling, 'but not devoid of hope and honour and good faith. The Aynsworths crossed the Border at an early period,' Maitland continued.

'So much I know,' Aynsworth said hastily, alarmed at what might be the prelude to a long speech; 'I know they were a gay, reckless and unfortunate race for many generations.'

'Not exactly, my lord, not exactly; I beg leave to

differ from your lordship: gay and even reckless, if you will, but not unfortunate. No, not really unfortunate. Their history is surely susceptible of another interpretation, quite susceptible of another interpretation. But not to weary you, I may briefly remind you that your grandfather succeeded to the title and broad acres when quite young, and plunged into all the dissipation of the court of the second Charles with a zeal which would have brought him fame and distinction if directed to worthier ends.'

'I have heard something of the Glenmore of those times,' the laird said quickly, hoping to curtail the story, but Maitland was in his element now and full of the Glenmore history, and quite unable to understand the young man's unwillingness to listen to the full recital.

'Ah! no doubt you have heard something of this,' he murmured quite complacently as he started off once more. 'The times, as you know, were out of joint—quite out of joint—and no wonder, when you give the matter due consideration—yes, due consideration.'

'The Puritans were a worthy people in their way—yes, quite worthy in their way—but they were dull-witted and could not understand what things were suitable for gentlemen, not to say noblemen of distinction. They drew the line too strictly for persons of quality—quite too strictly—and of course the court of Charles went a little too far on the other side, perhaps—yes, quite too far on the other side.'

'Duelling and raking became the hall-marks of a fine gentleman, and of course good churchmen winked at the little pécadilloes of gallant fellows, whose only fault was that they gambled, fought and swore like sturdy Britons, and in other ways faithfully copied their King. The times were at fault, and men are in such a case the creatures of circumstances.'

'It was expected that a gentleman should dress well, dance well, fence well, have a talent for love-making, and not keep too severely aloof from pleasant gentlemanly vices. All quite right and proper in moderation.'

'Yes. I understand,' the laird said, wishing to bring the story to an end. 'The Aynsworths did not culti-

vate moderation, but went express to the devil in their own way.'

'Precisely, my lord,' was the unembarrassed reply; 'precisely, the Aynsworths were emphatic in their good or—ahem, their other qualities, quite emphatic, and the times—the times were not conducive to a very high standard of virtue anywhere. Men wrote in those days what no pen would copy in our own. Brutality and debauchery found expression on the stage, under the sanction of the court in dialogues of studied foulness, so deep and general was the national depravity. Yes, deep and general. It was a world of knaves, and dupes and moral foulness, unparalleled. A world, where an honest gentleman with a reasonable taste for pleasure, had no chance at all, simply no chance at all.

'Lord Glenmore was the handsomest man of his day, brave to a fault, and an expert swordsman—what wonder that he should be the adorer and adored of more than one high-born damsel, or that he should dare to lift his eyes higher than most subjects venture to look? The romance was short-lived, and the awakening bitter enough. He had ruined himself for the sweet delirium of a few short months, so true is it that they who stand high are exposed to the blasts of ill-fortune, and if they fall they are ruined men, yes, ruined men.

'Naturally brave, rash and headstrong he was not a man to sit still and bemoan his hard fate, and a life of fierce action saved him from despair.

'He threw himself into the strife of the Continent, caring little on what side he fought, so long as it was not against his own country he drew his sword. In one of these fierce engagements he was left for dead upon the field, and when consciousness returned he found himself almost naked among heaps of fallen men, with one of those goulsh creatures that batten upon the spoils of battlefields bending over him. To get his boots, the wretched plunderer was jerking the seeming dead man violently with his foot against his body; his work was almost completed when the rough usage roused Glenmore from his death-like stupor, and suddenly sitting up, he glared at the robber

through grime and blood. The man waited for nothing more, but fled for his life, leaving the best part of his booty behind him.

'Strange as it may seem, instead of being glad that he was freed from the presence of such a human fiend, he exerted himself to the utmost to recall so terrible a companion, rather than be left alone where he found himself. Life was slowly ebbing and it was now near sundown. He was quite conscious and the glories of the dying day fell peacefully upon the field of carnage. The long horrors of his situation pierced him through and through. How long, he wondered, would it be before night shut out the sights around him, and merciful death blotted out the memory of human passion. "Oh," he cried, "to be free from the power of thought, the bitter past of a man's life!" Would death really be thus merciful, or would it only make more intense and vivid to the mind the deeds done in the flesh? Oh! that he could sleep and have done with it forever. But to sleep only to wake in some other life—the horror of the thought tortured him.

'The nights were cold, and the chill air smote mercilessly upon the wounded man, making him long for anything that would put an end to his present sufferings. Still he lived, and in flashes of extraordinary clearness recalled the past, without any power to put away from him the tormenting memories which crowded his brain to the point of frenzy. His boyhood came back to him, his mother, his young ambition, the misdoings of his hot and eager youth, the woman he loved, the battle, the headlong charge, the intoxication of action, the cheers of his company, and then—nothingness—if only the sun would linger in his golden glory until he quite lost consciousness, was his last remembered prayer, and not leave him to pass away in the dark, among the dead distorted forms around.

'His wish seemed granted for soon a soothing sense of repose crept over him and he remembered no more.

'The fellow who had plundered him when he recovered from his fright reproached himself for being afraid of a dying man, whom he could have despatched

with a blow, and vain of his spoils, could not resist exhibiting them to a group of men who had been drawn together for mutual protection after the full tide of battle had swept onward, and it chanced that among these was Lord Glenmore's servant. The faithful fellow was heart-broken for his master's loss, and only waited for the moon to rise, before starting with a small party to make a further search.

'To see his master's property in the hands of a stranger filled him with fierce anger, and drove him to the conclusion that the wretch had murdered him. Glenmore was beloved by his men, and swift vengeance was likely to overtake any man upon whom such a suspicion rested. The miserable wretch protested his innocence upon his knees and pleaded for his life. "I'll take you to him," he wailed; "I'll take you to him."

'The men concluded that it would be well to give him a chance to save his neck; they were determined, however, that he should not escape, and pinioning his arms they drove him before them with a rope about his neck, a hint of what was to come should he prove false. Glenmore was still living, when they found him, but so faint were the signs of life, that it was a question whether he could survive being moved.

'The only shelter was a near-by building almost a ruin, and when they had made a fire, and forced some spirits between his clenched teeth, they were rewarded by a slight movement which meant vitality and gave them hope. One of the men quietly liberated the robber, with a touch of compassion, and gave him a chance for his life, otherwise he might have fared ill, notwithstanding Glenmore's recovery.'

Aynsworth sat still while Maitland recounted this curious chapter of family history. 'The sequel you know,' the old man said.

'Yes,' the young man answered, rising, a trifle weary and with a look of perplexity in his eyes. 'I believe I have heard the main points of this part of the story,' he said gloomily. 'He was taken to the Chateau of the Duke de Freyne and ultimately married his daughter, and returned to his own country thirteen years afterwards.'

'Thirteen years and seven months, my lord,' Maitland said with marked precision as though it was a matter of great importance. 'And his foreign wife returned to her own country after a few years.'

'She had cause to be dissatisfied, bitter cause to be dissatisfied,' Aynsworth said with a touch of hardness.

'Your lordship's grandfather died before your father attained his majority, he was in consequence placed under disadvantages from the first, and was not fortunate in his friends, indeed most unfortunate in his friends. These documents,' laying his hand lovingly upon a mass of discoloured paper, 'enter into the whole case with proper care and minuteness, and indicate the course of action we think best in your lordship's interests.'

'I suppose,' said Aynsworth wearily, 'the plain meaning of all this is that my father mismanaged his affairs, and has left me in consequence a barren title, and as some say, a dishonoured name.'

'No, sir,' Maitland said with rising wrath; 'your father, although unfortunate in his affairs, was not guilty of the crime charged against him. He was hot-blooded enough and quick to resent an insult—his faults were the faults of a high-spirited gentleman, who scorned concealment, and dared the world to do its worst.'

'And the world has taken him at his word,' the young man said gloomily.

'Yes,' Maitland assented; 'the world took him at his word, and our business is to force the world to reverse this verdict and vindicate his name, and free your lordship from all shadow of shame for the foul crime laid to his charge.'

'Do I understand your lordship concurs in this decision?' For answer Aynsworth held out his hand, and thus both men pledged their devotion to what in appearance was a hopelessly lost cause.

They continued their conversation far into the night and parted resolved to push their investigations to the utmost, fully convinced that the old lord was the victim of injustice or error, although the full evidence in proof of it had yet to be found.

CHAPTER III

A GREAT AWAKENING

WHEN last we heard of Donald MacAlpin he was holding forth to an admiring audience on the merit of mulled sack, after which he was supposed to have started for home. Donald, however, had other plans in his mind; just what these were he hardly knew himself. The sight of Oona and Aynsworth had called up from the past much that he had thought dead and buried and out of sight and mind for ever. So little can a man know with any certainty of the possibilities of his own soul.

The night was dark, and the moon would not rise for a good two hours yet. The road he chose, although the shortest, was by no means the easiest to travel, but Donald was an old hand at a cross-country tramp, and whether drunk or sober, it was commonly believed, he could find his way blindfolded where other men would blunder into dangerous places with their eyes wide open. The path he followed led to a narrow foot bridge which spanned a broad swift stream, that might almost be called a river, protected only by a slender hand rail. The structure was known to be so precarious that it was rarely crossed after nightfall, except in cases of great urgency.

MacAlpin took it now, however, with as much certainty as though it were broad daylight, and he had not been sampling mine host's liquors most of the afternoon.

It was a quiet night at Fosseway Hall, as its present owner, Eric Hardcastle, had been reported suffering from a sudden attack of illness to which he was said to be subject. Donald had been for years a frequent visitor to the Squire, and the oldest servants about the place could not remember when their master refused to see him. To-night the footman thought would be an exception, as the Squire had declined to see three visitors that day on the score of health.

He was mistaken, however, and MacAlpin was shown in as usual.

Why this rollicking ne'er-do-weel could always count on seeing the Squire, well or ill, or whether he was himself drunk or sober, was a standing subject of discussion among the servants. Some said it was because he was a broken-down gentleman of the great clan MacAlpin, and that the Squire had excellent reasons, as a prudent gentleman for being civil to a man, who with all his faults was better born than the Master of Fosseway. Others declared it was pure good-nature on the part of the Squire, who remembered some trifling service MacAlpin had done him long ago when they were both gay young blades together. MacAlpin never gave any hint of the root of his acquaintance with the Squire, not even when the butler, knowing his love of liquor, produced his choicest wines and spirits, and did the honours without stint; MacAlpin's brain absolutely refused to get drunk, even when his legs succumbed, and under the appearance of the most perfect frankness he kept with extraordinary safety the secrets of his own life and others.

When the door was closed and a heavy curtain drawn across for protection against the chill air, the Squire motioned his visitor to a seat. He looked weary and ill at ease—this rich man—and not even his purple and fine linen, had power to smooth out the wrinkles or give him repose. MacAlpin seemed disinclined to open any subject of conversation, and the squire fidgeted about with unusual impatience, his eyes blazing with intensity, and never leaving the face of the man before him.

'Well,' he said at last, 'I see you have news. Out with it man quick! Is it true?' he demanded.

'Perfectly true,' MacAlpin said quietly; 'perfectly true,' and their eyes met and clashed like rapiers in a first onset. The squire was silent for a moment, and sunk back into his chair with a sickly pallor creeping over his countenance, while the fierce gleam in his eyes still held MacAlpin.

'What of this young man then?' queried he; 'what of him? Have you nothing to say?'

'Oh, yes,' MacAlpin said promptly, 'there is plenty to say—he is, and is not his father's son.'

'Is and is not? What trifling of this?' the squire snapped impatiently.

'Well then, he is like his father in brawn and muscle, but he is more than that, he is evidently a man of force and brains.'

Hardcastle sat up in his chair like a shot. 'What more?' he asked.

'Well, if you want a full inventory,' MacAlpin said, enjoying the squire's eagerness, 'he is about six feet in height, well built, broad-shouldered, wide forehead, Glenmore nose, solid underjaw, dark eyebrows, grey eyes, and as you know, about twenty-five or so, and in my opinion the devil of a customer to deal with.'

'The devil deal with him then,' the squire hissed, springing to his feet, transformed by passion, and looking like a vicious beast stung into frenzy by a sudden sense of helplessness.

'Where is he? Where have you left him?' he demanded excitedly.

'I left him nowhere,' MacAlpin said, with a touch of scorn. 'He is his own master, and no doubt he can be found at Woodlands.'

'At Woodlands!' the Squire hissed. 'That explains why I could never get possession of Woodlands; the old fool in charge of it let it be understood that it was no longer Aynsworth's.'

'Nor is it, really,' put in MacAlpin. 'It was made over to this Munro for faithful service, or some such thing, but the old fellow refuses to keep it save as a trust for his master, that is, of course, for the young Glenmore.'

The Squire said nothing, but as he walked up and down the large room, his hands, which were locked behind his back, worked nervously, and the glances he cast at his companion were keen and questioning.

A vase of choice flowers stood upon the table; MacAlpin selected one which pleased him, and examined it with great care by the aid of a pocket-lens. The action was simple enough, for MacAlpin was a lover of nature and an authority on the flora of the

district, but it angered Hardcastle to see a man at his ease, apparently absorbed in what was to him a trivial pastime, while he, the master of millions and of Fosseway, was tortured by anxiety.

'What of the girl,' the Squire asked sharply, pausing in his walk.

'What of her?' MacAlpin echoed with ominous calm, without looking up.

'You are at fault there MacAlpin,' he said. 'You have allowed that horror to be revived.'

'No horror has been revived that I know of, through any fault of mine,' Donald said, rising and taking up his place on the hearthrug, with the ease of a man quite sure of his ground in more ways than one.

'No horror revived!' the Squire said with a tone and look of genuine amazement.

'I mean precisely what I say. I despatched the child with the escort you provided, in absolute ignorance of the man's character or your intentions. It seems he got into a drunken brawl and had his head broken, past mending, and McLean, whose thoughts were only for Glenmore, found the child and vanished with her. When the fellow failed to claim the hire you promised him, you might have known that your plan had failed, but you were pleasantly occupied at the moment, you may remember, and a bairn more or less was of small consequence in your opinion.'

'Fool, fool,' the Squire muttered to himself; 'I might have known—I might have known! I might so easily have made all safe beyond risk or doubt!—Where was Kinkman?' he asked sharply. 'Why did you not send Kinkman?'

'Kinkman had a delicate consideration for his own neck at that moment,' MacAlpin said quietly, 'and was absent, and even the devil could hardly have selected Kinkman for such a mission.'

'Then why,' retorted the Squire, 'did you not go yourself?'

'I?' was the amazed answer, as he wheeled round upon the Squire. 'I, fight with women folk and wee bairns?'

'Yes, you,' thundered the Squire in extreme wrath. 'You, why not?'

Linked Lives

'Eric Hardcastle,' MacAlpin said with extraordinary calm, 'I have done much I wish I could undo, I am no longer a gay, young gallant with the world before me, but only plain Donald MacAlpin, the drunken roister at your service; but I would cheerfully give my life to have a clear conscience with respect to this lassie's mother.'

'Her mother! Her mother!' exclaimed the Squire in genuine amazement. 'What nonsense after all these years.'

'Yes, her mother,' continued MacAlpin; 'I was the miserable go-between to tempt her from her convent home to eternal happiness with her English lover, and I'll curse myself every day I live, for my share in that wretched business.'

'Well, then curse away and much good may it do you,' the Squire said with supreme scorn, as he threw himself into his chair with a look of disgust upon his keen old face. 'I thought you were free from that sort of rubbish. Curse yourself to your heart's content, only, for heaven's sake, or hell's sake, which ever appeals to you most in this new mood of yours, get the girl out of the way. You are resourceful. You are a man of pluck and skill, it should be an easy thing for you to carry her off, to contrive an accident, anything to undo this frightful blunder. Come now, MacAlpin, serve me in this and command me to the utmost. Before God, I vow and declare, I will give you anything you ask.'

'Before God,' MacAlpin echoed. 'Since when was the Deity a factor in the plans of Eric Hardcastle? Are you mad, or do you think me such a double-dyed villain that I stand ready to aid your foul schemes against an innocent and much injured girl? I have done my last day's work in your service—your daughter is safe from any meddling of mine.'

'For heaven's sake hush,' whispered the Squire, glancing toward the door, the picture of terror, 'some-one might hear.'

'Let them hear, who will,' MacAlpin said fiercely. 'I swear it from my soul. I do.'

'Let them hear! Think what you are saying man. Do you forget what it means?'

'I forget nothing,' MacAlpin said piteously. 'Heaven help me. I forget nothing. I would give my right hand to forget, and wipe out the past, but it cannot be.'

'No, of course it cannot be,' the Squire said with an air of relief, determined to humour the scruples of his visitor. 'Get Kinkman to do what is required, you need have nothing personally to do with it. Kinkman loves money. I can satisfy him, make any terms you please with him, only make haste, MacAlpin, make haste. There is no time to lose. Reginald must never know, he is particular, absurdly particular, and hard to deal with.' And the Squire settled himself among the cushions of his chair with the look of a man who had at last concluded a very troublesome piece of business. MacAlpin watched him in silence for some seconds. The ticking of the clock sounded loud in the stillness of the large room. The Squire glanced at his watch to emphasize haste. A cinder fell from the grate and he stared up wondering what the noise meant. MacAlpin kicked it back that it might do no harm, without a word.

'It is settled then,' the Squire said holding out his hand.

'It is settled that I have done with the wretched business,' MacAlpin replied, making no movement to touch the hand so invitingly held out to him, 'and farther, if any harm comes to this girl, MacAlpin knows how to exact justice.'

'No, no man,' the Squire said soothingly; 'no harm is intended—she is safe enough. But think what a frightful fix I am in. Think of my son, something must be done, or all is lost. You will not fail me this once. I am not asking you to do anything really amiss. What has come over you MacAlpin that you have grown so very particular at this time of day? It is not like you man, not the least like you.'

'Not like MacAlpin did you say? You are right, Hardcastle. I have danced to every devil's tune you have named for many a long day, and I'll dance in future to my own music, or not at all. Do you understand me? We were boys together,' he con-

tinued, 'I was your fag always, but that is past. You had a keen and nimble wit. I had plenty of inches and muscle for both, so we rubbed on together without much trouble—and now we part. Say that the girl is safe, and that you will do her justice, and we may still part friends.'

The Squire quailed visibly before the determined man, who towered over him, quivering with wrath.

It was the first time in the long years of their intercourse that MacAlpin had wholly cast off the Squire's influence, and Hardcastle, by some subtle instinct, caught the significance of the new tone, and for a moment stood speechless and spell-bound.

'It cannot be, MacAlpin,' he said almost pleadingly. 'It cannot be. Surely you understand that. It is plainly impossible. I cannot, man, set aside my son for the sake of this girl. I cannot. It is not to be thought of. Come be reasonable and aid me this once.'

'Blind, heartless fool,' cried MacAlpin, beside himself at last. 'Do you know who this girl is?'

'My daughter to be sure,' whispered the Squire terrified at the admission he was surprised into making. 'I will own as much to gratify you.'

'Your daughter indeed,' echoed MacAlpin, raising his voice. 'And the kinswoman of the man upon whom you have laboured to fix the stigma of a cowardly crime, and a cousin once removed of this young Glenmore, who has been robbed of his birth-right. What fouler crime could be invented!' and fearful of what more he might say or do, he hastily left the room and the house with one last look of scorn and loathing which cut Hardcastle to the quick.

The Squire remained standing where MacAlpin left him, in a maze of horror. He was stunned, perplexed, terror-stricken, but well aware that he was so entangled in the meshes of his own dark deeds that retreat was impossible. Left alone, he moved about the large room like a man suddenly dazed. He aimlessly fingered the articles upon his desk, rearranged the curios with which the room was abundantly supplied, with purposeless haste, and at length

tried to pour himself out a glass of wine, but his hand shook so that the decanter fell with a crash. The shock of discovering his own condition quite unmanned him and he sunk into his chair, a dismayed heap. His face worked frightfully, and his hands grasped the arms of the chair, while his body swayed this way and that, as though he was wrestling for his life. For a time his breathing might have been heard in the farthest corner, then a sudden calm came to him, and soon he lay back in his chair with great content. In a little time he rose, and walked leisurely to the side board where he poured out a glass of brandy, holding it up to the light with a steady hand this time before sipping a little. The old curious smile of triumph had returned to his crafty countenance and carrying the glass across the room, he set it upon his desk with some deliberation. His fertile brain was awake once more, shaping new plans for his deliverance from the desperate situation in which he suddenly found himself.

Glancing at the clock, he seated himself at his desk and wrote a long letter, which however pleased him so ill that he tore it up. A second and a third had no better fate. The task was more difficult than he had expected. It was not easy to be explicit and at the same time safe. The things a man may hint at personally or discuss in secret, look ugly when set down in black and white.

Finally he contented himself with a brief note which was addressed to Webb and Smith, White-chapel, London, requesting K. K's presence without delay. Farther, 'that the district was safe and healthy for a man suffering from his complaint, and business prospects excellent.' When this curious missive was duly sealed, he held it in his hand in deep thought, before laying it down to sip a little brandy once more. Excess in liquor was no part of Hardcastle's character. He admired it in his tools as making them more pliable for his purpose, and used it accordingly, as a matter of business.

Moments of introspection come to most, and sometimes the abyss of a man's mind, under some unex-

pected shock, throws up, suddenly, the wreckage of a life-time. His youth rose before him. It had been wild, unrestrained, and eventful, but 'luck' he told himself had been on his side, and luck had always been to him a sort of neutral divinity to which he had been careful to burn incense. He had come safely out of worse scrapes than this, he told himself with returning confidence. Of course, he had deviated from strict honour. Who has not? A man can afford to be honest with himself once in a while without damage to his reputation.

Other men, he pleaded hopefully, had made the same mistakes or worse, and were held in honour. He recalled the years of his travelling abroad with MacAlpin, as other young men had done.

The memory of it, in spite of everything, was pleasant to him, even at such a time as this. He smiled as he recalled it. He had sampled pleasure on a generous scale in many lands. What days those were! A young man of substance and prospects must sow his wild oats somewhere. It was expected of him. In short it is a kind of moral whirlpool he should go through to fit him for his place in society. Judicious mammas with marriageable daughters tell one another in confidential whispers that reformed rakes make excellent husbands. The Squire smiled at the thought and helped himself to more brandy, murmuring they ought to know, certainly they ought to know. Yes, of course, they ought to know!

Whatever apparatus served him in place of a conscience was at this moment showing some signs of activity and his mind went back over the years with, for him, a curious sense of interest.

He recalled his first Continental rambles, his pleasure in discovering the secluded by-paths of foreign lands, and his delight in the quaint and simple ways of the people came back to him. How far off it all seemed! Appearing now like the faint outline of a well-nigh forgotten dream. The stiff climbs, the exhilarating mountain air, the glory of sunrise over the Alps. Ah! he thought nothing can ever be quite the same. It was—it was all very pretty, very fine

indeed, a thing a man should see at least once in his life, and once seen could never be quite forgotten, and he had seen it many times, but never with the first freshness that meant so much.

There were other attractions besides sunrises and sunsets, there was one sweet face and form which captivated his fancy by the shores of Lake Constance. He recalled their walks among vineyards, and orchards, and their quiet excursions among the beautiful wooded hills along the Lake Shore. It was like the entrance into another world. Eric Hardcastle had there glimpses of paradise which could never be his again. Their frequent meetings by the ruined castles of the Rhine! Yes, he remembered them as though it were yesterday, the thousand little things which would seem so trivial to others, but which meant so much to them. He was not sure that he cared to recall so much, but MacAlpin had sprung it upon him, and in spite of himself it remained.

God and nature, it seemed to him had made them for each other. She believed it utterly. He believed it a little—for a time. Their marriage was secret. MacAlpin and another—a stranger—were the only witnesses. It was best so, he convinced her that the reasons were amply sufficient and she had such perfect faith in him. The marriage, he told himself to-night was wrong, quite wrong, a huge blunder, one of the few he had been weak enough to commit in the whole course of his life.

A young man, who would one day have a stake in the country, already about to be married to a rich heiress, should have stopped short of such supreme folly. Anything but that. Of course, he lied to MacAlpin. You have to lie to such men to make any use of them, and lie sturdily too. He had no regrets on that head. Ah! she was so beautiful, so trustful, so unsuspecting.

But there really was no way out of it but to leave her. The only explanation possible would have been incomprehensible to such a woman. This girl whom he had never seen, and never expected or desired to see was his daughter. It was most strange and most unfortunate.

But after all, a man's youthful follies should not shackle him for ever. She was in truth, too lovely in soul and body to mate with any man—this Alpine flower of long ago. He must not dwell upon it too much, it disturbed a man when grave and weighty affairs were pressing, and besides she was an ideal to worship, a woman to think of at your best, a being apart and after all he but left her to the serene content of her mountain home. Under the circumstances there was no other way.

Another kind of woman would have known by instinct what was meant when he did not return, but she could not understand these things. She should have forgotten as he did—and what a world of trouble it would have saved! It is always best to forget disagreeable things, but women are narrow-minded in such matters, and absurdly tenacious. They have no command of the reasoning faculties, when they are personally concerned, none whatever. She was really adapted for a religious life, and had a vocation that way, her large faith, and gift of perfect constancy marked her out for a devotee.

He had left her to be perfectly happy in her own way, and that was more than most could be quite sure of. The Squire sighed in spite of his superior reasoning for it was doubtful if he had got quite so much out of life, with all his scheming. Still, he told himself, that would come when this troublesome incident was brushed out of the way. Such things as these pass out of a man's life as though they had never been, and to bring them up again from the far past, to injure family honour and dispossess a lawful heir. The Squire paused, there was a false note somewhere, and his hands again worked a trifle nervously. Yes, he repeated as he ground his heel into the carpet—a lawful heir—and as his courage returned at full tide, he paced the long room with a firmer step. It is past reason, past all reason, he muttered, to set aside a man—a lawful heir—for a—— It cannot, must not be. He had worked himself round to the point he desired, for odd as it seemed this strange and most unscrupulous man found it necessary to keep up a show of respect for 'the bird in his breast.'

His mind was made up, evidently, for he touched the bell, and ordered that a man be sent at once to catch the mail coach with the letter he had written. The hours had passed, and the mail came no nearer than eight or ten miles of the Hall, so that time pressed.

'What horse should I take, sir?' the man asked a little anxiously.

The Squire followed the footman's gaze to the clock, took in the significance of the question, and said sharply, 'The sorrel, and don't spare him!'—Now the sorrel was Reginald's favourite mount, and the grooms were forbidden to ride him except for exercise, plainly then the matter was urgent, and the man hastened to obey his orders.

Having despatched this business, the Squire retired for the night, at peace apparently with himself and all the world, and slept the sleep of the man who has no pangs of conscience, and whose strength is firm.

It was not so with Donald MacAlpin. He was far from being at peace with himself. When he left the Hall every nerve was tense and quivering with excitement.

He had courage to break with the Squire after a life-time, but he was himself a broken man, a failure in every sense, a by-word, a terror, and an offence. Half his jaunty devil-may-careness, and much of his tippling was a miserable make-believe to hide this bitterness tugging at his heart. And now he was face to face with his own life. How could he undo the past? How could he save Oona from her father's scheming? The moon had risen, the night was still and the air crisp and invigorating. He threw his bonnet upon the ground, for his head was hot and throbbing, and sat down under the trees.

His indignation against the Squire had somewhat cooled, though it was still smouldering like banked fires; but against himself the storm raged in full fury. He did not rail at circumstances, or fate, or ill-fortune, he blamed Donald MacAlpin, he cursed Donald MacAlpin, who had with open eyes written 'ichabod' upon his own life for naught. If he hurled hard

words at the Squire, he had harder words for himself. 'Ye useless Godforsaken loon,' he said with intense passion, bringing down his clenched fist upon his knee. 'I'll curse ye. I'll pound ye. I'll learn ye, ye blind feckless fool to be the tool of such a heartless creature as yon!' jerking his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the Hall, 'you that ought to be a gentleman, a MacAlpin, and a man, I wad like to chastise ye wi' scorpions for a' yer misdoings, and yer general and particular wickedness. Ha'e ye forgotten a' yer mither telt ye?' and Donald clasped his hands about his knees while his body swayed to and fro in the silence. 'Na, na, we'll no say what she telt ye, ye ken that weel enough—just what guid mithers tell their bairns and reckless laddies.

'But, Oh! Donald, ye ha'e sinned long and muckle, sinned as the strong and wilful sin, when they turn aside from the good way, and now ye maun suffer as such maun suffer. Ye maun see yersel' blasted and loathsome with nothing concealed, nothing hidden, and squirming like the wretched worm ye are! Look for once into the open mouth of hell!' Covering his face with his hands, a convulsive shudder passed through his whole frame, then he fell back again upon the grass and lay quite still.

How long he remained lost to all outward things he could never tell. In after years a curious halo of mystery surrounded the events of that night whenever he recalled it. He was at last roused from his grim communing with himself by the rapid beat of horse hoofs, and was on his feet in time to see the Squire's messenger gallop past. The horse shied at the tall figure standing in the moonlight under the shelter of the trees, and his rider brought down the whip sharply upon the noble beast, rousing him to his utmost speed.

Donald in a flash took in the significance of the midnight horseman's reckless pace, and shaking his fist in the direction of the rider vowed to protect the unconscious girl from the danger which threatened her.

It was deep into the night, or rather morning, before he reached his home. He let himself in more

quietly than usual, and taking a candle from the Hall he made his way softly to his own apartment.

In passing the room where his children slept he paused, listening, and then entered cautiously, shading the candle with his hand. There were just two boys. The eldest Thomas, a boy of fourteen, was his father's delight; the other Sandy, was about nine, and was supposed to be of weak intellect, which roused MacAlpin's resentment when he had got a little more liquor than usual. The boy's infirmity seemed to him an affront to the long line of sturdy and capable MacAlpins, an affront which should not have been put upon a scion of so fine a race. It was at Sandy's cot he paused now, however, looking down with a strange, thoughtful tenderness upon the boy, as he lay rosy in sleep.

His wife always tried to keep Sandy out of sight when his father was in his worst moods. This was not easy, for Sandy had all his father's fearlessness and adored him as the greatest man on earth. His rough ways were only, to Sandy, the grand manners of such a lordly being as his father, which of course, simple folk like his mother and Tamas could not understand, but which, to a loyal subject and son like Sandy, were perfectly intelligible.

It was only when Donald used profane language that Sandy was shocked and alarmed. At such times he showed every sign of terror, he would turn deathly pale, and shake as though suddenly smitten with ague. 'Oh faither! faither,' he would sob piteously. 'You will no won to heaven, ye will no won to heaven; ye will no see the lovely man. No, no, never, never. Oh, faither, faither,' and running as if for his life in extreme misery, he would take refuge in the stable, or in one of his favourite haunts in the woods, and weep his heart out until he fell asleep.

It would seem that on this particular night Sandy had gone to bed under the shadow of some grief, for he still sobbed in his sleep, and his face was stained from recent tears. It hurt Donald to see it, and cut him to the heart, and the moisture gathered in his own eyes as he looked at his long-despised laddie.

Tears were not in MacAlpin's line, his emotion at the moment surprised him, he tried to shake it off as something foreign to his manhood, of which he was ashamed, yet he lived to learn that there are times when—

‘A tear is an intellectual thing,
And a sigh is the sword of an angel King.’

He bent forward to wipe the tell-tale signs from the little fellow's face, but his hand shook so much that he dare not run the risk of waking him, even as it was, the boy stirred in his sleep and turned over, throwing out his arm as he did so,—Donald thought with an appealing gesture, murmuring: ‘Faither, Faither,’ the word dying upon his lips as it passed into the land of dreams. MacAlpin turned away, choking and miserable in a way new to him, whispering to himself, ‘My poor Sandy, my poor Sandy.’

He passed his wife's room very softly. He dreaded meeting her of all things. He could hardly tell why. For one thing, he was at sea within himself, and it was night; only the moonbeams cast fitful and suggestive gleams of pure, cool light upon the great seawaste within his own mind, where he tossed, half in despair, half in hope. When he reached his own apartment, he threw himself down upon the couch and in spite of the tumult of his mind was soon fast asleep from sheer exhaustion.

He slept far into the morning, a circumstance so unusual for him, that his wife was anxious and troubled until she heard him moving about his room. When he got up the sun was pouring through the uncurtained windows, and although the house was quite still he knew that the day was well advanced.

What had happened was his first thought. Then, bit by bit, everything came back to him. The storm was indeed past, but the afterswell and sough remained. He had passed through a great ordeal, he had put off the old Donald. Had he really put it off? he asked himself. Was he really a new man? He hardly knew. He was dazed and stupified, so much

had crowded into so short a time that while he was conscious that he had changed his latitude he was still unable to take correct bearings. 'Where am I?' he asked himself, and in vain sought for an answer.

The thirst for his morning dram was upon him, he poured it out as usual and raised the glass to his lips, when a spasm of recollection sent cold shivers through every nerve. 'Donald,' he exclaimed, addressing himself as was his wont, while he held the glass with tense fingers. 'Donald, that is done for ever. Do you hear Donald, *for ever*,' and raising the window he threw glass and contents out, with the decanter crashing after it. It was a brave act, but brave as the man was, in the doing of it, he blanched and trembled as though smitten by a sudden palsy. The consuming passion for the liquor to which he had been accustomed most of his life, was an appalling discovery. His power over himself was in some mysterious way limited when it touched this long-established habit. The fact had only been brought home to him at this moment and it was terrible. It seemed as though he was bound hand-and-foot by phantom chains, and no sooner was one link snapped than it reunited of itself. He felt like a man in the horrors of some frightful nightmare, flying for his life, yet making no progress, consumed with terror and effort in vain.

And this was Donald MacAlpin, six feet four, burly and brave, the man whom men feared, the man who last night bearded Squire Hardcastle in his own stronghold, and set out with high resolve to order his life on new lines, and do splendid things. He had no misgivings as to his ability to accomplish what he desired. What could this mean—this savage clamour—this fierce craving for liquor? Could such a thing as this defeat the better purpose of his life, thwart and destroy him in the very moment of deliverance? He shuddered as the full significance of the conflict smote upon his awakened consciousness. It was no longer a warfare with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, with spiritual wickedness in high places, and falling upon his knees he cried out in mortal agony, 'God, God, save me, save me, a

miserable, weak, graceless fool, who cannot do the thing that he would, without help, without help of God.'

There were some moments of stillness, his face tense and white, his hands clenched, his eyes closed the better to see the vision of his mind. Swift as thought a great calm took possession of his life. All the springs of purpose within him were flooded and filled by a new inspiring radiance. He was still our old friend Donald MacAlpin, with all his grim humour and fierce energy, but with something added, which left him the same, and yet not quite the same.

With the new light upon him, he opened a drawer and took out a parcel which had lain there for several years. He liked to have it there, he had often touched it, held it in his hands and had better thoughts while he did so, but his courage to open it had always failed him. It was his mother's Bible, her dying gift to him. He remembered it. It had been well and lovingly used by her, and the sight of it brought back much that had lain in his mind under the dust of years. It came back to him how she looked up after reading some portions that seemed more than commonly precious to her, with a peculiar light upon her face, and how he wondered what she could find to interest her so much. It had always seemed to him a dull book, grim and threatening, without humour or any saving touches of mirth, a book in short to make a man miserable and spoil his pleasure. But now he remembered that the last days of her life were filled with the thoughts and sayings of this book. He could recall some of them, they were not grim and threatening at all, but full of pathos and beauty. Ah, he said to himself, she had never sinned as her son had sinned, and no doubt it was only to the pure-hearted that the oracle gave forth such comforting messages.

The dark spectre of doubt began to rise before his vision and the dark horror seemed ready to creep back. He felt like a man who had escaped the fury of the hurricane, but the waves still rolled in to his feet increasing in force each time. Perhaps the next might engulf him. Who could tell!

He held the book in his hand, wondering and fearful, not daring to open it. A bit of red wool showed at the top, evidently it had been used as a book marker, he opened it there, almost hastily, and read—'Innumerable evils have compassed me about, mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up. They are more than the hairs of my head, therefore mine heart faileth me. Yet the Lord thinketh upon me. He inclined unto me and heard my cry.' He was startled. Again he read, 'He brought me up out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock.' It seemed to him like a present miracle that words written so long ago should fit his need at the moment, as though he had been measured for them. No wonder his mother loved this book, he told himself. It goes to a man's heart and makes him feel that other men have sinned and been redeemed from the utmost depths; the ocean of light and love still continues to flow over death and darkness, inspiring the despairing with courage and hope.

'Thanks,' he said, looking up; 'thanks, dearest mother, now and always, for this precious gift,' and bowing his head upon the open page the strong man wept like a little child.

A great gulf seemed to separate the man of the day before from the man of that hour, a moral avalanche had swept a bitter and sinful past into oblivion, almost without warning. The memory of his previous life remained as something viewed from a long distance, a mere dream, a thing of shadow, shorn of all power, and the man stood up dominated through all his being by new forces for which he had hardly yet found a name.

But what of the wife and bairns? He must meet them of course. With the thought, a curious shyness came over him. No, he could not lay bare the secret of his soul's conflict to any mortal creature, not even to his own wife, at least, not yet.

Talking about these things of the inner life was quite right, no doubt. Donald had no fault to find with those who were gifted that way, and had per-

force to give voice to every breath which rippled the streamlets of their Christian consciousness, but for himself he felt there were things which it was not lawful—not even possible for a man to utter.

It was a perfect day, the air was invigorating, and the sun shone in a cloudless sky. He felt he must get out to breathe more freely. But when he surveyed himself it was plain his outward man was much disordered. His clothes were soiled, and in places torn to shreds, his boots were covered with mud to the ankles, his coat was profusely decorated with gorse, and his bonnet had ceased to bear any resemblance to its original shape or colour.

To divest himself of his soiled garments was his first consideration, and having bathed he put on clean sweet clothes, and, humming a tune softly, he went down to meet his wife. Sandy was waiting for him in spite of all his mother's care, but, to her surprise, Donald patted the little fellow upon the head and smiled down into the boy's happy face.

MacAlpin was unusually still and silent this morning, but with a new touch of gentleness, foreign to his boisterous life. After breakfast he went out whistling as usual, for Donald always whistled or sung something or other when he had any serious bit of thinking on hand.

He was at all times finely impartial in his selections, but to-day he excelled himself in an amazing way. 'Old Hundred' and 'Bangor' contended for supremacy with the 'Land o' the Leal' and 'Ha' Johnnie Cope, are ye waukin' yet?'

'Mither, mither,' piped Sandy breathless and gleeful, 'faither is whistling the Kirk sangs.'

'Whisht, whisht, laddie,' his mother said, lifting a warning finger. 'I'm listening.' She was more than listening. She was wondering what it could mean.

Donald had never mocked at religion, she told herself with some satisfaction—no, he never mocked at religion.

This was quite true; he had never given the matter much consideration of any sort. In short, he had no use for religion; he preferred to go to the devil in

his own way without even having a bowing acquaintance with doctrines, creeds, churches, or aught else.

When well-meaning people spoke to him on the subject he had waved it aside with seeming indifference saying briefly, 'Women-folk and bairns should attend to what the Kirks tell them, men have more serious things to occupy them.'

No wonder his wife was unprepared for the new drift of things.

'Does faither ken he is whistling the Kirk sangs?' broke in the irrepressible Sandy.

'I dinna ken, laddie,' his mother said gently, with a grave wistful look at the boy. 'I dinna ken; ask him yersel', Sandy, ma cushat, when he comes hame; ask him, laddie: he may—he may tell you himsel'.'

CHAPTER IV.

THE LOVERS' ISLE

MACALPIN desired no companionship this day, not even that of his faithful dog. He swung along at a rattling pace until he was well into the woods.

He had always been a lover of nature, and now nature, like a benevolent nursing mother, wrapped him round and round in swaddling-clothes of perfect peace. He was singularly incurious about his present mental mood, he never thought of asking himself how long it would last, or whether it would evaporate in the stress and turmoil of actual existence. He was not the kind of man to apply the microscope to the inner workings of his own mind and produce the result as a religious exercise for the benefit of others.

It was quite clear, however, to any one who knew him that his life was not likely, by any transformation, however exalted and complete, to become a perpetual idyll. The conflict and storm was sure to come, although for the moment he was securely anchored in still waters.

He continued this tramp with the utmost enjoyment along the banks of the Fleet, which in some parts of Glintshire is no more than a brawling brook, flowing over its bed of variegated pebble, and giving forth its own murmuring music as it winds its way through meadow and woodland.

He had been born within a few miles of the spot, and knew the country by heart. As a boy it was a favourite pastime with him, while lying under the trees and endeavouring to distinguish the different insect notes, to shut his eyes and make mental pictures of the landscape for many miles around him. Amidst the still beauty of the moment, he recalled now the memory of the turbid and swollen waters when in flood-time they broke bounds and submerged the low-lying pasture-land for many acres. These were grand

moments of excitement as, perched upon a fragment of an ancient tower locally known as the Devil's Rath (*i.e.*, fort), he watched the sturdy farmers battling with the flood in the hope of rescuing their cattle or hay from the strong current which was rapidly bearing them seaward. Once he almost lost his own life in saving a gallant little dog—a diminutive terrier that had ventured into the thick of the fight.

The shouting of the men, the roar and rush of the waters, the grinding and pounding of the great boulders as, torn from the banks, they were driven toward the ocean, came back to him now with a singular and unbidden note amidst the perfect Eden of the hour.

No district within the bounds of the British Isles possessed greater diversity of scenery at that period, and although time has wrought many changes, it is still far-famed for its beauty of wood and stream, its dreary wastes, its almost pathless moors, its miles of dense forest, and its strikingly romantic history.

But at the time of which we write, the beauty of its wooded solitude made it at once fascinating to and dreaded by the ordinary traveller, compelled to make the journey between the two capitals by coach or on horseback. The reason was not far to seek. His lordship of the road was at the time very much in evidence. Not the tawdry dare-devil ruffian we frequently hear of, but often a well-dressed, well-spoken gentleman, like the famous McLean, at once the king of cut-purses and a social celebrity. Fortunately there were still many beautiful nooks unknown to, and unfrequented by, such desperadoes—if such still survived—and MacAlpin had set his mind on visiting one of these before his return.

It was but a tiny island, in the midst of boiling, rushing waters, carved out of the rocky soil by the action of two streams, which, uniting in a great volume of foam and spray and dashing in vain against a solid rampart of rock, again parted, to unite below in one tumbling mass of angry waters.

This island paradise could only be approached on one side, and then only by a slender foot-bridge which had seen many years of service, and over which in

consequence few cared to pass. But those who were brave enough to venture at once found themselves in the most charming solitude, amidst the roar of rushing waters and under the shade of stately, spreading trees. Small as the island was, there were mossy nooks, springy to the tread, and rich with the fairest gems nature could bestow. There were also curious chair-like hollows, carved out of the rock by the hand of nature at some far-past time, and to crown the wonders of the spot there was a natural well, locally called 'a swallowhole,' of great and mysterious interest, and to complete the enchantment a profusion of wild flowers, many of them very rare and exceedingly beautiful.

Everything was freshened by the constant spray from the falling waters, and the little island was thus touched everywhere with the richest verdure.

It was a spot, for all its charm, seldom now visited, except by a wandering artist or botanist or some enthusiastic student of the rocks. The island had at one time played no inconsiderable part in local history, and many a romantic and gruesome tale had been woven around it by natives of the district, to whom it was known as the Isle of Two Streams, or more frequently The Lovers' Isle.

It so happened that Alan Graham had business that day, of great importance, connected with the Kirk.

The Sacrament was approaching, and the Sacrament was then, we must remember, a rare and vastly important function of the most sacred kind. In short, it partook of the character of a religious festival, camp meeting, fair, and national fête all in one. To the older people it was a sacred act of the most solemn nature, and, in addition to its sacred character, represented to them a national victory won only at the cost of much suffering and life.

To the younger people it was a pleasant season of re-unions, under the inspiring and restraining influences of religion, and with brave memories of a heroic past. Such a grand occasion, it was generally conceded, demanded that it should be approached in the best garb procurable. Men donned their 'Kirk claes' with

solemn respect for the great event, and as these garments often descended from father to son, the men-folk frequently presented a strikingly unique appearance.

Women were not so easily satisfied. Weeks were often required to decide upon the most becoming gowns, head-gear, and what not. It was well to be pious, of course; but it was absolutely imperative to be braw and bonnie, and to this end art was employed with more or less skill to set off nature's handiwork.

The old soldier's errand was to carry 'the tokens' to a few outlying members of the flock. This was the proper business of the Elders, but for some reason Graham was on this occasion entrusted with their delivery. Oona had heard much of the Island of Two Streams, and, as Alan's mission lay in that direction, Janet at length gave her consent to her accompanying him.

The day was perfect, the woods were full of cheerful light, and the streamlets winding their cool and limpid way through the forest gave a delightful aspect of freshness and fertility to the scene. Deer were plentiful, and trustful enough to allow you to approach quite near them, and to see them raise their heads to take stock of the intruders before scampering off was a new delight for Oona, which words could not express. Once on the island, it was decided she should remain there until Alan had finished his business and returned for her. This was a highly satisfactory arrangement, particularly to Oona, to whom the island was a veritable 'paradise regained,' with every natural delight in miniature complete, and no intrusion likely to break the charm.

But events have a curious way of falling out quite other than we expect, as though some power took pleasure in confusing the plans of mere mortals and playing with their dearest interests, as we might with an insignificant insect. It may be, for all we know, a necessary human discipline, for after all some of the darkest chapters in the world's affairs have been the prelude to some of the brightest, and the greatest good that has come to the race has often trod on the heels of apparent catastrophies.

At the moment when Graham left Oona in possession of the beautiful little island, Reginald Hardcastle was casting his line with some skill in one of the quiet pools below the falls, while Douglas, his man, was watching his master's luck with great interest. It could hardly be said that the young man was an enthusiastic angler: he fished, like other men of his class, when time hung a trifle heavily on his hands, or shot, or danced, or played—these being the ways of gentlemen. His dog Thor, a magnificent stag-hound, had surreptitiously followed him, and on this occasion, and in spite of the watchful eye of Douglas, vanished on some business of his own. With deer about, it was impossible to leave the dog at large, and Hardcastle despatched his man, with some sharp words, to find him. Douglas judged rightly enough that the dog had caught the scent of deer. His quest was soon successful, and in returning the path brought him so near The Lovers' Isle that he discovered the presence of a lady there, to his no little astonishment. He wove a whole perfect history about the unknown on the spot; that such a person could exist so near Fosseyway and without his knowledge, piqued him beyond measure, and he half-credited his master for once with having more cunning than himself, and having planned his fishing expedition for good reasons of his own.

In this he was mistaken. Reginald Hardcastle was completely in the dark.

'A lady on Lovers' Isle?' his man asked incredulously. 'Impossible!'

'Yes; a lady, sir,' he persisted. 'She was gathering of flowers all by herself.'

The young man was greatly amused and interested; it was far more to his mind to interview this mysterious lady than to risk his luck with the fish, and handing over his fishing-tackle, he started out to see for himself.

It was a voyage of discovery quite to his taste. 'Some country lass has made an interesting tryst,' he said to himself. 'What will her languishing clodhopper think when he finds her betrayed by another!

'Tis a joke of the first water! Who would have expected so much in this out of the way corner?' and he whistled a merry tune in anticipation of the fun. It was years since he had visited the spot, but he remembered it well. The bridge—yes, the bridge—it looked more dilapidated than ever, but there was no other way. The boiling, rushing water below looked uninviting, the noise of the river in its mad rush down had got on his nerves as he made his way along the bank, and now, as he essayed to cross, the seething turmoil of waters seemed pelting him with mocking threats and calling to him out of their dark and tormented depths. He remembered in spite of himself the tales he had heard of the island, many of them so strange and so fascinating as to be disconcerting and eerie in their present quest before him. 'This lady must be a stranger,' he mused, 'after all, however she may have found her way to the island.' He crossed bravely enough with great care, which, however, would have availed him nothing had the structure given way.

Reginald Hardcastle was quite a presentable young man, and had some right to think well of himself—a duty he was not slow to fulfil. He was certainly his father's son—a cast of the old block—but there were saving touches of a better meter—a better strain in his blood—which rescued him from the influences of his father's questionable example.

He was above the average height, should anyone be curious in such matter, well knit, compact and sinuous, with brown, curling hair and dark eyes. He was a general favourite both with men and women, and was trusted for his generous open character, a man who could look men in the face without apology and without fear. At times it was plain to those who knew him best that there was a touch of impetuosity in his nature, but such was fitting and proper to his age and circumstances, and endeared him to his friends rather than otherwise.

Just now he was all eagerness, with an unusual spice of adventure and all the charm of mystery luring him on to solve the riddle so unexpectedly presented to him. A lady on the island! The fates were certainly

kinder to him than usual, and had been most considerate in providing the most desirable entertainment an idle man could wish—and Reginald Hardcastle laughed as he thought of the tale he would have to tell. In fact, it was fashionable at the time to assume several interesting vices, even if you never attained to them; for, oddly enough, it was considered necessary to the reputation of a man of fashion to keep up an appearance of gallantry in order to stand well with other men, who often pretended to many peccadilloes which belonged purely to the realm of myth.

The noise of the waters and the velvet softness of the sward effectually masked his approach, so that he stood quite unobserved for several minutes contemplating the picture before him.

That scene remained with him to the end of his days, a symbol of the unattainable good which flitted across his fancy for a moment, only to vanish into the darkness.

What he saw was a young girl about his own age, of soft, exquisite beauty, evidently quite unconscious of her own charms, and in her simple garments she had all the repose and grace which might well become a queen.

She was almost buried in the wild flowers she had gathered, and was arranging them with deft fingers into pretty garlands. The wood anemone and wild hyacinth predominated, and their tremulous beauty seemed to fascinate and charm her. She was singing to herself a curious medley of ancient ballads, with delightful inconsequence, while she adjusted her treasures to her taste, and these were of the sad and tragic order, although she sang them as happy as a bird, with no shadow upon her joyous life and no care for the future.

Thor, the stag-hound, was bound to justify his name that day, whatever came of it. He had followed his master unobserved, and now intruded himself uninvited into the affairs of mortals in the most forward manner. Thrusting his nose into Oona's lap enquiringly, he snuffed so vigorously that the flowers were scattered in all directions. It certainly was quite disconcerting,

for the dog was large and fierce-looking. His attentions, however, were quite friendly, and having satisfied himself that the lady was worthy of his respect, he stood wagging his tail and surveying the tableau before him with apparent interest. Oona had risen in haste, to find herself face to face with a strange gentleman, who only stood, hat in hand, smiling at her, and gazing in admiring wonder into the face of the fair young stranger who had so unaccountably taken possession of The Lovers' Isle. Conversation was difficult owing to the babble of rustling waters, and Hardcastle advanced a step in order to hear. The movement filled her with alarm. She retreated with a touch of rustic dignity which amused the young man immensely. He bowed low, so low that to her there was a touch of mockery in his exaggerated deference. 'I am waiting,' she said, 'for Alan Graham, and I wish to be alone.'

'What a pity,' the young fellow said, still advancing. 'He may not come, you know, and besides the island—well, the island has a curious history. Let me tell you about it while you wait for your friend—but these cursed waters drown decent speech!' he said as, advancing, he stood beside her. She withdrew, in her alarm, nearer and nearer to the water-fall, until hearing was out of the question. It was plain that he could not return as he came and confess himself defeated, and yet they might both as well be dumb and deaf, for the spirit of the waters chattered and babbled and thundered in a thousand tones, mocking all efforts at human speech and laughing at their helplessness. There was something comical in the situation which caught the young man's fancy, and in spite of himself he laughed immoderately; the grave look of wonder on the young lady's face only intensified the fun. Still, he told himself, the joke was against him, and the fair unknown kept her secret. This must not be, and advancing swiftly he caught her in his arms and held her in spite of her struggles. The flowers, so lately her treasured prize, were not only scattered but trodden under foot, while she sobbed in dismay and terror. Her fear amused and pleased him: his

sense of power was agreeable to him. He could control her movement, but the look shot from her flashing eyes told him that for all that he was defied and set at naught. He touched her hair with his lips almost reverently, and held her from him to note the effect of the salutation: surely such polite restraint on his part would re-assure her. He explained his good intentions, assured her of his devotion, and was trying to soothe her alarm as best he could, when a shadow fell between them, and a hand was laid upon his collar which roused him from his day-dream. In an instant he was spun round in the grip of Donald MacAlpin as though he were a naughty boy. 'The devil!' the young man hissed, stirred to extreme anger at so unexpected an encounter.

'Exactly,' assented MacAlpin, with great composure. 'The devil's ahint o' a' mischief, na doot, na doot.'

'Here then,' said Hardcastle, 'take your hands off me, you confounded marplot—take your hands off, I say'; and, thoroughly roused, he put forth all his strength to free himself. But the iron grip of MacAlpin never relaxed for a moment; instead, he spoke soothingly to him.

'Hae patience, Master Reginald! hae patience; a' in good time, a' in good time.' Meanwhile MacAlpin was forcing him toward the bridge, struggling and furious. 'Now,' said MacAlpin, as they got there, 'the bridge is none too safe, but you may cross it if you will; if I tried to throw you across there might be an accident, and it would be a thousand pities to have an accident, Reginald—a thousand pities—yes, yes, a thousand pities.'

'You must answer for this,' the young man said, shaking himself so soon as he was released, and white to the lips with passion; 'You must answer for it, I say.'

'Very good,' MacAlpin said indifferently, with a shrug. 'I'll answer for it in an hour's time if that pleases you. I know your fishing ground. I'll answer for it, and more, Reginald—trust me for that.'

MacAlpin returned to Oona and made as light of the incident as possible, for her comfort. 'The young

man meant no harm,' he explained to Oona, 'he was thoughtless and full of life and mischief.' He knew him well, had known him all his life, and while he talked he studied the sweet face before him with a curious awakening of memory, and as he left, seeing Graham coming, he could not help murmuring to himself: 'My God, what a likeness—what a likeness.' A vivid searchlight seemed to have been thrown upon the past. 'The same trustfulness,' he said, 'the same deep, true, steadfast eyes, and no doubt,' he said, with a shudder, 'the same capacity for an absorbing passion, happily still dormant. But who can tell?' When Graham heard what had occurred, he was a good deal alarmed, and decided that Janet should know nothing of it, for the present at least.

MacAlpin, faithful to his word, followed Hardcastle down stream. The young man had waited impatiently, his anger in no way cooled. To be collared like a small boy, and treated so unceremoniously in the presence of a lady, was more than flesh and blood could endure. It could not pass; he must have satisfaction for an insult so open and palpable before many hours. There was no other way—absolutely none. It was in this mood Donald found him.

'Satisfaction,' MacAlpin echoed, as he seated himself upon the bank, and proceeded to fill his pipe with great deliberation. 'Satisfaction is an excellent thing, Reginald—a very excellent thing! How much would you like of it?' and he turned round so that he might see the young man to the best advantage.

'I would like a good deal of it,' Hardcastle said, controlling himself with a great effort. 'Where did you leave your distressed damsel, if a man may ask such a question?'

'Why, on the island, of course, in the company of Alan Graham. And hark ye, Reginald, she must be free of the island when it may please her, without interference. Do you understand?'

'No, I don't,' Hardcastle said shortly, rising. The note of anger in his master's voice brought Thor to his side, where he waited for orders, with an eye on MacAlpin. He had been restrained once before on

the island, and seemed to think it was not fair to be snubbed all the time, when even gentlemen lost their tempers. His master again bade him down, but ignoring it he walked over to MacAlpin and nosed him inquiringly, and then, apparently satisfied, he lay down a little way from them as though he had made up his mind to trust them to behave properly,

'Not interfere with her!' Hardcastle continued. 'If she chooses an island on the estate as her boudoir, it's only civil to keep her company. It would be a confounded shame to do otherwise, and leave her to the eternal drivel of the old fellow Graham. Why, she was singing old love-ditties all to herself, and arranging flowers like a Fairy Queen, when you came with your rough ways and sour visage and spoiled sport.'

'You forget, Reginald Hardcastle,' MacAlpin said, rising, 'that you were trampling these same flowers under foot and seriously alarming the lady, who never dreamt of intrusion.'

'Well, I meant no harm,' Hardcastle drawled, a little ashamed.

'I believe it, Reginald,' MacAlpin said cheerily. 'I believe you meant no harm, and I admit I was a little rough and I ask your pardon.'

'Oh, come,' the young fellow said, much disconcerted.

'I mean it,' MacAlpin continued, holding out his hand. 'I mean it; but there must be no more sport in that quarter. I kent her mother, and I owe her daughter some amends.'

'Oh, indeed; you knew her mother?' the young man repeated, and a new light dawned upon him, which made him whistle softly in a knowing manner, which was not lost on MacAlpin. 'You knew her mother? Now you interest me exceedingly.' MacAlpin looked much annoyed, and coloured to the roots of his hair in unfeigned dismay.

His visible discomfort drew from the young man boisterous mirth. It was such an unexpected side of MacAlpin. They had all at once changed places; and the youth was master of the situation, and the older man at a disadvantage.

'When you have had your laugh, Reginald, I have something to say,' MacAlpin said quietly.

'No doubt you have,' the young man said, trying in vain to suppress his amusement. 'It would be odd if you had nothing to say considering——'

'Reginald,' MacAlpin said, gripping the young man by the shoulder, 'I kent her mother, but not as you suppose.'

'Oh, of course not,' the young man said with mock gravity. 'All right and proper, of course.'

'Yes,' MacAlpin said, with an impressive grip which made the young fellow wince. 'All right and proper so far as I am concerned. She is in no way related to me,' and a look of compassion touched his face as he looked down into his companion's eyes. 'What I have said is true, Reginald. You will know it all some day for yourself; meanwhile you must take my word.'

'Oh, hang it all,' the young man said scornfully, 'there is too much mystery.'

'I am sorry,' MacAlpin said humbly, 'but the mystery cannot well be dispensed with at present. Your father must know nothing of this lady's presence, remember.'

'The governor's all right,' Hardcastle said impatiently. 'He need know nothing. Why should he?'

'Then listen,' MacAlpin said. 'The young lady shall have undisturbed possession of the island when she pleases. You must not speak to her, show yourself to her, or communicate with her in any way.'

'I'll promise nothing of the sort, MacAlpin; you take too much for granted. Confound you, man, I am not a child. I am master of my own actions. I'll speak to whom I please without any man's permission. You have my promise that I'll in no way molest the lady.'

'You must promise as I say,' MacAlpin said sternly, while his eyes held the young fellow's and his will dominated his with extraordinary insistence. 'You will promise before we part.' He shook himself free from MacAlpin's grasp, goaded into anger at last,

'The whole thing is too solemn by a league or more. What does it all mean? I will not insult the lady. I'll

treat her like a queen—and, by Jove, she is a queen too! I was an ass to offend her. Here, MacAlpin, cannot you excuse me to her in some sort of way; put it a kind of right, you know. I meant no harm, on my soul and honour I meant no harm. Do you believe me?’

‘I do!’ MacAlpin said in perfect good faith.

‘Then I promise,’ Hardcastle said. ‘I promise, honour bright!’ and held out his hand. ‘You coerce a fellow, MacAlpin,’ he said half resentfully; ‘you coerce a fellow with your determined air and solemn ways! Well, it’s settled, but I hope the mystery is not to hang on for ever and a day! I am not the most patient man in the world, but I can hold out for a little while, anyway. See if I don’t!’

And so they parted. Deep down in MacAlpin’s heart there was a tender regard for the young Hardcastle, which soon deepened into a great pity for Eric Hardcastle’s son and heir.

CHAPTER V.

THE STORY OF A GREAT CRIME

WE must take the liberty of summarizing a few intervening events in the interest of the reader, otherwise Mr Frederick Maitland, lawyer-wise, will keep us waiting as long as he would have kept the young laird, had not that chip of the old block cut matters short and plunged into the heart of the business without preface.

Briefly then, Lord Glenmore, Aynsworth's father, was altogether a notable personage. For one thing, he was a man of splendid physique, and endowed in a remarkable degree with the family heritage of good looks. 'As handsome as an Aynsworth' was a common saying when personal comeliness was in question, and with all this he had the rare charm of being without any touch of self-consciousness. He was generally known as a man of strong and determined character, and there certainly was evidence to sustain this popular conception; and yet there was a weak link somewhere, something felt, rather than actually in evidence, at least for many years. Then, as usual, people grew wise after the event, and spoke confidentially of a wild strain in the blood, a curious and unexpected lack of balance—the survival of some far-past ancestry—which stamped him as a man of eccentric virtues. Although he was without vanity, he was superbly proud in a massive sort of way. The interests that moved him were not many, but when the depths were stirred there was no mistaking what it meant with Glenmore. The little things upon the surface of his life were open to any one—very open indeed; the deeper matters were his own, with which no man might meddle with impunity. When he trusted, it was without measure or conditions. Very unwise, of course, but in spite of all his wild ways he somehow retained a curious boyishness of heart, which sat oddly enough upon him

sometimes, while in virtue of it he seldom failed to attract to himself the loyal love of friends. He was finely generous in his estimates of others, crediting them with the qualities he admired most, and wholly incapable of conceiving that any man under the guise of friendship could conceal purely selfish ends. But once the conviction of any such baseness fully seized upon him, the tiger in his nature awoke, and he could track the offender with the tenacity of a sleuth-hound to the farthest corner of the earth. Once, while quite a young man, a companion he had grown to consider a friend—Rollo Fenhurst—played him false. It was about a woman, of course; nothing else seems capable of driving men to the extremes of bliss or despair.

She was, to his ardent fancy, a divine creature, and quite perfect in all the charm of womanhood. Fenhurst, who had introduced him to this adorable person, declared he had no ambition that way himself and was full of sympathy and admiration for his friend, who had achieved so much happiness. It was for Glenmore a first experience in such deep waters, and absorbed every thought. It happened, however, that he returned unexpectedly one evening, just when twilight was passing into darkness, and heard the woman he adored mimicking him with great skill for the entertainment of his friend, Rollo, while both enjoyed the joke immensely. The times were sanguinary, and no man was expected to condone such an offence. They met next morning; all was arranged, of course, according to the code of honour in vogue. It was a fierce encounter on both sides, and in the end was fatal to Fenhurst.

Glenmore received the congratulations of his friends, touched lightly with pity for the unfortunate Fenhurst, and was complimented on his skill; but when the passion of the hour was past the horror of the deed clung to him: the abyss of his own soul had been laid bare in the joy with which he had taken vengeance, and henceforth the eternal furies were unchained within his own breast. But what was his own ultimate verdict on that morning's work was never put into words for any man.

For good or evil, his mind seemed to close upon the deed like the door of a dungeon, and so far as any one knew, it belonged to the past of forgotten things.

Yet it may in part account for the crazy freaks of his later life.

Often, when the Hall was full of guests, he would muster them among the small hours of the morning, and, sallying out with horse and hound, sweep through the neighbourhood like a whirlwind. The rustic imagination in time embellished the tales that reached them, working into them their own superstitious fears and building up a story of strange and weird interest.

Wild huntsmen galloping through the darkness by the fitful light of flashing torches, was a clear proof that Lord Glenmore had sold himself to the devil for a price, as a Glenmore of every second generation was said to do, for some mysterious reason, for more than two hundred years.

These wild revels were brought to a sudden and tragic close by the murder of a woman in a secluded part of the Longwalk—a semi-private path of over two miles in length, which led from the highway through a bit of woodland to the Hall. The unfortunate woman was unknown in the district, and was afterwards found to be a foreigner. She had been brutally clubbed to death, and a little girl about two years old was found in a state of terror clinging to the dead woman's clothes.

Lord Glenmore chanced to find the body one autumn evening as he was returning alone after an afternoon spent in the woods, and might have passed but for the child's cries. It was a horrifying sight, everything indicating a desperate struggle.

Some fragments of writing paper, afterwards found to be of foreign manufacture, scattered about, suggested the theory that the unfortunate creature had some documents of importance, for the safe keeping of which she had given her life, and the possession of which may have been the motive for the crime.

Lord Glenmore was gay and reckless enough, but he was not quite heartless, and the sight of a baby girl in tears, under such terrible circumstances, touched

the best in him. He took up the little sobbing mite with clumsy tenderness, in spite of its tears and terror, and made his way to the Hall for help. The action was most natural and altogether to his credit, although the interpretation put upon it afterwards was not favourable to his case. To make matters worse, the child disappeared soon afterwards, no one being able to tell how or whither. The crime was the marvel and mystery of the day, for the time absorbing local interest, even to the exclusion of General Bonaparte's Continental victories and plan for the invasion of England. Crimes of such magnitude were rare in the district, and the horror felt was deep and genuine.

The local magnates of the law confessed themselves unable to cope with such an event, and experts were called in to take charge of the case. Theories of the crime were of course abundant, but all the same a reasonable solution of it was not forthcoming. It was brought out at the trial that the woman had landed, some days before, at an obscure fishing-port, from somewhere abroad, and that she spoke very little English, and asked her way to the Hall with great difficulty, frequently consulting written directions which she had with her. It could not be proved that she had ever mentioned Lord Glenmore, so that the theory that he had gone out to meet her collapsed, and all the efforts of the prosecution to show that her errand was to Lord Glenmore broke down utterly. But as he would not, or could not, account for his time that afternoon, and as his counsel could not explain to the satisfaction of the jury why he was in that part of the woods at that hour, their verdict was the doubtful one of 'Not proven,' instead of 'Not guilty.' The Hall was unusually full at the time of the murder, and it was pointed out that the woman may have been looking for a guest of Glenmore's and not the master of Fosseyway.

Under all the circumstances the verdict was all that could be expected, and as Eric Hardcastle—his bosom friend—took a deep interest in the case through all its stages, and had been in frequent consultation with the gentlemen charged with the defence, it was felt that

the utmost had been done to clear the unfortunate Glenmore from the shadow of the dastardly crime charged against him.

The law solemnly declared him a free man, and his friends were full of congratulations. But it brought no lifting of the burden to Glenmore. True, he was a free man, but he was also a changed man—the gay, reckless master of Fosseyway had passed away; henceforth there was a dark shadow upon his life. Had the victim been a man, instead of a woman, high words might have led to hard blows, and the result might perchance have been in some ways the same—but a woman with a helpless child! How could any man dream of such an unspeakable crime in connection with him? Such were his own bitter thoughts. He was free of the law, it was true; but there was a subtle influence in the air which made him feel he was not free in men's minds, and the free-living, careless, pleasure-loving peer felt maddened by the thought.

Hardcastle was much incensed against the public for their wicked stupidity, but with singular lack of consideration he made Glenmore the confidant of his wrathful comments. Some specimens of human nature find it easy to believe in the total depravity of the race, so that no outburst of evil ever surprises them; and somehow Hardcastle gathered up in an amazing manner the seamy side of men's thoughts, and recited the full measure of them to his miserable friend.

Better men than Glenmore have been changed by evil tongues and evil suspicions into veritable demons, with the music of their lives silenced for ever and nothing left but a bitter wrath which they justified to themselves as right and natural under the cruel circumstances of their lives.

A careless business man at any time, he had been reckless to madness of recent years.

The entail had been broken, on the advice of his friend Hardcastle, with the double purpose of paying off pressing claims and making investments that were represented to be exceedingly promising, under the management of Hardcastle himself.

Now when he came to set his affairs in order before

leaving his country for an indefinite period, he found there was very little left, and of that little still less immediately available.

At another time this blow in itself would have been a severe one, but now it made little or no impression upon him. The man himself seemed to have gone under: what did a little more or less of worldly gear matter at such a time? Had he been as rich as Croesus, the situation would have been the same. 'But my son!' he exclaimed. 'My God! my son!' The thought ground the unhappy man between the upper and nether millstone of his own deeds, until with clenched hands he paced the room in a dumb agony, all the more terrible because it was inarticulate. Mingling with the misery of the hour, there may have been a dark shadow from the past, when honour was avenged at the cost of a human life. Eric Hardcastle, man of the world and cynic as he was, stood appalled, perplexed, at the effect produced by the terrible event. 'Surely this could not be Glenmore! Certainly not as he had known him!' True, Glenmore could leave his son nothing in the way of wealth, except the little which he inherited from his mother, but he must leave him a clean name: he must spend the rest of his life in unravelling the history of the vile crime imputed to him. He prayed God with a fervour which was utterly sincere, 'To spare his miserable life to that end,' and as he did so he covered his face with his hands and fell upon his knees in an agony of entreaty. It was his Gethsemane, dark and terrible in the shadow of the stormy past. What he saw in that supreme moment of abstraction, we cannot tell, but as the setting sun fell upon his upturned face and tense form, covering him, all unconscious as he was, with a warm glow of golden light, Eric Hardcastle could stand it no longer, and starting up he abruptly left the room. It was Glenmore's farewell to his ancestral home. He never saw it more.

Hardcastle was nonplussed by the turn of events. He thought he knew this man to the very bottom of his nature. He was quite prepared to witness a mad outburst of fury, and then a cold measureless con-

tempt of the world's opinion. That would have been like Glenmore: but this! What did it mean? He had no key to unlock the secret: it was beyond him. He was unaccountably irritated and put out by the turn things had taken. He felt like an injured man himself. He was stirred in a very unpleasant manner by what he had seen and heard—ridiculously stirred. He was angry with himself for allowing Glenmore's eccentricities to move him. He, of all men! There was a curious spice of chagrin in it all for him. His calculations were at fault—altogether at fault, he told himself. Who could have expected such a development as this? Who indeed!

Hardcastle was a very shrewd man of the world, with unbounded faith in his own shrewdness; it was, in fact, his excessive vanity in this respect which led him into some serious mistakes. His faith in his own penetration was so complete that he forgot to give other men credit for a little of the same quality.

At the root of his nature he was coarse and profane, but he was also calculating, supple, and time-serving, and if he conceived of men as on a par with himself: what wonder! Others do the same all the world over. His estimate of human nature was, in short, uniformly low, and left no room for a superior essence, which, though it may be submerged and inoperative, exists and may at some moment of upheaval assert itself and recover lost territory, transforming barrenness into fruitfulness, and redeeming a man's life. Glenmore in many ways was no better than Hardcastle, but he was a different man. Profligate and spendthrift as he was, he retained amidst all his vices the capacity for friendship, a warm heart, and charm of manner which few could resist. While the soil grew weeds in abundance, it was not wholly vitiated, and in the very collapse of his character and fortunes in the eyes of the world, the true man was evolved, and a nobler Glenmore born.

To start on such a quest at such a time was no light undertaking, but it seemed to him that there really was no choice. It was impossible to rest quietly under the shadow of such a crime; no formal verdict could

Linked Lives

absolve him of the shame and degradation, which had bitten into the very marrow of his life. Nothing but absolute proof of his innocence could suffice. The French Terror had, as we know, at this time developed into a military despotism, and Europe at the moment was writhing under the appalling calamity of a supreme genius, gifted with amazing energy, wielding colossal power in the service of the most perfect egotism the world has ever seen.

To reach a convenient port without attracting attention or being overhauled by French cruisers was no easy matter. British subjects had no desire in those days to see the inside of French prisons. Accidents often happened in these institutions, and men frequently disappeared with mysterious suddenness and were never heard of again. Although English battle-ships sailed sometimes for weeks without coming in touch with the enemy, French cruisers would once in a while pounce upon some defenceless craft or fool-hardy old seadogs, looming phantom-like out of the fog at dawn with a blaze from water-line to truck, and do much mischief.

Glenmore, or Oswald Aynsworth as he henceforth desired to be called, was naturally anxious under the circumstances to avoid such incidents, and the captain of the good ship 'Swiftsure' was bound over to keep his fighting instincts under control, and apply himself instead to the development of the best seamanship he could command. The 'Swiftsure' was a schooner of no great tonnage, but a thing of life when the wind filled her sails, and capable of outperforming her master firmly believed, of outsailing anything afloat. She carried no guns, although well supplied with small arms for use at close quarters, if such a contingency arose. Her captain's hope was therefore in the sailing qualities of his little craft, and his own prudence in not challenging the attention of the enemy.

It was Channel weather when they put out to sea: a strong gale was blowing, and as twilight deepened into night the storm increased. The night was without moon, and although this added to their anxiety, it was otherwise favourable to their success.

During the day they showed as little sign of haste as possible, and sailed as far as might be their ship's speed and their destination. As to their place of landing, they were in no way particular. Aynsworth's plans would be equally well served by any safe port or landing-place on the Western coast of France or Spain.

It was about the seventh day, before dawn, when he succeeded in making a point of land near San Sebastian, at the foot of the Pyrenees, and began in earnest his strange journey.

The clew to the mystery of the crime for which he had been tried was of the slenderest; still, he was satisfied, and so was his lawyer, that his only hope lay in the following it with the utmost care. The main difficulty lay in the troubled state of the Continent, where the dogs of war had been so long let loose that ordinary travel was neither safe nor easy, but Aynsworth was not a man to be turned aside by danger or difficulty at any time, and now all his energies were quickened by a resolve which amounted to a consuming passion.

When his lawyer urged arguments for delay, owing to the troubled state of the times, the answer was sadly enough in the words of an old author, long since forgotten: 'Time flies and will not return, and at the best the wings of man's life are plumed with the feathers of death.' Delay was thus impossible.

He was for the moment wound up to a high pitch of persistent effort in his grim quest; but reaction, his friends knew, was bound to come with its bitter burden of darkness and despair. It is needless for us to follow his wanderings or to recount his adventures, and how, following in the wake of contending armies, he saw many strange and gruesome sights and learned to put a new value upon 'the glories of war.' If all that befell him even in a single year of his journeyings were set down, it would read more like highly-drawn romance than sober history. Perhaps some day the full story of these toilsome years may be transcribed, and their pathetic interest laid bare to all who may care to read the story.

Several years had passed, and he was no nearer the realization of his hopes than when he landed. The continued failure had told upon him: he had aged visibly. It was not the hardships he had endured, great as these were; but the fire was burning low in the man himself. Deferred hope had made his heart faint, and in spite of all he could say to himself, dark hours would engulf him, when he could see nothing but Ichabod written over him and his. He had ceased to expect any lightening of his burden, any break in the dark cloud which shut out all cheerful prospects; and it was slowly borne in upon him that he must face defeat and shame, and brace himself as well as he might to sustain the weight of his misery to the end. There was nothing else left to him, save, indeed, the stern satisfaction of having touched the bottom of his misery. He must, he told himself, take the wounds of fortune bravely, as the gladiator took the death-stroke from his comrade, ere the spark of life flickered out, leaving what was once a man limp and motionless upon the blood-soaked sand. Thinking had become increasingly difficult to him, he was like a man lost in a storm; and overcome with the bewilderment of his situation he had ceased to travel with clear purpose, and merely groped his way, uncertain of what the next step might bring.

It was at such a crisis in his wanderings that an autumn day found him toiling through a mountain gorge. The savage grandeur and sublimity of the scene would at another time have appealed to his imagination, and inspired him with the noblest thoughts, but now it oppressed him, stifled him—in short, overwhelmed him with a sense of power, which was terrible, unmovable and passionless.

The pine-clad mountains and frowning precipices only made him feel more deeply the hopelessness of his condition. He seemed to himself, in presence of the everlasting hills, like an insignificant atom in the universe, a needless atom, made only to be crushed like an insect, or thrown to the void by the master-hand that created him. 'Neither God nor man had any use for such as he.'

Night was closing in, and his strength was fast failing, his brain throbbed painfully, and a sense of helplessness crept over him. Was this the valley of the dark shadow? he asked himself; had he really come to the end of his toilsome days at last? and was it all darkness, or was there rest and light somewhere beyond the present gloom? His mind was wandering in distressful uncertainty; he staggered onward like a drunken man. A sense of lone wretchedness stole over him. The agony was fast paralyzing thought and movement; no friendly voices would greet him, no cheerful light and warmth would restore him to himself. Suddenly he stumbled over some obstruction, and in a flash of collectedness knew where he was. Fortunately, he was outside a mountain village which he had passed in the first year of his wanderings, and had stumbled over a broken Crucifix which had been wrenched from its pedestal and thrown down by some impious hand. A curious sense of mingled horror and compassionate awe swept over him; the story of the world's great tragedy came back to him as he had learned it as a boy, and with it a consciousness of sympathy and brotherhood. 'Alas, poor Sufferer!' he said as he bent over the broken figure in the gathering darkness, and laid his hand pityingly upon the crown of thorns. 'Thou too hast known sorrow: false friends, false trial and the bitter end,' and then consciousness quite forsook him, and he fell forward within the outstretched arms of the prone statue, and lay cold and still.

The army of the Revolution had swept onward, leaving, as their custom was, desolation in their track. The distant roll of drums, and the various bugle calls came, faint, but clear, up the valley, telling the people that the danger for the time was past, and that the war-worn men were called to their bivouacs at last until morning. The good Curé had only waited for this assurance before going forth at the head of his parishioners to bewail the sacrilege which had been committed.

They were a simple-hearted pious folk, isolated among their mountains, and governed by their ancient

customs and religion. The great world beyond was a sort of abiding fairy-tale, which in no way prepared them to comprehend the tangled misery of the nations at this stirring time. They followed their pastor now, as with torch-bearers he went forth on his mission of atonement, chanting with devout fervour the penitential Psalm, beginning—

'O Lord! rebuke me not in Thy fury,
Nor chasten me in Thy wrath.
Have mercy upon me, O God, for I am weak.
Heal me, O God! for all my bones are broken.'

The signs that an armed multitude had passed were everywhere visible. Happy indeed are the people who know nothing of the presence of hostile armies on their native soil.

The glow of the far-off watchfires told their own tale.

The chanted wail of the heartsore people echoed dolefully among the mountains to the accompaniment of the owls' dismal cry, in the frowning cliffs above them, while anon some wild creatures disturbed in their lair by the human wave, still murmuring in the distance, terror-stricken rushed by. The whole scene was wild, weird, and pathetic beyond description.

The destruction of their guarding Crucifix was to the simple faith of the villagers an extraordinary and unheard of crime, and when an apparently dead man was found among the broken fragments, it was received as a heaven-sent miracle. It proved to their eager faith that the cross, in spite of men's wickedness, was still powerful in drawing penitents to its sublime peace. 'Holy Mary!' exclaimed the good priest, devoutly crossing himself. 'See! see! my children, the stranger appeals to the supreme sufferer! Heaven has sent him to our love and care!' A stretcher was soon improvised by the resourcefulness of the mountaineers, and the unconscious man was borne in a sort of pious triumph to the shelter of the good priest's home. 'We found him at the cross,' he explained simply to those who were not acquainted

with all the circumstances. 'It is a good omen.' 'He shall not die! He shall not die!' Still, he lay so long like one dead, that the good man's faith was sorely put to the test, and when life was assured it was only manifested by wild and incoherent mutterings, in a language they could not understand.

The Curé cared for the stranger with unflinching solicitude, and was greatly concerned because his mind continued clouded, and dominated by furious passions. Often he would rave like a maniac and, transported with rage, fight unseen foes. At other times he would evince the most pathetic signs of distress, and whisper to himself in tones of complaint and weariness, as of one suffering the extreme of misery and defeat.

'Who was this stranger thrown so mysteriously upon their compassion?' some asked. It was time they knew something about the man. That he was English was now certain, but that fact was rather to his disadvantage than otherwise. He might be a spy they thought, an emissary of the British Government, and the Curé know nothing of it. The whole hamlet might be obliged to suffer the consequences of harbouring him. It was indeed a grave question. It was not well, however, to indicate such misgivings to the Curé, for plainly the good man was devoted to the stranger. The Curé had a kind heart, they said, with evident sincerity, but—well, they wished the Notary was at home. The Notary would examine the man's belongings, papers and such-like, and by some means or other find out who he was, and set their minds at rest. Of course, it would be his duty to do this, and they could depend upon the Notary to do his duty. Yes, they could depend upon the Notary! He was a wise and shrewd man, the wisest in the parish—except—perhaps, the Curé, but the Curé was pious, very pious, and worthy, very worthy, they all liked the Curé, but somehow, excessive piety was detrimental to a large measure of wisdom in things earthly, and plainly this stranger was no saint, and might have been a great offender for aught any of them knew at that moment. Monsieur Menard, the

Notary, was also wishing himself safe home again among his own people. He had been carried off unceremoniously by the army that had passed the day the stranger was found. Marshal Augereau desired to speak with him at headquarters, a few leagues beyond, but it was many leagues distant before he was brought into Augereau's presence. He had heard so much of the terrible Marshal that the request filled him with alarm, and not without cause.

The severe exactions the French made on all districts, whether friends or enemies, was well known, and it might well be that all the skill of the notary, would not suffice to save their district from being picked bare by the vultures of the Revolution. When, therefore, he returned a few weeks later and was able to announce that he had been successful in securing their exemption for the present, he was greeted with unbound satisfaction. Their faith in the Notary was not misplaced, that was certain. He was undoubtedly a great man. He had spoken face to face with one of the most renowned Marshals of France, and came through the ordeal unscathed.

The sick stranger had meanwhile improved very much in health and although weak, was no longer excited by the fancies which at first tormented him. Sometimes he talked of strange scenes and persons in his sleep, but when awake he seemed indisposed to be communicative. So far the Curé's faith was justified, he would live, of that there was no longer any doubt. His own impatience was the only drawback, his determination to be up and on his way was consuming what little vitality he possessed in spite of all their efforts to sooth and encourage him. The Notary, who among his varied accomplishments included a fair knowledge of English, insisted on allowing him to try his strength, as the shortest way of bringing home to him his own helplessness. It was sufficient; he fell back upon his couch with a pitiful look of patient pain upon his strongly marked face, and said no more. It was a few evenings after this that the Curé and Notary decided that the sick man's effects should be carefully examined, as he showed no dis-

position to throw any light on his own history. He was lying in the next room—a mere closet—close to where they were sitting, and lying as he had been for some days, nerveless and still, with closed eyes. There was not much to examine, a well-filled knapsack, a few pocket-books, with notes something like a diary, and some pieces of soiled paper written on in a neat small hand and much crumpled, but smoothed out and put away evidently with much care. That was all! His name—yes his name was Aynsworth, 'Oswald Aynsworth' the notary read aloud. The man in the next room stirred in his sleep, and they spoke more softly. They had found his name, and the name of his solicitors to whom in case of his death they or anyone should communicate the fact. He was not a spy then, no spy would keep an account of his own movements, and furnish a clue to his own identity. The Curé was made happy by this announcement. But why he should travel about so aimlessly remained to be answered. 'Something wrong here,' the notary promptly replied, touching his forehead significantly. 'Ah!' ejaculated the Curé compassionately, crossing himself. 'See,' continued Monsieur Menard, in confirmation of his own wisdom, and he turned out the soiled bits of paper on to the table. 'Eccentric, eccentric!' he remarked with the easy superiority of a man who knew more than others, and could put two and two together, while duller wits were fumbling for the key to unlock such little secrets.

The priest saw the fragments, preserved with so much evident care, fluttering about the table, with a puzzled rather than satisfied look. He was deficient in the shrewd intellect of his companion, but he was remarkably endowed with a gentle and reverend heart, and instinctively shrunk from seeing the sick man's little private nothings treated so cavalierly. The notary was pleased with the effect his sage conclusions had produced, and leaned back in his chair, amiably waiting to receive congratulations. The curé, instead, picked up one of the despised scraps, and examined it with great care. The effect was magical, his hand trembled, he was much agitated, and his

pale cheeks blanched while his whole frame shook. What could this mean! The notary was interested, it was not dignified to show excessive surprise. He was certainly much interested. He had never seen the curé like this before, it was a sort of irregular manifestation of feeling, hardly becoming in a priest. The curé had sunk into a chair and covered his face with his hands. The notary finding it incumbent upon him to do something picked up the bit of paper the curé had laid down and scrutinized it closely.

The effect was almost the same, only a little less restrained. 'Mon dieu! Mon dieu!' he muttered, as he examined each piece with the utmost rapidity, exhausting his extensive vocabulary meanwhile in his utter amazement at what he discovered, then sweeping up all the pieces hastily, he placed them carefully in his own pocket-book for safe-keeping, and waited the curé's pleasure. The good man recovered himself, as the importance of action was forced upon him; he dare not delay lest he should fail to do his duty, should be untrue to himself, and to the great trust reposed in him. He opened a drawer in a small cabinet and took out a few small articles of some value, and among them a miniature of a man in early manhood, and a few letters. All had been carefully preserved. Both men examined the picture with scrupulous thoroughness, and the letters were also compared with the sick man's note book. Then they breathed freely, and sat down satisfied and exhausted by the sharpness of the mental strain they had passed through. Almost at the same moment a lean hand, more like a skeleton's than a living man's, reached between them and clutched the picture, as a miser might his dearest treasure, and with a wild cry—Aynsworth fell full length upon the floor.

It was so sudden and unexpected that both men were for a moment dumb and powerless. He had made his way to where they were seated in the lamp-light, like a shadow, it was indeed but a few steps. The sight of the miniature produced a sudden revival of knowledge, the recognition of it came like a flash, and exerting all his strength he seized it with the

eagerness of a desperate man, with the result we have seen.

In a little time he was carried to his room where he lay helpless, but with a new look of content upon his worn face. They made no attempt to take the picture from him, its possession seemed to give him perfect satisfaction, his mind was more at rest, and he consequently gained strength much more rapidly. They had concluded before that he was no spy, they were convinced now that he was no criminal.

Beyond that not even the notary could go. Whatever might be the cause of his sudden act or the mystery of his visit to their mountain home, they had no doubt that in some strange way he held the key that would, at the fitting time, unlock the secret of a great sorrow, perhaps of a great crime.

Aynsworth's recovery after this was slow, but steady and wholly satisfactory in the end. During the long weeks of enforced leisure he had time to gather up the threads of his discovery and commit to writing the main features of it with a fulness which left nothing to be desired.

It was from the good priest he learned the story of the little child he had taken from the arms of the murdered woman in the Long Walk at Fosseyway. A marvellous story it was indeed to Aynsworth, who had but faint recollections of the family traditions about a marriage of a member of his house with a daughter of a French nobleman.

This child then was Hardcastle's own daughter he repeated with amazement as bit by bit the story developed, and her mother was a kinswoman of his own. How strange, how wonderful! He had found all he sought and so much more. It was in truth an extraordinary revelation of duplicity, the opening of an unexpected charnel-house of human foulness, of which even in his wildest moments of mental misery and despair he had never dreamt.

'His friend!' How the word had become as gall and wormwood. 'His friend!' knew all the time he was innocent, absolutely innocent, nay more, he knew who was guilty—and yet—it was even now well nigh

past belief—he would have sent him to a felon's doom without a word, and played the role of faithful counsellor to the end.

He paced the room in extreme agitation as the full force of the situation took possession of him. He had not only to clear himself then, he had also to avenge the wrongs of another, and bring home the crime of which he himself had been accused to,—could it be possible?—bring home this cowardly crime to Eric Hardcastle. Perhaps it was but a bad dream after all, a fancy that would pass as other fearsome shadows of the brain had passed, or was it in truth a fact of crude and desperate wickedness that had to be probed to the bottom, come what may?

No disclosure could well be more unexpected nor amazing. But now that it had come in this extraordinary shape, it was certainly stimulating in a marked degree. It called for immediate action, and action was the best tonic Aynsworth could have at the moment. The end before him now was at last perfectly plain, and all the way lay in broad daylight, there was no longer any shadow or mystery, nor make-believe, nor false issue, of any sort, the whole chain of evidence was complete, and in his own hands. Surely there could be no more failure in the fulfilment of his heart's desire! The good old priest, wrapped up in his own thoughts, was more content than he had been for years. He had carried a great burden until he tottered under it, and now it was transferred to another, who was skilful and strong, and had power to carry it to a right conclusion.

It was on his last interview with his guest, to whom his heart had gone out from the very first, that the curé felt he must unburden himself of the whole story, so that nothing might any longer remain in doubt, but that the whole should stand out in sharp relief at whatever cost.

'The Lady Madelene, was left an orphan at an early age,' remarked Aynsworth.

'Yes, monseigneur, she was not quite thirteen. I was appointed her guardian, and indeed, I became instructor, and confessor as well, so that my life has

been in a way bound up with her life from the first. I had been her mother's friend, our families were distantly connected, and I was her nearest; in fact, her only known relative. I accepted the trust with all my heart and did my best, perhaps I erred, but I did what I could and she was gentle and good always, and my hopes were great that she would choose a religious life. This English stranger came more than once to our hamlet, but how could we know the ground of his preference for our mountain home. We had not learned to consider the Lady Madelene more than a child. She had grown up among us, and her perfect beauty of form did not impress us as it did strangers.

'She was indeed most beautiful and perfect in every grace of early womanhood, but alas! she learned to love monseigneur's friend and what could we do? I was an old man, and a priest, absorbed in the things of another world, and burdened with the anxious care of many souls, and besides I had hoped even against hope that she would give herself to a religious life. But, alas! she had no vocation that way, none whatever!

'I could not grudge her the happiness she found with her English lover, although I desired it otherwise and was much perplexed. We could not foresee what followed, nor know the bitter end. How blind we were, perhaps mercifully blind, for surely it is tender wisdom that veils the future! It is enough to bear and suffer in the present, without the foreshadowing of what lies beyond in the years of our mortal life.'

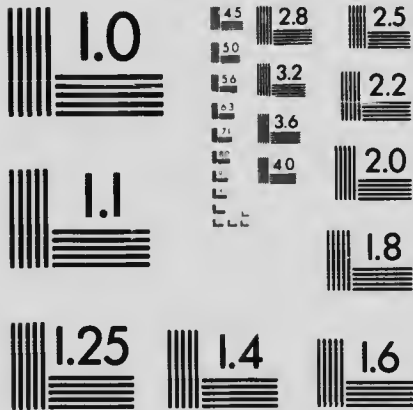
'How long did he remain with his wife?' Aynsworth asked.

'Oh, many months,' the old priest answered. 'He left and returned, and then he left and returned no more. She was crowned with happiness for such a little while and then the sun darkened, and she was left sad and broken in the gloom of a great despair. It was so hard to see her waste away in sorrow, while we who loved her were helpless, and could do nothing.'



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'The memory of the time that followed is unspeakably painful, but God was merciful in the gift of the little child, for whose sake we had to seem less sad, even while we suffered.'

'Did he not write to his wife then?' Aynsworth asked.

'Oh, yes,' the old man explained. 'He wrote more than once. Monseigneur has the letters with the other papers. These also are in Monseigneur's keeping and will I trust help much when Monseigneur reaches his own country.'

'But she must also have written to her husband,' remarked Aynsworth.

'Yes, she wrote many times,' the curé explained. 'But received no answer, sometimes her letters were returned. The person to whom they were addressed could not be found.'

'And of these returned letters,' Aynsworth asked.

'Oh, Monseigneur,' the old man exclaimed with uplifted hands, as though driving away some evil image from his brain. 'They broke her heart! They broke her heart! and we buried them with her, we could do no other. As she had not destroyed them herself we dare not. We left them in the dear dead hands, that had written them in hope. God knows we did it for the best, and in tender love for the lady Madelene, whose loving heart was no doubt revealed in them in vain.'

Both men were silent for a moment.

'The child was sent to England in accordance with her own request,' at last the old man continued. 'It made us sad, but we would not refuse to fulfil her last desire and our word was pledged to her before the end came.'

'Why did she send the child to England?' Aynsworth enquired. 'After such cruel treatment?'

'She never lost faith in her husband,' the old priest said with a gleam of triumph in his kind grey eyes. 'She had much faith, Monseigneur, and loved most perfectly and in spite of all the pain, she was glorified by her own perfect trust and unflinching devotion, albeit it was so grievously misplaced. Nor could any of us

be quite certain that he would not return, till Monseigneur came. She thought there had perhaps been an accident, that he had been stricken down, and never recovered sufficiently to explain, and she thought his family would care for their child for his sake. It seemed most natural. It was perhaps a desperate choice, but there was room for no other. We did our best. It was not much we could do. Madame Delmont and her husband started on their perilous journey with the child full of hope and fear, Madame had been our lady Madelene's nurse in early days. They were of course furnished with all necessary papers for their undertaking, and copies of all documents, now in Monseigneur's possession, so that the child's claim to care and consideration might be established.'

'But evil fortune pursued them from first to last. Madame's husband was pressed by the way to serve in the French Army, and Madame was forced to continue the terrible task alone. All this we learned from a discharged soldier, who returned broken and maimed from the war. Monseigneur might see this man, if he desired for he still lived although crippled for life. Ah, yes, a wreck, a sad wreck!'

'Then the clue failed until Monseigneur came so strangely to our hamlet, bringing with him the fragments of the copied documents in the notary's own handwriting. It was most sad, most wonderful, a strange evil fate which had been permitted, no doubt, for some wise end. These things are hid from us,' he murmured devoutly crossing himself, and the gentle old man's voice broke for the first time. 'Madame murdered! and the child of the Lady Madelene lost! Lost among strangers! Where will all this end! What sin of ours has wrought this web of wretchedness? Not hers,' he protested, to himself. 'She was pure as the angels of God, and yet, she suffered, suffered, suffered to the end.'

Aynsworth sat still and stern. He had absorbed the appalling story in the totality of its evil purpose, with fuller knowledge than the curé could bring to it. He was altogether content to leave the inscrutable to

the All-Knowing, but for the present his concern was to see justice, pitiless justice, done upon the perpetrator of so many crimes. Aynsworth was not indeed the dare-devil man of the past, but he was still a long way from the chastened, patient, piety, of the old priest. The world of human affairs is shaped by many influences, and it was clear that Aynsworth's work, whatever it might be would always partake of the earthquake and the whirlwind, rather than the persuasive power of the still, small voice.

Next day a little after dawn, Aynsworth left the hamlet carrying with him the fully-attested evidence of a well-planned villany, which lacked no element of passion, greed and treachery to make it wholly revolting in its calculated wickedness.

Fortune had favoured Eric Hardcastle so far, good success had smiled upon him, prosperity had crowned him with wealth and lands, his fellow-men looked up to him, and his son assured him that his name would continue, and possessions be handed on in lawful succession to his heirs.

He was well content with his own life. He knew all the highways and byways of a merry world, and had no serious regrets, nor unfulfilled ambitions. What more could a man desire? Certainly he at least had no ground for discontent, it was a pleasant enough world as he knew it. Had his wife lived it would have been altogether more satisfactory. Reginald was so young when she died, and young children, he told himself, really need a woman's care, and then there are so many ways in which a man's wife can be of use to him. Still, it might have been worse, yes, much worse; her death certainly made a tiny ripple of pain on the surface of his pleasant existence, and he was decorously miserable for a short time. Perhaps we do him an injustice. He may have had real pangs of sorrow, for such men have a singular capacity for attachments that fit in with their plans and purposes, without clashing at any point with their dominant desires. And men of cool reflectiveness, like Hardcastle, can often look beyond the immediate break in the continuity of their lives, to the time when their

grief, such as it is, will have spent itself, and the world will be as gay and satisfying as before.

Besides, a great sorrow, or what ought to be a great sorrow, is in the nature of a new sensation; it makes a man interesting to his fellows and secures him their consideration. It calls a truce to all bitterness, save among the most debased, and the waves of human kindness flow over a man's blackest misdeeds for a time. True, the tide will ebb by-and-by, leaving the slime, and ooze and loathsome things visible once more to the light of day. But that is not yet, and what is not yet, may not be, or may be different in kind or degree, and wise men like Hardcastle never make themselves miserable by anticipating events, which at the worst may be modified or neutralized by circumstances that are still among the hidden things of the future.

CHAPTER VI

VENGEANCE IS MINE

AYNSWORTH had been fortunate in securing, through the good priest, two trusty guides, who undertook to accompany him on his way for at least three days' journey. Beyond that they could not promise, as it was by no means safe to be found outside one's own district in these distressful times. In short, travel of all sorts was practically suspended, it being almost as dangerous as bearing arms in any of the great armies in the field.

This was owing largely to the fact that as the struggle proceeded, hundreds of men who grew weary of fighting in the regular way of business, formed themselves into lawless bands and set up on their own account. These terrible desperados raided whole districts at will, and executed summary vengeance on all who made any show of resistance. In some cases these marauders shrewdly turned their military skill to account by fortifying deserted buildings, from which they issued forth in lordly style to levy blackmail on the depressed and terrified inhabitants. Aynsworth had no wish to fall in with any such unpleasant companions, any more than he had of running across any of the fighting forces of the many nationalities then in arms.

For these excellent reasons he was unable to follow any direct route, and indeed was compelled more than once, in spite of his impatience, to change his course according to the prevailing conditions of the district through which he passed. Sometimes it was found even necessary to retrace their steps, and finally they concluded it was best to confine themselves to mountain paths, known only by huntsmen in search of game, and these frequently led them into rough and untravelled tracks, where they had to pick their way

painfully, aside from all known lines of travel, over stones and splinters of rocks.

This made Aynsworth very anxious at the end of the second day, for the future of his journey. After the evening meal and some hours of rest, the guides proposed, as it was brilliant moonlight, that they should push on through the night, to which he readily assented.

The country was new to him, but the guides were on familiar ground, and had explored the depths of these forest lands many times since their boyhood, and knew it, as one of them said, by inches. They had that day passed through some of the most picturesque scenery to be found anywhere, and it was an unspeakable delight to Aynsworth to feast his eyes on cascades, ravines, and mountain lakes around which clustered the legendary lore of many centuries.

'Once out of the forest, Monseigneur,' the guides said encouragingly, 'we shall find a farm-house, where Monseigneur may dine and sleep, and rest until other guides are found to show the way through the shortest and safest passes, until Monseigneur reaches the sea, where the English ships are; then Monseigneur will soon reach his own country.' The men were altogether faithful, but they made no secret of their anxiety to return to their homes.

On they trudged through the night, one of them leading and the other bringing up the rear. Day was breaking in supreme glory, 'morn with rosy hand unbarred the gates of light,' and suffusing lake, forest, and mountain with the many-tinted hues of early dawn; they had paused to take in the beauty of the scene, when without warning of any sort, several bullets whistled past them in close succession. The marksmen were hidden from view, but the smoke indicated that they were unpleasantly near.

It was quite impossible to tell whether they were the object of attack, or had blundered in some way into the line of fire. The guides indicated the way from the path they were on, into the forest, with the silent tread of the practised huntsman, and settling themselves in the deep undergrowth, they waited

farther developments, a little anxiously it must be confessed. In a short time two more shots were fired, waking all the echoes, and startling some wild creatures from their lair, but with no other result. After waiting for a time they concluded that whatever the firing might mean the marksmen must have moved away in an opposite direction, when suddenly a motley group of seven or more came in sight following the path they had just left, only moving in the opposite direction. Two of them appeared to be peasants, and one even looked like a priest. What could it mean?

The guides took them for Spaniards, but as Aynsworth had been so long cut off from all the ordinary channels of news, he was at a loss to account for the presence of Spaniards in that neighbourhood. They were all apparently in high good humour, and deeply laden with plunder. One of the party evidently played the role of clown, capering and dancing before the singular cavalcade, in a medley of garments, civil, military, and even feminine. Serious as the situation was the humour was in a measure contagious, and Aynsworth was divided between his perception of the comic side of things, and the desire to call the ruffians to account for their misdoings.

Prudence prevailed, and they remained safe in their hiding-place, considering it better, as they were so largely outnumbered, to run no risks. They had made a weary march during the night and were both fatigued and hungry, so that the enforced rest was grateful to them. Their wallets still contained some food, which they ate in silence, keeping a sharp lookout on all the approaches to their hiding-place, and intending in a short time, to resume their journey; but they were more exhausted than they realised while the strain and excitement lasted, and the enforced stillness induced drowsiness, so that in spite of all their efforts they were soon fast asleep.

How long they had slept they could not tell, when all three by some common impulse sat up, looking anxiously in all directions. Aynsworth was about to rise when one of the guides raised a warning finger.

'Listen! Monseigneur!' he whispered, and then

there came a long dismal wail, the howl of a dog in terror or pain.

They waited no longer but pressed on in the direction of the sound. They had scarcely made their way out of the forest when they came upon the bodies of two French soldiers, stripped almost naked, and immediately recalled the clown's curiously mixed costume. The recollection was not pleasant. When they reached the farm-house, it was deserted and partially wrecked, and they expected nothing less than to find that the family had been barbarously murdered.

In this they were happily disappointed as the house was empty of life or death of any sort. The dog, a fox-hound, greeted them with signs of pleasure, but continued to whine pitiously and run round the building. Aynsworth followed the animal to the other side of the homestead, where he came upon a gruesome sight. A young French officer was nailed by his hands and feet to a tree, a fire had been lighted under him which was still smouldering, but fortunately his sufferings were over. He had evidently died of his wounds. The dog evinced every sign of delight when the body was released from its frightful position, and laid upon the ground, but when it was placed in the grave the guides prepared for it, together with the bodies of the two men of his troop, the faithful creature became frantic once more and burrowed furiously in the soft earth. until, exhausted, it fell asleep, upon the mound which covered its dead master.

Aynsworth was much touched by the fidelity of the dead officer's dumb friend, and curiously shy of showing how deeply he was moved he strolled into the forest a little way, to be alone for a space with his own thoughts, unobserved. When he returned he was met by the guides and the farmer himself. The family, it seemed, had time to withdraw into a safe shelter, known only to themselves, at the first sign of danger, but were unable to persuade the little party of French soldiers to accompany them. The farmer had even seen the fiends at their hideous work, although powerless to prevent it. The officer refused

to disclose the direction the owner and his family had taken, and this refusal, coupled with their disappointment in not obtaining more valuable loot, drove the ruffians into a frenzy of cruelty, which they wreaked so terribly upon the unfortunate Frenchman. Notwithstanding his distress for his dismantled home, the farmer assured them he would do his utmost to serve them, and invited them to share such shelter as his poor habitation could still afford.

Madam La Fore was far from taking the spoiling of her goods as philosophically as her husband. She wandered about in helpless misery, finding at every turn some fresh cause for lamentation. The signs of their late visitors' evil purpose were everywhere. Even the pictures of the saints, she complained to Aynsworth, had not been respected by the canaille. The wretches had no piety, no mercy, no consideration: Monseigneur could see that, of course. Aynsworth was quite sympathetic, and thereby won Madam's good will. Madam declared the ruffians would all come to a bad end, the vengeance of heaven would overtake them, the miserable wretches; and she crossed herself devoutly in the sincerity of her faith and certainty of their swift destruction. It was still, however, necessary to eat, whatever might be the future fate of the miserable marauders, and the preparation of the meal called the good woman back to the things of ordinary life and broke for a time the strain of her painful recollections.

They had all had an unusually long fast, and in spite of what they had gone through they ate with relish and appetite, and began to take a more hopeful view of the situation.

Evening was closing in, and it was necessary to make such a disposition of their little force, that sleep might be obtained without too much anxiety. The farmer, La Fore, collected what arms he could, and with abundance of ammunition, they concluded, it would be possible to make a stout resistance in case of attack by any more wandering bands. Having put themselves in a position of defence as far as their limited means permitted, silence settled over the little garrison and they were soon fast asleep.

A short time before day-break, they were roused by the dog whining miserably and then barking furiously. Everyone was soon awake and on the alert, and as soon as it was light the guides and the farmer went out to investigate. Aynsworth and Denis, the farmer's son, remained behind with Madam, giving her all the encouragement in their power. It was not long before the guides and farmer returned, bringing with them a limp and helpless-looking fellow, who had been labouring to explain to his captors how he came there. The dog continued so full of distress and fierceness that it was all they could do to save their prisoner from being torn by the infuriated animal.

His story was plausible enough. He had been the servant of a British officer, when he fell sick and had to be left behind.

He had his hospital discharge to show, in which he was described as James Lawson of His Majesty's Carbineers.

He told of the many hardships he had undergone in making his way through a strange country. Only the day before he had fallen in with a wild party of semi-savages, who robbed him of the little he had and beat him so unmercifully that they felt him for dead.

When he came to himself, he made haste to travel in the opposite direction to which the robber band were going, until just before morning he came to the edge of the forest, when the dog set upon him. Fortunately, help came when he had given up all hope. It was a great mercy, he remarked piously, to which La Fore responded cordially enough. The dog, however, was quite implacable in spite of much coaxing. Lawson suggested that he should be shot, as he was hopelessly dangerous, but no one would hear of it. Madam said it would be nothing less than murder, and there had been murder enough already. She shared the dog's dislike of the newcomer, and Lawson soon became aware of it and prudently kept out of her way as much as possible. Barring the suspicion Madam entertained of the man, his coming was remarkably fortunate; with La Fore's help, it solved the difficulty of guides, and the men who had brought

Aynsworth so far could now return to their hamlet with a clear conscience. And this they were very anxious to do.

The farmer decided after what had passed to leave his wrecked homestead, and after conveying his wife to friends who lived on the other side of the mountain, he promised to see Monseigneur as far on his journey as might be, and find him another trusty guide to take his place. Aynsworth was well satisfied with this arrangement, for in spite of some drawbacks things were turning out better than he had dared hope when he first started. The guides took their leave next day, taking the dog with them, in the hope of returning him to his master's regiment; and so the last link with the little hamlet and the good priest, where he had made such fortunate discoveries, was broken.

They decided still to continue their plan of traveling at night and resting during the day. It was far from pleasant, but it seemed safest under the circumstances. All the next day they heard the booming of distant cannon to the right of their retreat. frightened cattle rushed past them terror-stricken, and towards evening droves of them halted near by, lowing piteously. The farmer's son made use of the opportunity to procure new milk, which was gladly welcomed as furnishing both food and drink at a time when rations were running rather low.

As night closed in the firing ceased, and the blaze of distant conflagrations lit up the whole country. The bleating of the disturbed flocks of sheep and the bellowing of the frightened cattle was soon joined and blended with the hoarser notes of the ravens and the howling of the wolves that had been attracted from afar to the scene of slaughter.

Aynsworth was restless and impatient all day, sleep was out of the question, his own personal affairs had been suddenly pushed into the background, pressing as they were, by the sound of battle and the conviction that England was engaged in a life-and-death struggle; only the fact that he had not been bred to the army restrained him and kept him true to his original purpose.

They had made fair progress on their journey; still they were a long way from the coast, and the danger had not grown less as they advanced. They had yet to pass through a corner of French territory and more than ordinary care was necessary, for if no worse came of it, to be detained for enquiry would have been a serious hindrance.

Lawson was invaluable: he could turn his hand to anything, and not the least of his accomplishments was his ability to converse fairly well in most Continental languages.

'How did you acquire so many languages?' Aynsworth asked him one day.

'Picked them up, sir,' was the ready answer.

'Picked them up where?' Aynsworth continued.

'Oh, everywhere, sir; the world is but a little place to those who know, and a nimble fellow can cover a good deal of ground, sir.'

'You are a genius, Lawson,' Aynsworth said, regarding the fellow almost admiringly.

'Yes, sir,' was the prompt reply, at which his master laughed heartily.

Lawson got into the way of wandering about, recklessly, as it seemed to the little party, often going into towns and villages if anywhere near their camping ground, and returning with abundance of news and plenty of good things for their larder. But how he came by such desirable edibles always remained a mystery which no one cared to scrutinize too closely. One day Denis, the farmer's son, followed him unobserved, intending to have a little fun at his expense. But Lawson was too shrewd a campaigner to be caught so easily. When he suspected he was under observation he doubled back and ran the boy to earth without difficulty. If the boy was joking, not so Lawson: he was in a frightful passion, his hand was on the lad's throat in an instant, while he shook him so savagely that he cried out in mortal terror: 'O, Lord, I see death in your eyes. I see death in your eyes.'

'And you see true, whelp,' he hissed through clenched teeth. Then, recovering himself in an in-

stant, he threw the boy from him and laughed. It was a curious unmirthful chuckle, which was far from re-assuring.

'Good acting, Denis, my boy; rare good acting,' he said banteringly. 'Suppose we take to the road, we two, when Monseigneur has finished this important journey of his! We might do worse; much worse, lad. But hark!' taking the boy not too gently by the ear, 'not a word of this fine fooling to any one.'

Denis promised, of course: he would have promised anything just then to get safely away from his strange companion.

They were now in the Hautes Alpes, near the little mountain capital of Gap, where La Fore expected to be able to procure a guide who could see Aynsworth safely to some convenient port. This compelled him to leave the party for a day or more, his son remaining until his return.

During this time Aynsworth saw a little more of Lawson than usual.

'What do you intend doing when you get back to England?' he asked him one day.

'The Lord knows, sir,' he answered. 'I am a friendless man, and I doubt if I am any longer fit for service in the army. Providence has been very considerate so far, sir.'

'Ah!' Aynsworth said, as though a point of special interest had been touched upon. 'Providence! I have proved that in a very remarkable manner, and yet I once thought there was nothing in it; absolutely nothing. But I was wrong; quite wrong, Lawson.'

After a moment's silence he said, looking kindly at the man, who was busy cleaning his master's pistols and in the act of snapping one of them to make sure that it worked smoothly:

'Would you like to enter my service permanently? I have much need just now of a faithful man like you.'

'Yes, sir,' Lawson answered, looking up with a smile of satisfaction upon his bronzed face.

'Of course,' Aynsworth continued, 'I will do the best I can for you, Lawson.'

'I know that, sir,' he answered with what might be

a touch of feeling in his voice, and continued gazing at his master, though unobserved.

A few hours afterwards as it was drawing towards evening, Aynsworth, who had been occupied most of the day writing in his note-book, returned to their previous conversation. 'There certainly is a Divine Ruler over the affairs of men,' he said: 'a Power, a beneficent Power, guiding their blind and blundering footsteps and redeeming their broken lives.'

'Yes, sir,' Lawson answered as usual, watching his master meanwhile with a curious intensity.

'I left England,' he went on, as though reviewing his own thoughts, 'with no real hope of ever being able to clear up a strange occurrence which concerns my family, and in the most unexpected way—by the mercy of God—I am returning with every proof possible in my own possession.'

'Surely!' Lawson ejaculated, with evident interest.

'Yes, without doubt, his master repeated with a sigh of thankfulness as he rose and, reverently uncovering his head, stood a moment in silence amid the stillness of the forest. Lawson's hands worked at his task rapidly, nervously in fact, so intense was his interest in what he had just heard: he worked unconsciously, for his thoughts were elsewhere. A light breeze had suddenly sprung up meanwhile and moaned drearily among the pines; still Aynsworth stood in deep thought, uncovered. Just then a weird cry in the trees above them startled both men, and presently something rushed past them, but in the obscurity of the dense undergrowth it was impossible to tell what it might be. Lawson started in extreme terror, and clutched at a branch to keep himself from falling, clinging to it with every sign of fear and misery, trembling like an aspen. Aynsworth looked at him in wonder. 'What! Afraid!' he said with a touch of haughty amazement.

'Was it a dog, sir?' Lawson gasped.

'Oh, no, I think not,' his master answered with perfect indifference, and leisurely strolled away among the trees. The incident had no significance of any

sort for him, but for Lawson it was like a warning from the abyss. He tried to speak, his throat was dry, his lips parched, his whole frame quivering, he swayed for an instant like a man intoxicated, and would have fallen but for the branch to which he still clung. He tried to move after his master, but only fell back against the trunk of the tree. Had Aynsworth turned to look, he would have seen a strange and pitiable object. He was stretching out his hands imploringly in the direction of the retreating figure. His fingers worked convulsively, he put them to his throat and tore frantically at his neck-cloth, but no words came; his face twitched as though in the grip of some frightful spasm, then he collapsed, a dismayed and terror-smitten heap. The momentary upheaval, whatever it meant, had passed, and the man looked like a lost soul.

It was more than two hours before Aynsworth returned. The sun had set, and the after-glow in every shade of matchless colour glorified wood, waterfall and mountain. War was indeed abroad, and the vultures were feasting to the full: men were not only battling in arms, but with strong passions, in which they often suffered defeat; but nature, serene and undisturbed, was pursuing her own unfathomed destiny, unimpressed and unmoved, as she had done through all the centuries of the past, and as she will continue to do throughout all the centuries to come. And yet there is behind all this tangled web of human pain a Supreme Will and a Supreme Good.

Aynsworth met La Fore as he expected, returning to camp, bringing a guide with him as he had promised.

Julian Callot, the new guide, was a man of about thirty, well-built, and compact of frame, with keen dark eyes and alert in all his movements.

Aynsworth gave him a cordial welcome. He was heartily sorry to part with the farmer and his son; they had lived a free, healthy life with nature for weeks, and man and man had been brought into sympathetic touch. The mere accidents of position, the artificial distinctions which grow up under other circumstances, had vanished, and they had become

hearty comrades and friends; and now they parted with mutual regrets, believing they would never meet again. Lawson for some reason did not take kindly to the new guide, and more than once he grumbled at the plans Callot considered necessary to their progress. He roamed about as usual, but was less communicative on his return than he had been. Occasionally Callot met him on his way to camp, and although it was quite accidental, Lawson grew suspicious and complained to Aynsworth that his movements were watched and that the guide treated him with distrust.

His master assured him that his surmises were without foundation: no one distrusted him. 'Why should they? It was plainly absurd to think of such a thing.' Nevertheless, Callot was careful to avoid him after that and let him go his own way.

The season was late, and in the district through which they were now travelling the nights and mornings were colder, so that they suffered a little from the chill air. But worse was to come, for as they approached the Rhone thunder-storms became frequent, and the rain poured down in torrents, compelling them to halt and take refuge in one of the numerous caves for which the country is famed.

The river was now swollen far beyond its usual volume, and, lashed by a fierce gale, roared and thundered along the banks and to make their situation more precarious, at night they could see on the opposite shore a long line of bivouac fires, indicating the presence of an army, but whether friend or foe it was impossible to tell. So soon as the weather showed signs of clearing, Aynsworth grew impatient to resume their journey, and Lawson was quite as eager as his master. Callot, however, was doubtful: he pointed out the difficulties of the undertaking. The road—or rather, the path—was narrow and dangerous, even in daylight, and now, sodden with rain and in almost pitch darkness, for the moon was still young, it was madness to attempt it.

The remonstrance was altogether reasonable, and Aynsworth admitted its force. The guide urged,

respectfully but firmly, that the responsibility rested with him.

If any accident happened to Monseigneur, he would be severely censured, perhaps discredited. It was indeed a serious matter, and he begged Aynsworth not to think he was unwilling to serve him to the utmost. 'To travel by steep zig-zag tracks among rugged rocks and mountain passes in daytime was well enough! But at night to cross rapids that would now be one vast sheet of foam and thunder, is another matter! Would Monseigneur consider the difficulty?' They would be obliged to cross one of the swiftest torrents in the district by a slender bridge, and make their way through a gloomy pass, where the mountains approach each other so closely as to have only the bed of the stream and the width of the path between the frowning cliffs.

Aynsworth hesitated. He had no desire to imperil the lives of others, and of course Callot was the best judge of what might be attempted. So they decided to wait for forty-eight hours at least, or longer if need be, and perhaps the clouds would pass and the stars show some light upon their difficult undertaking.

Lawson was the only dissatisfied member of the little party. He was mortified that his counsels were set aside. He became restless and needlessly irritated.

The brunt of it fell, of course, on Callot. Lawson was evidently on the war-path, and his sarcasm spared nothing. Every word bit to the bone, and the guide writhed under it. He twitted him with his cowardice, lack of nerve, and indifference to his employer's interests. There was not a word of truth in it, and yet it stung the guide into acting in sheer pique against his better judgment. Without assigning any reason for his change of plan, he proposed to Aynsworth that they make the attempt without delay.

It was a dreary tramp through the darkness, the guide leading the way and Lawson following his master. Callot, for safety, had a rope tied round his body, which, however, his two companions only held, using it as a feeler to guide them in the obscurity. They plodded on in silence, occupied with their own

thoughts, and intent on making the best progress possible.

They reached the narrow pass and mountain torrent of which the guide had spoken with some misgivings, and which was spanned by a bridge as it crossed the track they were following, when suddenly the guide halted. The bridge was gone; and only an impassable chasm with its swift-rushing waters lay before them in the dim light! It was appalling enough, and Callot turned to communicate the news to Aynsworth. Almost at the same moment there was a flash out of the darkness at the corner of the gorge, and the guide fell. Had his fall not partially dragged Aynsworth with him, the second shot would have ended their journey then and there. As it was, the second shot went wide. They could make out that their assailants were three in number, but the nature of the ground gave them little advantage on that account. Aynsworth fired point-blank at the foremost ruffian, but his pistol snapped harmlessly. He threw it from him in disgust and fired the second, with the same result; clubbing the weapon that had failed him, he struck the fellow so true upon the forehead that he fell without a groan. The situation became clear to him in a flash, and Aynsworth's wrath blazed: Lawson had betrayed them! He turned, to find the wretch with a dagger raised to strike him in the back, and, clutching him by the throat in a passion of indignant fury, he shook him until he was limp and helpless, and then flung him sheer over the bank to meet his fate, perhaps two hundred feet below. Aynsworth owed his safety for the moment to the fear the bandits had of wounding their accomplice. But now both rushed upon him with the evident intention of overpowering him at once. He was now alone, and weaponless save his hands, and the use he could make of them had evidently not been taken into account by the desperate ruffians. A single blow sufficed to make the number even, but the man that remained closed with him before he could strike again. It was a life-and-death struggle upon which the half-moon looked down: the struggle of a brave man with hired

assassins. Lawson had failed in striking the deadly blow he intended, but the dagger had not missed, and Aynsworth was wounded and momentarily growing weaker, although hardly yet aware of his own hurt. Still it was doubtful how it might end, for he was an exceptionally powerful man, and his antagonist was hard pressed. But just then, when the issue hung in the balance, one of the fallen men regained his wits, and taking aim as he lay upon the ground watching the struggling figures as seen against the sky, he fired his last shot, and Aynsworth fell.

'It is an uncommonly bad business,' the fellow said when he recovered his breath, as he glanced at his comrade, 'and we are not likely to get much out of it after all.'

'Ah!' was the comment as the man who was the leader tried to rise and fell back with an oath.

'What's the matter?' his comrade asked.

'Matter!' he roared; 'Furies!—Devils!—everything the matter! Can't you see that I am broken—crippled, cursed with bad luck! Ruined! ruined!' He bellowed out curses as he clutched at the grass in a paroxysm of insane passion, and he poured out a torrent of profanity in every dialect he could command. It seemed to give him such evident satisfaction to put every evil thought upon the surface of his mind into words and hurl them into the night, that there clearly was no choice but to wait until he exhausted himself, which he very soon did, and fell back with a groan of misery against the rocks.

Presently he called: 'Fiasco.'

'Yes, captain,' the man answered, glad that the fit was past, for no one liked to cross the captain when his hour was upon him.

'See if the guide is dead or shamming.'

Fiasco reported the guide was not dead yet, but past all mischief and past recovery.

'Then finish him!' was the order.

'No, my captain. I have no quarrel with Callot; let the poor devil die in his own way and time.'

'Finish him, I say!' the captain roared, in another fit of rage.

'I will not,' was the brief answer.

'You fiend, you beast, you coward,' hissed the captain, as drawing his dagger he raised it to throw at his companion. 'Who saved you from the grip of the tall Englishman? Your captain saved you, you ingrate! and you refuse to obey, because you think him powerless to enforce his will. I'll let you see! I'll let you see!' and he began to drag himself by inches toward Callot, holding the dagger in his teeth. To move at all must have given him intense pain, but he was on fire to complete his task. His eyes blazed in the faint light, and his teeth gleamed like a wild animal at bay. He had almost succeeded in reaching the guide, a yard or two more and the deadly blade would have settled accounts once for all, when in a flash he became tense and eager, all his senses quickened by terror. For a few seconds he listened with his ear to the ground, and then, with a frightful oath, he balanced the dagger in his hand to throw, glancing from the wounded man to Fiesco, uncertain whom to strike, and then launched it at his fellow-conspirator with a snarl of hate, and rolled over to take cover in the brush by the side of the gorge. He had forgotten in the eagerness of his passion that he had changed his position, and instead of rolling out of sight of any one passing he went sheer over the bank into the deep, swift torrent below. There had been but an instant's wild clutching at vacancy and a groan of horror, and Fiesco was alone with the wounded men. 'So!' the fellow commented, unmoved, as he picked up the weapon and felt the edge with a grunt of satisfaction. 'The captain always carried good implements,' he said admiringly, 'even though he fails to make good use of them!' and he chuckled under the agreeable sense of his own shrewdness. Then, creeping forward to the bank, he lay flat and cautiously peered over at the point where the captain had fallen: there was no sign of anything, he had absolutely disappeared. 'So!' he commented again as he drew back. The truth was, Fiesco was a little at fault, as the captain and Lawson kept their own counsels so well that their only surviving subordinate had no clear

idea what to do. Still it was worth while to find out what the Englishman had about him; and if he could save him he might demand a substantial ransom and retire into private life on the strength of it. In this frame of mind, he proceeded to rifle Aynsworth's pockets with great content, while his thoughts dwelt upon a cottage in the fertile valley and a welcome face at the window. Then he hummed the last song he had heard her sing, a song very popular just then in the French army:

'You leave me, dear, to go where glory waits you;
My loving heart accompanies your steps—'

He stopped, started up, thrusting his plunder into his pockets, and rushed into the shadow of the mountain and up the pass Aynsworth had so lately travelled. where he soon found a narrow goat-track which led him up the heights into a safe hiding-place. The captain had heard then, but gave no warning, he commented to himself. 'Ah, he expected Fiesco would be caught!—Not so, my captain!' he murmured to himself as he patted his wallet, well pleased with himself.

Either Fiesco never had a conscience or he had contrived to live so far without making its acquaintance; anyhow, he was supremely happy with his own good-fortune, and had no fault to find with his night's work.

Meanwhile there was a snorting and stamping in the pass below, and a sharp 'Halt!' brought a small detachment of British troops to a sudden pause. They were out on some special mission, and numbered about sixty men all told, and were prepared for all contingencies, having stretchers and a surgeon with them. Captain Winslow was surprised to find two wounded men, and after a brief examination, on the suggestion of the surgeon, decided to carry both of them a couple of leagues in the direction they were travelling and leave them at a monastery, where an officer of their own had been carefully nursed and was now about to re-join his regiment. This plan had

the merit of combining humanity with a strict fulfilment of duty, and therefore commended itself to Winslow, who was a man of few words and prompt action. Fiesco in his haste had left Aynsworth's ring upon his hand, and Captain Winslow after examining it by such light as they could procure, fancied he had seen the crest and motto before, but where had he seen it? and to whom did it belong? This was more than he could recall. He did all that was possible in conveying him and his guide to the friendly shelter of the monastery and promising, if possible, to return or send some one to enquire after the welfare of his wounded countryman. The promise made in all good faith was, however, made on the eve of a severe engagement, and the gallant Winslow never lived to fulfil the kindly purpose he had formed; indeed, he had met a soldier's death before the man he succoured breathed his last.

When Aynsworth regained consciousness the guide was with him, and told him what had transpired. He was silent for a space, looking into vacancy; the end was near, and he had failed in the great object on which he had set his heart, so far as being able to carry it through to the end was concerned.

The disappointment was bitter, or would have been had not the supreme business of dying been so imminent. Recollections of the past may, indeed, torture suffering men with time before them, however dim and shadowy—but tears are forbidden to dying eyes, and the pressure of the illimitable future as it begins to touch the human consciousness awakens a strange and pathetic awe as they peer into the Beyond and realize that all around them is the unutterable vastness and power of the Creator, in the light of which the greatest things of earth are less than nothing and vanity.

It took but little time to settle Aynsworth's earthly affairs now. They were, in fact, practically settled for him. The money that remained was fortunately sufficient to amply satisfy the guide and Father Francis, whose guest he was, offered all gracious service.

A curiously constructed belt, with locked pockets, contained the precious papers upon which so much depended, and a few valuables besides.

This with his watch and signet ring were to be conveyed to England, where a substantial reward would be paid the messenger.

Father Francis undertook this onerous responsibility himself. He had spent some time in England, it seemed, a few years before, and was well fitted to accomplish this important mission with every prospect of success.

Aynsworth was satisfied, and a look of calm content settled upon his face, now touched with the pallor of the final struggle.

He had, even at the most reckless period of his life, possessed a singular power of winning the confidence and affection of men with whom he was associated, and now at the last he was not without a friend.

Callot was evidently as much distressed as though he had been with him for years. He kissed the dying man's hand again and again as he knelt weeping by his side. Father Francis held up a warning finger, whispering to the guide: 'Calmness, calmness, my son! We are in the presence of death!—Death!' Aynsworth roused himself, as one might when just beginning to lose consciousness in sleep, and smiled, murmuring something which was quite inaudible, then lapsed into stupor and lay still.

The doors and windows were wide open, and no human sound disturbed the stillness save the laboured breathing of the dying man.

The birds in the branches close by piped their love notes to one another, and fussed and twittered over their domestic affairs, for spring had come and the world was throbbing with new life. But within death reigned, and his icy hand was upon the heart of the strong man, so lately full of life and purpose to enforce punishment for a great and terrible wrong.

Did he at any time during the few days he lay between life and death recall the sacred words: 'Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.' Who can tell?

A clock in the next room marked time, and the tick, tick, tick filled the silence with an insistent note that became oppressive to the two men who waited with bowed heads for the end.

Suddenly the sick man moved as though he had been roused out of a sound sleep, with a look of intentness and wonder lighting up the deathly pallor of his face. The men held their breath in awe. He tried to raise himself, but could not, and gazing into space with wide-open eyes which seemed to see the Unseen, he raised his right hand and murmured in a voice of marvellous distinctness:

'Not guilty, my lord,' and with a sigh, as of one well content, he breathed his last.

The silence of death filled the chamber where the dead man lay: no sound was heard amidst the awed stillness. The priest's lips moved, but no word was spoken; then, rising from his knees, he touched the dead man's hand and murmured sadly to his companion: He has suffered some great wrong, my son, and the Most High has permitted it to end thus. How little we know of the tragedy of human life, and how little we can do at such moments as this!

CHAPTER VII

FOR LOVE OF OLD

THE game had been so long in the Squire's hands and manipulated by him at will that he considered it a cruel wrong to have to face anything like possible defeat. The very thought was strangely bewildering to him. He had commanded the success of all his schemes with such marvellous ease that it seemed almost like a law of nature that Eric Hardcastle should flourish, whatever became of other men.

'It would be a great injustice,' he told himself, with a curious mixture of self-pity and virtuous indignation, 'if Fortune caresses men, merely to impel them to venture more and more, alluring them, in fact, into greater depths only to overwhelm them with disaster in the end!' It was inconceivable, absolutely inconceivable; and he swore by all the gods that if such a thing should be, it would be an unspeakable and hideous felony against a man who had deserved better at the hands of Fate.

Why should he be called upon, he asked himself, to throw away the fruit of his own brains for sheer naught? Glenmore would have clung to his almost barren acres, like his father before him, without ever discovering that vast stores of wealth lay hidden under his feet; and if he had enriched him with the gift of his own knowledge it would have been pure waste in the hands of such as he!

'Certainly it would!' he declared with convincing energy. 'Bah! Men prate as if, forsooth, the good things of life belong of right to fools because they happen to be first in possession! To the shrewd and far-seeing belong the spoils. Why not? Is not life, after all, a game of skill—a battle, in short; and the wisest and bravest should win—fairly—if you *can*!' Yes, he had always stood by that, he told himself with marked complaisance: 'But, fairly or otherwise, win, win!

'It is, in short, a test of a man's skill and nerve, and when luck plainly favours you and throws the prize into your hands, keep it, I say; keep it, in despite of Fate or Fortune, Heaven or Hell!'

The Squire had elaborated his own peculiar system of ethics without a qualm, and to emphasize his conclusions he kicked the footstool out of his way as he rose to walk off the fit of heroics which was strong upon him.

The noise brought his discreet footman, with: 'Did you ring, sir?' in a voice of soothing deference which was distinctly agreeable at the moment, though a little disconcerting owing to the prominence of the man's appearance.

'No—Yes—I think not!' stammered his master, with unusual perturbation; 'Ah yes,' he drawled, recollecting himself, 'when Mr Reginald returns, send him here at once.'

'Yes, sir,' the man answered, while he returned the footstool to its place and moved a chair or two into position, keenly glancing at his master meanwhile, without the least appearance of being unduly observant. The truth was, the door had not been closed as the Squire supposed, and the obsequious lackey had heard some part of his master's soliloquy—as he had, in fact, many times before.

'Squire talks to his-self,' he remarked to the butler, in confidence, 'and hargufies most awful, and swears as if he meant to have it out with the devil, unbeknownst to Mister Reginald or anyone!'

The butler snorted viciously, but declined to answer, for the footman was a mere Englisman, brought up on man-made hymns, curious creeds, amens and things, and had hardly ever heard of the Solemn League and Covenant or the Psalms of David in a proper version! Moreover, he was a poor judge of good liquor; he drank beer, only beer! Whew! he was a poor, miserable thing, for all his soft southern speech and five feet eleven and a half inches! What could Susan Jane be thinking of, to draw him over for such a brainless, feckless apology for a man?

'He spys on the Squire!' he mused. 'Weel! Mac-Gregor kens a thing or two, and can bide his time. Exchange confidences with him, indeed! No, by my father's dirk, a thousand times no!'

What passed between the Squire and his son is only a matter of conjecture.

It transpired, however, that Reginald was unwilling to leave on some business which the Squire desired him to undertake. He was to be absent six weeks or more, and friends he had asked to the Hall had been put off for that length of time or longer. But notwithstanding this, Douglas was able to assure them, below stairs, that his master would be back long before then. In fact, Reginald never came to the Hall with hearty goodwill except when he could fill the house with guests after his own heart; and now to be sent for in hot haste, because the Squire was ill, only to be sent off on an errand which anyone else, he told himself, could do as well or better, was peculiarly exasperating, with the 'Lovers' Isle' and its interesting occupant fresh in mind.

At first he decided to leave his man behind him, charged to report any interesting developments, but on second thoughts he determined to trust MacAlpin and to play the game fair to the end. But what a nuisance it all was! And he swore many round oaths, after his kind, to think that a man should be elbowed about at inconvenient times for no particular reason!

'Well—let the Governor have his way, this once!'

All the same, he felt ill-used and convinced that things in general were decidedly perverse. To have a glimpse of Paradise, only to be thrust down to Hades, to be twice in one day baulked and thwarted, was too much for any ordinary mortal to receive with common patience! And Reginald Hardcastle was beyond doubt an ordinary human being, with a full share of his father's masterful character, and it had not so far fallen to his lot to be obliged to conform often to the plans of others. He consoled himself with the reflection that the time would pass somehow! And then—well, who knows? It would be strange if he could not compel MacAlpin to unload and to

make a clean breast of whatever lay behind the mystery of the Lady of the Island!

A few days after Reginald had left—it may, perhaps, have been on the fourth day—a man came to the Hall selling curios of various sorts. Many of the articles appeared to be rare and valuable, others less interesting and costly, but all certainly unique in their way. He was an old soldier and had been in the wars, and many were eager to hear of the countries and the events through which he had passed. His story was more than commonly attractive at that time. He had been discharged as no longer fit for active service; the articles he was selling had been picked up in many cities and Continental states; he had, in fact, invested all he had in them, and if he failed to sell them he would be a serious loser—a depressing consideration, indeed, for a war-worn and crippled man! He did a very good business among the servants at the Hall, and finally persuaded the footman to tell his master of the rare and interesting articles he had for sale.

The Squire was much impressed by all he heard, and desired to see the old soldier and his wonderful wares. For the great man could unbend, once in a while, with rare graciousness; and he did so now with more than common goodwill, as he had a shrewd suspicion who the old soldier was.

When the door closed upon him, the Squire looked at the man with much interest: he would have passed him anywhere without recognizing him.

'You are a clever fellow, Kinkman!' he said admiringly, pointing to a chair.

'Pretty well!' the man replied, a trifle drily. All the same, his trepidation was manifest, in spite of his apparent nonchalance—a fact his employer did not fail to observe. The Squire poured out a glass of brandy for his visitor, as a restorative, while he sipped a little wine himself, with the air of a connoisseur whose mind was empty of all other interest at the moment.

'I dare not take anything stronger,' he said by way of apology for his abstemiousness, 'but you were always well-seasoned and could carry more than most men!' So saying, he refilled the man's glass. His

hand was steady, his voice low and firm, and his eyes held the fellow before him as in a vice. This tool of his was capable, and under certain conditions could be trusted; and it was the Squire's business now to make him sufficiently malleable for his purpose and then to bind him to accomplish his own special ends. There was a strange satisfaction in noting the man's anxiety; the sight of it inspired the Squire with a buoyant certitude in all his own movements and gave him a pleasing sense of mastery, for human beings are not severely critical when their own particular weakness is amply gratified. And Eric Hardcastle could have no misgivings at this moment as to the ultimate triumph of his plans.

It was Kinkman that broached business first, as the Squire showed no disposition to open the matter. 'What is it?' he asked, looking across the table at the alert old man before him.

'Oh, nothing much,' the Squire answered; 'young Glenmore is here.'

'Yes, I know,' Kinkman remarked, 'I have spoken with him: my curios seemed to interest him a good deal. He appears to be on the point of going abroad on the same old errand as his father.'

'Good!' the Squire remarked shortly, 'let him go,' and he smiled grimly; 'nothing can come of it.'

'Nothing can come of it *now*,' corrected Kinkman, with marked emphasis upon the last word.

'Well, you have been well paid,' replied the Squire, 'and little said about your failure.'

'The *failure*, as you call it, makes no difference; he is dead and buried, and whatever proofs he had are lost past all recovery.'

'That he is dead, I know; but that the proofs are also for ever out of the way, is by no means so certain; nevertheless, I have been more than commonly liberal, seeing that the express terms of our compact were broken.'

'And have you sent for me to tell me this?' Kinkman answered, with unmistakable signs of irritation. 'I tell you, no consideration you or any other man could offer me would induce me to go through the same again!'

'Oh!' the Squire muttered.

'To hang for well-nigh a night and a day between an unscalable precipice and a roaring whirlpool of hungry waters, thinking every moment would be the last, is something I have no desire to go through any more.' He shuddered, as though he were still looking into the foaming depths awaiting him. 'I'll never be the same man again,' he said with an air of conviction; 'my nerves are shattered! My courage died that terrible night. I'll never again have the nerve I once had.'

'Oh yes, you will!' the Squire said cheerily; 'the air of this neighbourhood will work wonders. In a short time you will be yourself again, and as fit as ever.'

'This neighbourhood!' repeated Kinkman; 'this neighbourhood! I swore that I would never come within a hundred miles of it!'

'And here you are again,' put in the Squire pleasantly; 'drink success to our enterprises like a man.' And again he poured liquor into the partially emptied glass. 'There is nothing to try your nerves this time,' he continued, with amiable consideration for the man before him; 'nothing whatever.' There was not a particle of eagerness or concern in either voice or manner, nothing to suggest that he had calmly and without passion determined upon such a course as the destruction of a young girl whose sole crime was her legitimate and inconvenient existence. 'In fact,' he continued, 'it is rather a pleasant adventure that awaits you. The child—' Kinkman started. —'the child is a young woman now. Man,' he said in a friendly way, pressing him back into his chair, 'certainly your nerves are out of order! be still and listen. You can, of course, decline if you wish. You must contrive to make yourself interesting to this young person, an old soldier has always pathetic stories at command; let her hear them over your wares; put yourself in her way as often as possible; and when your plans are matured, carry her off. I am not concerned beyond that; the rest must be your own devising. Do you understand?'

'I don't,' Kinkman answered shortly; 'I doubt if I can serve you in this; if that is the business in hand, better find another man.'

'Oh no,' the Squire said, in no way disconcerted, 'that cannot be. See!' he added, and jotting down some items on a slip of paper he passed it over to his companion, and whispered a few words in his ear.

The man studied the paper carefully, glancing curiously at the Squire, and laying it down, began packing up his goods in nervous haste. The Squire occupied himself counting out some gold and notes which he placed in a canvas bag, tying it with great deliberation before tossing it across to the pedlar. 'So much now,' he said, 'and the balance as stated there,' indicating the slip of paper; 'and no bungling this time, or there will be the devil to pay, and no mistake!'

'Do you threaten me?' demanded the fellow, with an unpleasant gleam in his steel-blue eyes.

'By no means,' the Squire said, not in the least offended.

'Because,' continued Kinkman, 'if I swing, I'll not swing for nothing!'

'You have certainly lost your head as well as your nerve, Kinkman,' the Squire remarked, rising with a touch of impatience. 'Look at that slip once more. You will never again have so much money at your service.'

He did look at it again, and his face flushed and paled curiously, as he glanced at his employer with a strange gleam in his eye.

The Squire was satisfied he had made an impression at last. He well knew the man's greed. The love of money had slowly eaten out whatever heart he originally possessed, and Hardcastle was convinced that if the bribe were large enough he might be bought to murder his own mother without a pang.

The fellow now seemed galvanized into action, beyond doubt seeing that the matter was decided, and placing the slip of paper with the bag he put them both in his pocket.

'Hold,' the Squire said, with a sudden movement, 'I

will keep the paper,' stretching out his hand for it a trifle eagerly.

'No,' Kinkman said, with a strange smile upon his sinister countenance; 'you can remember what you have written, no doubt; but I might forget!' and picking up his traps, almost hastily, he left the Squire to his own reflections.

They were far from pleasant. There was something in the man's tone and look, as he took possession of the sheet of paper, which perplexed Hardcastle and set him thinking. To allow Kinkman, his tool, to get the upper hand in his plans was a bitter thought to the Squire, and he put it away from him as too preposterous and unthinkable to be entertained for a moment, and at once plunged into other schemes with hearty goodwill.

When Kinkman left the Hall, his step was perceptibly quicker, and a greater alertness was distinctly manifest. A subtle change of some sort had passed over him, giving to his narrow eyes a new light, and a touch of defiance a good deal out of keeping with the character he had assumed. A growing hostility to Hardcastle had been gathering in his mind, almost without his being aware of it, and now, without warning, it had leaped into being. Why should the Squire reap in security the pleasant fruits of iniquity, he asked himself, while *he* skulked through the world, an outcast and a moral leper, cut off from free intercourse with his kind? 'Why indeed?' he asked himself indignantly. 'True,' he admitted. 'I am still in his pay, and have another bit of his devil's work on hand. But what of that?—surely I may very well do it with a clear conscience, considering who has set me to the task. All the same, he shall not escape,—he has dragged me into crime and has cursed every hour of my existence, and he shall yet feel the terror which has sapped my life, and of which he has even to-day made sport.'

It did not occur to Kinkman that the 'dragging' had been a comparatively easy matter, owing to his own consuming greed.

'The Lord has delivered him into my hands,' he

Linked Lives

said with a mirthless chuckle, 'and I shall taste the sweets of revenge at my leisure! Yes! I'll do his bidding this once, as far as it suits my own plans and no farther—and then I'll drain the Master of Fosseway to his last guinea, or he shall bite the dust.'

'His son, forsooth! He harps upon that, as though other men were bound to risk everything for him and his! I have a son of my own, for that matter.' He stopped, and a new light came into his face. 'Hardcastle knows nothing of him, never cared enough even to ask if I had a friend in the world, and there is never any use in being gratuitously communicative about family affairs. The Squire knows nothing yet about that, nor shall he until it is pleasant to tell him a good deal more than he at present imagines.'

'Why not carry off this girl who is so much in the way, and marry her to my own young scapegrace? It is more than he deserves, the ungrateful scamp, but it will be a fine joke on the Squire, and a mine of wealth to boot.'

When he reached his lodgings and was safe from intrusion, he examined the little canvas sack carefully, and counted the gold with manifest satisfaction.

It was undoubtedly more than usual. The Squire evidently meant business very seriously, and when he spread out the crumpled sheet of paper and read what was there in black and white, his satisfaction was greatly increased. Then he turned up the other side, which the Squire had overlooked, and rubbed his hands gleefully. 'Fosseway' was there, printed prettily enough, with the Squire's crest and signature. The old fox had shewn less cunning than usual, and could be safely run to earth when the time came. Kinkman could hardly contain himself, so fully was he satisfied. Hardcastle had moved with such cautious certitude all his life, guarding every avenue of danger, and covering up his tracks with such marvelous success, that it was indeed curious he should stumble so fatally at such a time. The Squire did not even trust himself to elaborate his devilish scheme by word of mouth, lest something should be overheard, and while the sentinels of his mind slept, he

had actually allowed Kinkman to possess himself of a tell-tale memo of the most endangering character.

Hardcastle, as we have seen, was puzzled by the sudden pliability of his accomplice, and rummaged his brain quite unsuccessfully to find the cause of it. It gave him a vague feeling of uneasiness which he could not shake off, and which continued to creep into his mind in spite of himself. Could he have made a mistake of some sort, and so placed himself in the hands of such a double-dyed scoundrel? he asked. Surely not!

To be in the power of Kinkman was something different from being in the power of MacAlpin. MacAlpin, with all his curious and fantastic notions was a gentleman with an unusually keen sense of honour. 'Kinkman'—the Squire rose in a spasm of disgust and loathing before he finished the sentence, 'is a villain through and through.'

He paused, a trifle perplexed by his own vehemence, which was evidently sincere, and then murmured as he dropped into his chair, 'He has been a useful villain, nevertheless, and I have offered him enough to bind him to my service for the rest of his life. It must surely be safe enough.' And so the Squire, with his unfailing belief in money, became quite satisfied that all was well and regular between them.

The fact was, Kinkman, ruffian as he was, was not just as black as he was painted in the mind of the cynical and prosperous old roué. He had experienced moments of self-loathing and revulsion, glimpses of a better life, when he longed to unburden himself of the story of his misdeeds, and to take his punishment, whatever it might be, for the satisfaction of saying, 'Kinkman, you are a man and not a monster, and you can claim some human rights still.'

But these good impulses faded before the possibility of acquiring money; and under the overwhelming desire to grow rich, he slowly deteriorated, until he became the cunning, unscrupulous wretch we find him. The Squire knew his weakness, he studied to know the weaknesses of men he came in contact with, and he kept the bait which he knew was most attrac-

tive before the wretched creature, calculating, with devilish discrimination, on his greed and his inability to resist. Nothing, the Squire thought, was so useful as understanding a man's weakness, and knowing how to bring to the surface the scum of his nature; nothing helped so much to make a man malleable for the plans and purposes of his employer.

'Some men's characters are like an ant's nest on which a stone rests; you have only to remove the obstruction and stir it with but the point of a straw to have a swarm about you in an instant.'

There certainly was scum enough about Kinkman, and yet there were lingering flashes of a better life, as seen in the fact that he found it necessary to tell himself at times that by-and-bye he would turn over a new leaf, and some day be a fairly good man—'That is,' he said to himself, 'considering—considering the past'—for he admitted to himself that he could never be quite so good a man as he might have been, had his former life been different. It was borne in upon him in rare moments of uninvited self-realization that the very substance of his nature had become vitiated, and that while the barrenness might indeed be broken, the soil could never bear the best fruit in full measure.

He was not a man to let the grass grow under his feet when once he plunged into any of his schemes, and his ruling passion,—for gain and intrigue, was upon him now. Once fairly started, any sense of personal misgiving soon became obliterated, and he planned and carried through the matter in hand without a qualm.

The present enterprise had in it a delicious spice of malice. Yes—he would oblige the Squire this time heartily enough. 'Gad! it would be a fine stroke of genius to make my own son master of Fosseyway 'n his wife's right! The Squire dare not bring up the business of the Long Walk without confessing his own share in it, and as for young Glenmore, he is never likely to stumble upon the truth.'

Kinkman rubbed his hands gleefully, and almost forgot how decrepit his members were as the result of the deadly grip of the injured man he had betrayed and assassinated.

Walter Heathfield, Kinkman's son, was personable enough, and was ignorant of the dark background of his father's life. He had always understood that his father was in the secret service of the government, and that his numerous disguises and wandering ways were a necessary part of his business. The one tender spot in Kinkman's being, which had survived his criminal career, was his affection for this son; and how to manage the business without involving Walter in any serious difficulty was the problem now facing him.

But Kinkman was equal to most emergencies, and about three weeks after the events we have related, a Mistress Whitgar and her daughter, Ethel, arrived at the village inn. In their company was a young man about twenty-three, tall and slight of build, with the dreamy look of a student rather than a man of affairs. He had no recollection of his mother, Mistress Whitgar, his maternal aunt, having brought him up from the time he was five years old. Ethel Whitgar was five years his senior. Why they were visitors in the little village was not clear to any of them, save that Walter Heathfield's father, who chose to be known by many aliases, among which was Kinkman, had requested their presence there for reasons of his own.

It was a pleasant change for Mistress Whitgar and her daughter, but the young man was not so much impressed as he was expected to be. At twenty-three a man likes to be his own master and plan his movements according to his fancy; it was therefore in no way agreeable to him to know that he was journeying by command, and of compulsion, not choice.

It was impossible not to ask questions, and the answers he received were in no way satisfactory. Besides, his pride was wounded to find that his father was living under an assumed name, and was unable to recognise or acknowledge his son.

The secret service was, of course, a recognized necessity to the government, and it was not his father's fault if he had to play many parts. Such at least was the way Kinkman put it before his son and

heir. All the same, it irked the young fellow so much that he began to shrink from the man he called father. Curiously enough for the son of such a man, his one passion was Art, and to travel and study under the best instructors, the chief ambition of his life. With his sketch-book, he found it no hardship to roam about drinking in the beauty of mountain and forest, dreaming of the future by the banks of clear, cool streams that wound their way through rich meadowland, already glorious with early summer flowers.

Under these circumstances, it was not wonderful that he should meet our friend Sandy, nor that the curiously assorted pair should become friends. For Sandy, although he was deficient in brain power and without artistic skill, had an eye for the beautiful in nature, and a heart tender and sensitive toward all living things.

He took his new companion to see his favourite haunts, confided to him the nesting-places of the shyest birds, and the lairs of many four-footed creatures, and as a crowning token of his regard, gave him his very latest pet, a piping bullfinch, that could repeat his own name like a Christian.

'Harken to him!'—he would say with a glow of pride, as the bird, conscious he was on exhibition, would chirp and call, 'Bobby, Bobby,' and then receive a hemp-seed as his reward.

Heathfield made a sketch of the bird, so that his late owner might be consoled when Bobby would be with him no longer.

Sandy and Heathfield more than once in their rambles met Oona, and talked of the beautiful things in nature which were so dear to them. It made the world full of new interest to them. Heathfield had some knowledge of botany, and to Oona her rare finds of wild flowers grew more beautiful in the light of this fuller knowledge.

Sometimes Miss Whitgar joined them, and occasionally her mother was one of the party; more than once Alan Graham spent an hour or two, by the way, recounting his own adventures to them, and giving them interesting sketches, in his own way, of foreign

lands. Visitors were rare in the neighbourhood, and when they came were cordially welcomed. Janet was apprised of all this, and had 'doubts,' but then Janet had so many doubts that Alan Graham was used to them, and often gave them less consideration than they deserved.

June had passed pleasantly enough, and Kinkman, though well-pleased with the drift of things, was growing anxious as to the ultimate outcome of his plans.

His son was so far from understanding what was in the older man's mind that it was not easy to disclose to him the full extent of what was expected of him, and the difficulty was not lessened by the fact that the reason for the step he contemplated could not be divulged to the young man without unsettling the whole fabric of his life, and revealing his father's character.

At last Kinkman grew weary of waiting, and one afternoon sought out Heathfield, and found him on the side of a well-wooded hill overlooking the Lover's Isle, where Oona, unconscious that their eyes were upon her, occupied her favourite nook with a girl friend of her own age who had lately been her constant companion, and to whom she was doing the honours of the island with the utmost satisfaction.

Sandy was watching by Heathfield in wonder, as the Island, and Oona, with every outline complete, grew under the skilful touches of the artist's pencil, when the sinister shadow of Kinkman fell upon them and brought the work to an end.

Still, it had to be done, and Kinkman plunged into it with but little preface, as the business was now urgent.

'To carry off the lady!' Heathfield exclaimed; 'why, you must be mad to propose such a thing! Win her. I will, if honest devotion can, but to force her into a doubtful position!—nothing under heaven could make me do her such grievous wrong.'

'Why, then, you really love her,' Kinkman remarked with satisfaction, 'and she will the more readily forgive you, when she has time to think it over.'

'Take my word for it, all will be well in the end.'

Heathfield closed his sketchbook hastily, and rose in disgust, angry scorn writ large in every movement. 'Not to win Heaven nor to escape hell would I do the lady such an injury—such an unspeakable injury,' he said, as he faced his father with clenched hands, trembling with passion—'did you bring me here for this hellish scheme?' he demanded in a hoarse voice of suppressed rage—'Am I to be as Satan to mar a second Paradise?—and you—you!—Oh, God, *you* my father!'—and the young man covered his face with his hands, as he threw himself upon the moss-covered bank, perhaps desiring to hide his tears, or to shut out the sight of the tempter.

Kinkman was taken by surprise. After all, then, he did not know this son of his—he had never taken time to cultivate his acquaintance, and as to his notions of conduct or honour—well, he had never even thought of that.

That the young man would think and act for himself had not occurred to him. The situation was unlooked-for; he was content to let Heathfield's passion spend itself, while he turned it over in his mind.

A refusal from his son! He had never thought of such a thing! The plan was easy and excellent—the best for the girl, and very desirable for this foolish young man.

If this moonstruck lad continued refractory, so much the worse for Oona; and besides, he had a great deal to gain or lose in the matter himself.

'There is another side to this thing,' he said at length, as Heathfield rose, and sat down upon the trunk of a tree, exhausted by his own violence, with his eyes fixed in wonder and passion upon the little island.

'Another side to the matter!' the son echoed. 'It is to be hoped so!'

'Yes,' Kinkman continued, without noticing the tone—'the lady is in great peril—peril even of her life. I know no other way to save her, and you have refused.'

'My God!' the young man cried, in amazed horror,

springing to his feet; 'danger of her life!—she!—Oona, in danger! For what? Who—tell me!' He was white to the lips, with a look of intense, passionate eagerness upon his face. Kinkman for a moment quailed before it. An observant stranger might have noticed a likeness between the two men when the depths were stirred which unmistakably proclaimed them father and son, past all doubt.

'It is only a question of days,' continued Kinkman, 'either she is carried off, as I have said, or she is lost.'

'Why not tell her friends,' suggested the young man; 'I will go at once!'

'That would only involve them in her ruin,' replied Kinkman, with the air of a man at his wits' end to find means of doing a kind action.

'You are dreaming,' said Heatheld at last, making an effort to throw off the burden of the last hour; 'certainly, you must be dreaming!'

'No,' said Kinkman, slowly; 'I leave that to my son, and wish him joy of his awaking!' Kinkman rose, as if the matter were at an end.

The young man paused. 'If to carry her off is the *only* way to save her—Heaven help me!—I would die for her!—and if there is no other way—so be it! I may as well complete the sacrifice, and earn for ever her contempt and loathing! Oona, Oona!' he whispered to himself, in a passion of despair, stretching out his arms toward the little island, where the unconscious cause of his misery still lingered; 'Oona forgive me!—forgive me this wrong!—forgive me!'

A stone flew past them at that moment, and neatly cut in two a tall stalk of golden-rod, which had stood out bravely among its fellows. Kinkman started, and turned to look for the cause of the interruption, and there Sandy was sitting in the grass, blowing thistle-down off the stems and watching their airy flight with great satisfaction.

'I made a good shot,' he remarked, looking up for the appreciation which he thought was due to so much skill.

For answer, Kinkman advanced towards him threateningly, his face aflame with fear and passion, and his hand raised to strike.

The boy never moved, no sign of dismay was visible, instead he gazed enquiringly at the angry man. Heathfield stepped between them. He had never seen such an evil look upon his father's face: it appalled him by its ferocity; the lips were contracted, showing his teeth, and the whole pose was that of an animal about to spring at his prey.

'The boy means no harm,' Heathfield said, with sudden composure. 'How long has he been here?' Kinkman demanded. 'Not long,' Heathfield answered at a venture; 'he has heard nothing he can understand, and can do no harm.'

'It is best to make sure,' Kinkman said, as he motioned his son away, while the angry gleam in his deep-set eyes meant no good to the boy.

Heathfield stood his ground, and Sandy gazed from one to the other, wondering at the strange ways of the two men.

'We can do nothing more to-day, Sandy,' Heathfield said kindly to the boy; 'take these things home for me,' pointing to his sketching apparatus; 'we will finish the picture another time—and see that you forget anything you have heard just now.'

Sandy vanished, and after some time, Kinkman went his way, leaving his son to the solitude he craved, and his own bitter company.

Kinkman was not altogether satisfied with the turn things were taking. 'He has been too long among women, this son of mine,' he mused, 'and lacks hardness; but time will mend that, and the possession of the girl, when he cools down, is sure to work changes in his views of things he little dreams of,' and he laughed softly to himself, with a fine appreciation of his own astuteness.

'When pressed hard, the young dog can show fight too,' he continued; 'he is a chip off the old block, after all. I am glad of that, anyway, for he has a part to play of which he little dreams—and, by my life, he'll play it as I have planned, or he is like to learn something the schoolmaster never taught him, for all his picture-making!'

Heathfield breathed more freely when relieved of

his father's presence. 'Perhaps I can still watch over her,' he said to himself, 'and perhaps restore her to her friends, and she may yet know I acted against my own will, and only to serve her. Perhaps! Who knows!'

He lingered on until the sun had set. The mellow thrush, which had been pouring forth its requiem of the parting day, was now silent; the lark flew to its mossy bed, the swallow to its nest, and the wood-pigeon had uttered his last coo before settling down for the night. The hum of the bee was no longer heard; the grass-hopper had sounded its last chirp, and all seemed to have sunk to sleep.

The owl began to utter its doleful and melancholy wail, the night-jar was out with its spinning-wheel-like 'birr, birr,' and the lightsome roe, the pride of the lowland woods, was emitting his favourite bark.

Still the young man stood leaning against the trunk of an old elm; and in his heart were bitter thoughts against his father which he tried in vain to suppress.

He had been deliberately brought half across the kingdom to assist in some scheme the full particulars of which were not even yet disclosed to him, his father—yes, his *father* had done this. A man should feel that he owes his father respect, and more than respect, but Heathfield felt in his soul that he owed to him the bitterest hours of his existence, and his deepest resentment.

True, his father had done his best for him, according to his light; he had given him food and shelter and clothing; he had paid for his education; and he was liberal still in the matter of money and asked no question how it was spent. He was better than many fathers in such things. But men have minds and souls as well as bodies, bread alone cannot satisfy; but of that, this father of his, he told himself, took no account; he was but the pawn upon the chess-board of some fine game of his, in which the sweetest woman that ever breathed was dangerously involved.

Herein he did Kinkman wrong, for according to his capacity, as it survived many crimes, if he loved anything beside gold it was his son.

He started homeward at last, making a long détour that he might pass within sight of Janet McLean's cottage, and see the cheerful light in the window perhaps for the last time in peace and safety. Having had his look at the simple home that sheltered Oona, he pushed on, singing softly to himself a song of the day, new to him then, and afterwards, in a more perfect form well-known under the skilful setting of the Scottish poet:—

'Oh! wert thou in the cauld blast
 On yonder lea, on yonder lea,
 My plaidie to the angry airt,
 I'd shelter thee, I'd shelter thee!
 Or did misfortune's bitter storms
 Around thee blaw, around thee blaw,
 Thy bield should be my bosom,
 To share it a', to share it a'.'

'Or were I in the wildest waste,
 Sae bleak and bare, sae bleak and bare.
 The desert were a paradise,
 If thou wert there, if thou wert there!
 Or, were I monarch o' the globe,
 Wi' thee to reign, wi' thee to reign,
 The brightest jewel in my crown
 Wad be my queen, wad be my queen!'

CHAPTER VIII

SANDY

'FAATHER,' said Sandy, a few days after the events related, 'How div ye misremember what ye ken, when ye are tauld to?'

Donald laughed, a clear, full-throated laugh of genuine amusement, at the naive question, which outbreak of hilarity quite disconcerted the boy and brought the colour to his cheeks. 'Dinna frighten the bairn,' his mother said, divining something unusual under the boy's question, for Sandy had been restless for a day or two, and she had found him awake and tearful when he should have been asleep the night before.

Thus admonished, Donald laid his hand upon the lad's curly head, saying, 'Your faither sud'na hae laughed at your question, Sandy my man. His ain main tussle whiles is to remember, but certies, you may be right after all, laddies, for there are things that can never be quite forgotten.'

'I canna misremember,' Sandy whimpered again, in visible distress; 'I canna, faither!'

'Tell your faither about it, laddie,' his mother said, encouragingly, 'he winna laugh at ye again, nor fin' faut wi' ye laddie, he winna for sure.'

'I want to hear all about it, Sandy,' Donald said. 'It is a gran' thing to be able to forget when ye want to, but it is no easy, and I never learned how to do it mysel' laddie, so dinna be miserable.'

'I canna,' Sandy wailed afresh; 'I canna misremember onything. I canna—'deed I canna.'

'Well then, bairnie, what is it?' his mother said, soothingly, searching the boy's countenance with loving eyes.

'I harkit mither,' he said, plunging into the matter, like one throwing himself on another's mercy. 'I harkit when they didna ken.'

'Ye harkit, laddie?' his father said, quite mystified.

'I harkit,' the boy continued, 'to the lame pedlar and Meester Heathfield having a gran crack about the bonny lady of the Island, and I canna misremember.'

'The pedlar!' Donald said, hoarsely.

'I warna spyng, faither,' the boy said, mistaking the impression he had made. 'I warna spyng, indeed I warna.'

'No, no, of course not, Sandy,' Donald said hastily;

'And ye will tell your faither all about it, laddie,' his mother said soothingly; 'he'll no be angry.'

'It was about takin' awa' the lady o' the Island, whether or no. Will they tak' her awa', faither?'—and the boy scanned his father's face anxiously.

Donald was startled. He had foreseen danger to Oona, but had no intimation it was so near, and the mention of the lame pedlar, whom he knew now to be Kinkman, boded ill for the safety of the 'lady o' the Island' as Sandy called her.

'Will they tak' her awa', faither?' Sandy repeated, in evident distress.

'No, laddie,' Donald said slowly. 'That is, I hope not.'

Donald had grown pale under the bronze, and tense in spite of himself. His brain was working rapidly at the moment, for he had to decide, and he had to decide quickly; and perhaps, even now, he was too late. It was a bitter moment for MacAlpin; he could not chide his boy for the sense of honour which had kept him silent, in spite of his dwarfed intelligence; still, the time lost might mean much, might even mean everything he had pledged himself to prevent; yet whatever came of it, Sandy must never know, Donald told himself: 'Sandy must never know.'

The sensitive soul of the boy had enough to suffer, being as he was without the reasoning powers which enable others to look beyond the present pain, and to draw nectar and fragrance, even from the crushed flowers of human life. The present was all to Sandy, and Donald wished to make it as little painful as possible for him.

Leaving a message with his wife for Alan Graham, Donald was soon mounted on his horse, with Sandy behind him, and taking the shortest cuts through the woods, in little over an hour from the time he started, he sighted the ancient hostelry where he hoped to learn something of the whereabouts of those he sought. It was indeed an anxious, and might also be a perilous journey. On the way, he had learned all that Sandy could tell him, and was far from being comforted by what the boy had to relate.

Leaving Sandy in charge of the horse, in a little cleugh about half a mile off, Donald made his way on foot to the inn. He had not been a frequent visitor there of late, and now his coming was hailed with unbounded delight by all about the place, as an event of great note.

Yes, the landlord explained, the lame pedlar had left three days ago, but whether he had left the neighbourhood or not, he could not tell. 'A good riddance,' remarked the hostler, wrathfully. 'A French spy, most likely,' whispered the landlord, mysteriously. 'Very glad he's gone. Such characters spoil the reputation of a decent house—quite spoil it, indeed.'

'Always went afoot,' chimed in the hostler, whose grievances were many and deep; 'he rose with the birds every day of the week, and was the last to lie down, if indeed he ever did lie down and sleep like a Christian body! He said he had learned all his queer ways soldiering. He soldiering, indeed!—he would start like a thief if you came upon him unbeknownst in broad daylight. Yes, he is gone without a word or a bawbee, bad luck to him, the misshapen miser, and a St Johnston tippet for a fairin!' It was clear the hostler had a poor opinion of Kinkman, who, by the way, was known to him by quite another name.

Yes, Meester Heathfield and the ladies had left that very morning, only that morning. 'They were civil folk, very civil, and gi'e liberal.'

'Would Donald step in and have a taste o' something? He was unco' particular in such things, they a' kenned that, ever sin' he becam' a kirk-ganging man.'

'But bless ye, that need mak' nae great difference, there was the Ruling Elder, now, who——'

'Just so,' Donald remarked, anxious to stop the flow of talk, and well enough aware of the Ruling Elder's capacity for good liquor in time past; 'let every man hoe his ain rig,' Donald said, as he turned to go; 'it is the maist ony ane can do, I'm thinkin'!'

'To be sure, to be sure!' said mine host, with his usual adaptability to the humours of his patrons. 'Exactly my ain sentiments! That is just what I was saying when ye cam' in. He watched the retreating figure of Donald, with a puzzled air, till he was well out of ear-shot; and then sagely shaking his head, as with grave concern, he helped himself to a taste of his own good liquor. Thus fortified, he gave it as his opinion that there was something seriously amiss with MacAlpin. 'If there is no' a bee in his bonnet, my name is no' Tammas Tamson!' he said solemnly.

'Did ony ane ever hear MacAlpin talk like a kirk parson afore? Never. And did ony ane ever see his eyes snap and blaze like live coals when you blaw on them as they did when he asked for the pedlar body? I say, never! Tak' my word for it, if MacAlpin meets that same pedlar, there'll be murder, yes, murder—lawful and proper murder!'

'Murder!' echoed mine host's better half, in alarm; 'you mean justice, belikes man!'

'In course I do,' retorted the landlord, much offended at being called to order before strangers; 'I mean justice on a spy.'

'A spy!' exclaimed half-a-dozen in a breath.

'A spy, and in this house for more than a month past!' cried his wife; 'heard ye ever the like? What next! What next!'

When Donald returned to the place where he had left his horse and son, Sandy was asleep, and the horse, having finished his oats, was browsing contentedly near by; he had cropped the grass round the sleeping boy in every direction, and was still only a few yards away, as though his duty was to protect him. Nor was this in appearance only, for the horse—his name was Duke—would only let his friends

approach him at any time, and those who once saw him use his teeth and heels had no desire to witness a second exhibition of his prowess.

Donald as he approached gave a low whistle, to which Duke answered as he turned to meet his master, for horse and man understood one another perfectly. Sandy slept on, the happy, peaceful sleep which comes to the young and pure-hearted, wrapping the little fellow round and round in tranquil repose. Donald looked lovingly at the boy, without disturbing him, and led Duke to a near-by stream, where he drank to his satisfaction. 'We cannot tell what is before us,' he said to the noble animal, as though he could understand him, while he patted his arched neck, 'but we must be ready, Duke, we must be ready good horse!'

When he returned, Sandy was awake, rosy and happy.

To be out on an important expedition with his father and Duke, was a rare treat, which Sandy was enjoying without alloy. Donald got out their lunch, of which he ate sparingly himself, while Sandy demolished the good things without pause.

When the meal was over, Donald sat still in deep thought and the boy, having nothing better to do roamed about, and played hide and seek with Duke, in perfect confidence, as though the horse enjoyed the game. Donald could not help watching them, with half his mind, and in spite of the serious nature of the business in hand, he was diverted to hear Sandy exhort Duke after the self-same manner of the minister in the kirk the Sabbath before; in fact few points were omitted.

'Do horses ken everything that folk ken, faither?' broke in Sandy on MacAlpin's meditations.

'No, no, laddie,' Donald answered, a trifle wearily.

'Weel then,' said Sandy, with a sigh of satisfaction; 'I ha' tel't him lots o' things the meenister tel't us on Sabbath, and he never went to sleep once!'

'Ah, Duke's a good horse, laddie,' Donald said, while in his mind he searched the future for some certain light on what might come of their present

expedition. 'We'll be a' wisc. before to-morrow's morn, laddie—yes, before to-morrow's morn!'

In a trice they were on their way again, Sandy in the saddle this time, and Donald walking in advance. The way was intricate and difficult, as they had to travel through belts of dense forest, with only here and there breaks of clearing, and imperfectly indicated footpaths; but both Duke and Sandy knew how, on occasion, to make themselves small, and take things as they came, without much ado.

It was nearing sundown when they came upon the coach road, and leaving the horse in a secluded spot, they went forward until reaching a bit of rising ground, known in the district as the ridge of Glenmay, which cut clear across the landscape and offered an extended view for several miles in either direction.

MacAlpin scanned the distance carefully, and with evident perplexity. So far as he could see the landscape was empty of human life and sound, save the murmuring of a distant waterfall, heard distinctly enough amidst the stillness, and the far-off tinkling of cow-bells in the valley below.

The hush of evening had fallen upon hill and stream, and nature had paused to sleep, perchance to dream! MacAlpin whistled an old tune under his breath, as he considered the situation. A tall pine, shooting up at a height of sixty or seventy feet, grew near by. Donald glanced at it, and at the boy. 'Can you climb, laddie?' he asked, pointing at the tree, towering majestically, like a Corinthian column. 'Climb!' Sandy echoed, scornfully. 'See!'—and the boy was in the branches with the agility of a monkey. True, he had often been admonished for risking his neck in such seductive enterprises, but now his father bade him climb, and Sandy meant to show some of his tree-craft to so fine an audience as his father, just for once.

'Do you see aught, laddie?' Donald called, as Sandy issued from the heart of the tree, and stood among the parting branches. 'Na!' was the laconic reply of Sandy, whose heart was much more in the climbing than in the seeing. 'Harken to the squirrels,

faither,' Sandy called down, 'they are scolding most fearfu'; they dinna ken me, sae far frae hame.'

'Never mind the squirrels now laddie, but look to the right along the road, there is a sharp turn far ahead. Do you see aught now, laddie?'

'Yes, faither, I see a carriage and twa horses, and twa more horses, and twa men, and——'

'That will do now laddie, come down, Sandy my man, and help faither.'

Sandy was soon down, and helped his father to drag some heavy branches of a dead tree across the road, at a point where the obstruction would be concealed until a carriage would be close upon it.

Then MacAlpin, with cheery confidence, the burden being at last lifted from his heart and the moment of action at hand, said, touching the boy's cheek playfully with his finger, 'Rin awa' laddie, and keep Duke company for awhile. I am expecting Alan Graham and twa or three mair.

Donald was almost light-hearted, the cloud had in a measure passed, for Sandy had redeemed his error, and Oona might yet be saved.

The old soldier had not kept tryst, and now that the crisis had come, Donald remembered that he was absolutely without a weapon, and what the odds might be, he could not tell. Still, he told himself, he must face the situation, at all cost, nothing doubting. He sat down under the shelter of the trees, where he could see without being seen. The minutes seemed hours while he waited, but he had no misgivings as to the result. If ever the protection of Heaven was granted to mortal man, MacAlpin thought he was justified in claiming it then; and something about, 'one chasing a thousand, and two putting ten thousand to flight,' kept up a constant rhythm in his brain.

The ascent was steep, and the creaking of the harness and the panting of the horses was the first intimation that they were at hand. Kinkman's voice broke the silence, he had evidently been comparing the forests he had seen abroad with the bit of woodland they were passing through.

The sound of his voice brought MacAlpin to his

feet so abruptly that several stones were dislodged and rolled down among the carriage wheels. But Kinkman was just then far too much occupied with his own discourse to notice anything outside his own thoughts.

A moment later, the carriage came to a stand-still, and the leaders, growing restive, turned back upon the wheelers in spite of all the postillion could do.

The situation was far from desirable for Kinkman's plans, for on one side was a deep ditch with a bank rising fifteen or twenty feet, and on the other a rocky precipice overhanging a swift stream, full fifty feet below.

The confusion was as complete as MacAlpin could wish, and the position of the horses such that Kinkman, who was on the box, and Heathfield, who was in the carriage could not for the moment reach the ground.

Donald had therefore time to open the carriage door on the free side, and Oona, with dishevelled hair and tear-stained face, was out before Kinkman and his party seemed to realize what had happened. Heathfield was the first to extricate himself from the confusion, and fully possessed of the idea that MacAlpin represented the danger which Kinkman had said threatened the lady's life, he flew at him in a transport of passion, and levelling a pistol at his head he pulled the trigger without a moment's warning. Fortunately the weapon snapped without exploding, and before the second barrel could be discharged Donald had knocked the pistol out of the young man's hand and had kicked it into the ditch. Nothing daunted, Heathfield threw himself upon the Highlander, fierce and frenzied and wholly reckless of his life. MacAlpin caught him by the throat, not well knowing what to do, for in truth he had never given Heathfield a thought, and was somewhat embarrassed in finding him there at all. Nevertheless, he held him in no gentle grip, and shaking him contemptuously, only murmured to himself: 'You! You!' For piecing things together at short notice was, as we know, no part of MacAlpin's mental equipment.

A warning cry from Oona caused him to turn his head for a moment, to find Kinkman covering him with a pistol, with a studied carefulness which augured ill for Donald's safety. This act on the part of Kinkman was well-nigh fatal to his son, for MacAlpin hastily threw the young man from him with such force that he rolled under the horses, causing them to plunge and rear, mauling the well-nigh unconscious artist under their iron hoofs.

Kinkman was for an instant disconcerted by his son's danger, and in that instant, MacAlpin had caught the hand that held the murderous weapon, which exploded without harm and fell from the hand of the foiled villain.

But Kinkman was not to be disposed of so easily. With his left hand he drew a dagger, which flashed before MacAlpin's eyes for an instant, and drew blood ere the hand which held it could be mastered.

It needed the touch of steel to rouse Donald to the utmost, and Kinkman was soon at his mercy; but what to do with him was the problem. Meanwhile he held the miserable man by both wrists, and his grasp tightened while he looked down upon him with a fierce loathing, which smote the wretched creature as with the hammer of Thor. Still, Kinkman was far from accepting defeat. He tried to kick his assailant like a vicious beast. For answer, MacAlpin plucked him from the ground, and swinging him round, brought him down with such force that for the moment he hung limp and helpless in the big man's hands. When the wretch recovered his breath, he exerted all his strength to set his teeth in the hand that held him. MacAlpin could only prevent him from doing so by lifting him sheer off the ground, and shaking him into helplessness every time he made the attempt.

So soon as he recovered his wind the vicious creature poured out imprecations wholly unrepeatable, hissing curses through clenched teeth in words scathing and terrible.

MacAlpin was at a loss what to do. He dare not release him, and but for the accident that had dis-

abled Heathfield, the situation would have been extremely critical; perhaps indeed fatal to MacAlpin's plans of rescue. Kinkman, exhausted and battered as he was, roused all his remaining strength in a last effort to free himself, and so determined and powerful was his attempt, that MacAlpin once more raised him from the ground, until in terror and agony, he cried for mercy.

'Oh! mercy! Mercy!' MacAlpin echoed, scornfully. 'The mercy you have shown to helpless women and wee bairns—is *that* the mercy you ask?' and he shook him wrathfully, bringing him down again with great force.

'Oh! for God's sake, have mercy,' Kinkman wailed, in pain and terror.

'God!' said MacAlpin, with indignant severity, 'since when has Kinkman had dealings with God, or spoken his name save to profane it?'

Kinkman's wail ceased, and his eyes flashed defiant hate into the very soul of the big man who held him: his pain and terror for the moment forgotten in the passion of deadly antagonism. 'You brute,' he hissed between clenched teeth, 'why don't you kill me like a man and have done with it instead of torturing me like a fiend! You canting hypocrite!' he screamed, in a transport of fury; 'why don't you send me to hell—because you dare not!—because you know I would take you with me! You fool,' he screamed, ceasing to struggle, and flashing defiance into the very soul of MacAlpin, 'what is this thing to you? What right have you to preach to other men? Since when have you been so pious? Since when have you ceased to be a drunkard and profane beyond most men; you who talk of profaning God's name as if you were a saint from heaven, instead of the drunken beast you are! Who lay drunk while his own mother lay dead? *You, you!*—you useless ne'er-do-weel, for whom the devil himself can find no employment out of hell.'

MacAlpin quailed, smitten in mind rather than in body. It was no longer the superior strength and stature of one man beating down the strength of

another by sheer right of thews and sinews: it was the wills and the central force of the men that clashed, and Kinkman, beaten and physically crushed, struck back in a white heat of fierce defiance and lurid hate that was appalling and terrible. The words were simple enough, and in their simplicity they struck home like rapier thrusts, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and laying bare the whole inner being of the man before him. It was the big man that quailed now.

MacAlpin's grip relaxed, he breathed hard, like a man in mortal pain. The words could not have been more cunningly devised to awake recollection if they had been the result of long thought instead of the impetus of the moment. They called up the best in MacAlpin, and turned his better self against himself; and yet the words came from the lips of a man whose whole character savoured of the charnel-house of an evil life.

Donald paled visibly under the steady gaze of the wretch he held at his mercy. He paused, wondering what to do with the man. If only Alan Graham were there, to care for Oona, for the two strangers who were in care of the horses were almost ready to turn their attention to other matters than the carriage which had been partially overturned. For a space Donald felt confused in thought and uncertain in action; and all because certain bitter words on a forceful tongue had flashed a searchlight upon a past which a few moments before he thought ages behind him, so complete had he felt his emancipation from old habits and old passions. Oh! how he loathed the past, he told himself; and now it appeared to mock him from the lips of this wretched man!

The tide of thought and feeling in the mind and heart of MacAlpin ebbed and flowed painfully and rapidly.

The sense of mastery and the joy of power at last welled up within him, his grip grew tense once more; he felt he could crush the wrists he held into impotency. Would he really do it? His original plan was to save Oona, he had no desire to injure even Kink-

man, much less Heathfield, and yet he seemed on the point of shaking the life out of the crippled creature he held in his hands. Kinkman writhed in agony, while MacAlpin looked into his craven soul, until he shrunk before him, in moral as well as mortal terror.

It was only for a moment. 'Yes,' he told himself, 'his own past was not so far behind him that he had a right to censure others, not even Kinkman.' And suddenly throwing the suffering wretch from him, he wiped his hands upon the grass, as if to purify them by the healthful touch of Mother Earth from their late pollution.

Kinkman lay where he fell, his bones ached, his breath came in gasps, as much from baffled rage as from bodily pain; but his brain worked as keen and true as a machine of first-rate workmanship, driven at utmost speed.

MacAlpin stood where he could best guard Oona, and had the satisfaction, at last, of seeing the old soldier approaching, although fully ten minutes must elapse before he could reach them, for the ground was steep and broken, and Alan's best marching days were over.

That ten minutes was destined to make a deep impression on the life of MacAlpin. The men had repaired all damage to the harness and carriage, and took up poor Heathfield to place him in it. The movement hurt him so cruelly that he moaned in agony. The sound of suffering from his son roused Kinkman, and galvanised him into activity which an instant before seemed impossible. He had clambered to his feet with amazing speed, considering his condition, when Sandy's shrill-voiced delight broke in upon the scene:

'Look, faither, look!' he piped in perfect gladness; 'flowers! flowers for the lady o' the Island!'

The sight of the boy roused all the strength and all the evil passion in the miserable Kinkman. He remembered in a flash that the boy was present when he talked his plans over with Heathfield, and at once he saw how his well-laid schemes had come to such a sorry ending.

Donald had never thought of harm coming to Sandy, and was unprepared when he saw Kinkman rush at the lad. At the same moment there was a sharp cry. It was not from Sandy but from Oona. Donald turned towards her, and was consequently spared the sight of the wondering little fellow in the hands of Kinkman, who, after one fierce shake of murderous hate, threw him over the bank to meet his fate on the rocks below.

Kinkman laughed in triumph over his fiendish deed, as he was hustled by the men into the carriage; it was a sound of bloodcurdling viciousness which clung to the memory of those who heard it like an evil dream for many a long day.

Oona had witnessed the conflict of the two men in silent amazement, and such was her confidence in MacAlpin, that she had no real misgivings as to the outcome of the battle; but the sight of Sandy in the grip of his enemy was more than she could endure, and with a cry of helpless terror she fell senseless to the ground.

The many hours of excitement, the want of food, the horror of the scene she was forced to witness and unable to prevent all contributed to sap her courage and to bring about this merciful oblivion.

In after years, when it had all become a far-off memory, she spoke of it as the only time she had ever fainted. Frightful as the result was to the boy, still worse might have followed had MacAlpin reached Kinkman fresh from the perpetration of his dastardly crime, which he certainly would have done, had not Oona claimed his attention for a few precious moments.

The old soldier had climbed the hill at last, and MacAlpin was free to seek his wee laddie, where he might be found at the bottom of the cliffs. Swinging himself down by a zig-zag path he made his way with a beating heart, in quest of what he dare not form an image of in his own mind, brave man as he was.

The little fellow lay very still, the nimble limbs were at rest, and as MacAlpin saw the battered form of his boy, his passionate wrath rose in spite of himself,

obliterating for a time his sense of personal loss, and sweeping him onward like a piece of driftwood on the crest of a tidal wave. Appalled at the sudden tempest, and terrified to find he was slipping beyond his own control, he threw himself down beside the injured boy, and sobbed out in the gathering gloom his penitence, pain and misery, praying in an agony of suffering and sorrow that the Eternal might not forsake him but hold him when the current was strongest and bring him into calm waters once more.

When self-control returned to him, he spread his coat upon the ground, and tenderly lifting the injured boy, placed him upon it; as he did so the little fellow sighed and relapsed into unconsciousness.

MacAlpin's heart grew lighter. Sandy was not dead. Still, it was plain to him that never again would the laddie play games with the squirrels in the tall trees, or pay morning calls on the young doves in the high branches, and count the timid little heads of the jays and the nightingales and his other feathered friends in their downy homes. Sandy had that day climbed his last, MacAlpin told himself sadly, just to let 'faither' see how he could do it.

Lovingly and sadly he thought of how the little fellow was wont to drink in the beauty of the dawn from some leafy bower towering far up into the pure ether, and from his grand retreat watch the grey river turn purple and gold, suffused with unspeakable glory, as a foretaste of a new heaven and a new earth. Sandy had the artist's eye and the poet's soul; he saw and felt the unspeakable beauty of the world of nature, but the expression of these things was denied him, and at times amidst scenes of the most peaceful splendour, perplexed and oppressed by his unintelligible emotions, he would throw himself down among the wild flowers in a passion of tears.

Now he lay a pitiful object of helpless boyhood, crushed and mangled, his clothes torn to shreds, his eyes closed, his body limp save his hands which still held the precious flowers he had gathered with such care for the 'lady o' the Island.'

MacAlpin pulled his bonnet over his eyes with a

shaking hand, and took up his helpless burden. Again the little fellow sighed, and as Donald made the ascent, he could feel heart-beats against his own as he held the boy closely and tenderly in his arms.

Graham had moved Oona back from the road for shelter—the night was chill; and for safety, for they hardly dared hope that Kinkman had altogether abandoned his purpose; and in the interval Graham had made several important and startling communications to her, which, had they come from another, might have appeared to her past belief. It was well he did so for MacAlpin's plans for her safety were sufficiently strange to put all her courage and confidence in him to the proof.

CHAPTER IX

THE SWALLOW HOLE

HARDCASTLE, as we have seen, had arranged his plans with some care, and so far, was quite satisfied with the result. He had bought Kinkman to do his bidding, and after a few qualms and misgivings, he put the whole thing from him as a highly unpleasant piece of business. His fine contempt for inferior human nature came to his assistance. What was the use of paying a big price and making a promise of more to have unpleasant things done for you, if you must worry over it yourself? Such restless habits of thought spoil a man's digestion, and keep him awake when he should be asleep, and Hardcastle was not the man to incur any of these unpleasant things without cause.

This being so he chose to make things pleasant for his son and heir on principle.

It was only proper, he reasoned, that Reginald should meet men and women of his own class on all fitting occasions, and learn to take his place as a leader in the county where by-and-bye, of course, he must in the natural order of things play a distinguished part. So at least the squire had planned.

And therefore while Kinkman was doing his best to serve his employer, as we have seen, with a proper consideration for his own interests, guests were arriving from far and near, and the old Hall was alive with brightness and a cheery welcome for all comers. It was not Hardcastle's fault that these festivities should be under way at the very time Kinkman was doing his best to give effect to his master's wishes.

He had concluded, with easy confidence, that all was well over a week or more before. But Kinkman had found it no easy task to overcome the scruples of Heathfield, nor had Heathfield found it easy to lure

Oona sufficiently far from her home to make their scheme successful; and after all their well-laid plans, thanks to Sandy, their purpose failed as we have seen.

No such gaiety had awakened the echoes at the Fosseway since the old lord's time, at least so people said. The Squire had lived rather quietly since he came into possession, far too quietly, many thought, for a man of such large estate and ample fortune. In fact it was considered Hardcastle's duty to spend freely and to keep up the reputation of the old place. Many reasons were given for his not doing so, among them, the death of his wife; and besides, it was whispered that the old nobility and magnates of the first order had never been able to reconcile themselves to Hardcastle's *régime* at Fosseway.

The days of millionaires and multi-millionaires had not yet come; money had not been deified to the point of covering a multitude of social and other sins; so that notwithstanding Hardcastle's widely distributed invitations there were many notable absentees, and the fact was keenly felt by the squire on this important occasion.

All the same, Reginald for once was well-pleased with his father's plans, and that in itself was exceedingly gratifying to the old man, and made up for much that was lacking. The Island and its interesting occupant had not faded from the young man's memory, and he inwardly cursed himself many times a day that he had allowed MacAlpin to bully him into promising to leave the lady to the seclusion she desired.

What right had MacAlpin, he asked himself, to interfere with his wishes and pleasures? It would indeed be strange, he told himself, if he could not find some means of surprising the secret from him; he, indeed, her self-constituted guardian!—he of all men!

While the young man was in this mood, Douglas, who was deep in his master's confidence, readily undertook the task of solving the mystery. Douglas was under no obligation to absent himself from the island, and his master with fine sophistry justified his conduct to himself, and was pleased that he had found a satisfactory way out of the difficulty.

MacAlpin knew, as all the world seemed to know, that gaieties of unusual magnificence were contemplated; and from his knowledge of the squire, he inferred that Hardcastle was not all bent on pleasure and hospitality, but that underneath the craving for social distinction, he had some serious purpose, looking toward the safe-guarding of what he most prized; and MacAlpin was convinced that if a crime were again necessary to the accomplishment of his purposes, Hardcastle would not hesitate to commit it.

In short, as things were, the old scoundrel had no choice but to confess himself a great offender, or sin yet deeper to cover up his mis-doings.

MacAlpin, for all his dullness in seeing through fine schemes, had no great difficulty in connecting these festive doings with Kinkman's abortive attempt to carry off the 'lady o' the Island.' He had foreseen danger to Oona, and he had made preparations to meet it, in which he had taken the old soldier into his confidence, and Graham, without being strikingly explicit, had given Janet explanations which prepared her for much which followed.

But MacAlpin, notwithstanding his sense of impending danger, had quite failed to read the signs correctly; and as we know when the time came, he was taken by surprise, and but for an accident, might have failed in the purpose to which he had pledged his life.

There was now no time to be lost; and mounting Oona upon the good horse—Duke—MacAlpin led the way, with Sandy in his arms, while Graham followed leading Duke along such paths as Donald considered safe and secret.

The moon was young, and gave a feeble light where the density of the trees did not quite obscure it. The distance was not great but the mental and physical strain was beginning to tell upon every one, and yet much remained to be done and this consciousness nerved them to renewed effort. Leaving Sandy in as comfortable a position as could be found, after doing all in his power for him, and with Duke near by, the two men made their way to the 'Lovers' Isle'—carefully guiding Oona by the best paths known to

them, and across the narrow footbridge of which we have heard before.

Although it was night, when no one would be likely to find their way voluntarily to such a lonely spot, Graham soldierlike, insisted on mounting guard at the island end of the bridge, while MacAlpin made his dangerous journey with Oona.

A few articles had been secreted in a cleft of the rock, over which some shrubs grew so dense that their concealment was perfect. MacAlpin produced them, much to Oona's wonder, and also some food, which she sorely needed after a fast of so many hours.

During the few minutes spent thus, Donald endeavoured to explain his plan to her, and although she was quite unable to understand what was intended, the whole thing being so new and extraordinary, she was quite satisfied to trust MacAlpin to the end, as she had, with a woman's keen instinct, trusted him from the first. His own preparations were soon made and wrapping a plaid of ample dimensions around her, with the request that she would shut her eyes and keep them shut until he told her to open them, he was ready.

'But it is dark,' she pleaded, 'and I cannot see with my eyes open!'

'Why then, close them, nevertheless!' Donald would be content with nothing less, and Oona at last complied in good faith. He told her he was going to take her down a steep place and through falling water, but she need have no fear. Alan Graham would follow, and she would be safe under his care from all harm.

For a moment he felt about among the undergrowth, where a tiny stream of water seemed to lose itself in the ground, and then taking Oona in his arms, he began to descend into a veritable abyss by means of a rope ladder which he had firmly secured for the occasion. It was well Oona could not see, for down, down, down, slowly and steadily into the depths MacAlpin made his way. The sensation was curious and not a little alarming. Any one who has been down a coal, or other mine, can recall the sense

of vacancy, the helplessness, the sound and sense of falling water amidst the darkness, and the wonder when it would end or if it would end at all.

MacAlpin's breathing told her that the task was no light one, even for him. His pauses for rest, when he leaned against the rocky side of the chasm, and the slowness with which he moved downward, all indicated the difficulty of the undertaking.

It seemed to her as if the descent would never end, and the amazement of the immediate present was such that she never gave a thought as to where their journey would terminate; for among all the strange and startling experiences of the day, it was the most extraordinary and perplexing. Over twenty minutes must have passed before MacAlpin was able to make sure that the first stage of their journey was completed, and that they might, without doubt, stand on *terra firma* once more.

When at last he was able to strike a light the wonder of their surroundings was overwhelming to Oona, who saw it under such startling circumstances and for the first time.

They were in a grand cathedral-like cavern, over four hundred feet in length, and perhaps a hundred and fifty feet wide and nearly a hundred feet in height. The floor was of black sand and small round pebbles, and as regular as if it had been intended for a ball-room. To reach it, they had made a descent of five hundred feet or more, through a well-like chasm which few would attempt at any time on their own account, and fewer still encumbered with a human burden. Nothing, indeed, but dire necessity could induce any one to make the attempt. The season had been unusually dry, and the volume of water which found its way into this strange abyss was consequently so reduced that the perilous journey was made under the most favourable conditions. Had it not been so, it is doubtful whether MacAlpin, with all his daring would have ventured even under the severe pressure of the moment.

From the main cathedral-like expanse there were winding galleries, and almost regular stairs or steps,

and side-caves and openings in bewildering abundance which branched off in several directions, giving to the whole an almost limitless aspect of vastness.

The situation was weird and awe-inspiring in the extreme, with its ghostly shadows and yawning chambers, not fashioned by the hand of man, and which few human eyes had ever seen.

The little cascade through which they had in a measure passed was now no more to them than a thin veil of sparkling beauty spread over the rocks and blown into millions of diamonds by some invisible breath, and glowing in innumerable prisms of unspeakable loveliness. A glory of wonders hid from human eyes, it was indeed an enchanted castle of mystery to which MacAlpin had brought her, and of which she would speak to wondering listeners in after-time.

By a long *détour* of many miles these wonderful caves could be reached by any one in the secret of the labyrinth of paths which led to them, but there had been no time to reach them in that way now. It was evident that they had been used at some time in the past by smugglers or perhaps robbers; but for as long as MacAlpin could remember their existence was regarded as a myth, and even the Island of Two Streams was so protected by superstitious dread that the clue to the caves had long been lost. Nor is this much to be wondered at, for in those days serious research in the realm of nature was little known, and it has been left to modern science to interpret these manifestations of hidden forces to the eager intelligence of our own times.

MacAlpin had passed this abyss of darkness more than once since his last interview with the squire, and had made preparations in case of such need as now existed, so that some measure of rude comfort was secured, as well as shelter and safety. When it was unsafe to enter from the island, he made the long tramp by the winding paths we have mentioned, and which he in fact had discovered tracking game, and save for this chance intrusion had been left in sole possession of the wild creatures of the world.

Graham followed slowly and painfully. He would have followed MacAlpin anywhere in the service of Oona. His amazement when he recovered his breath was extreme, and he declared that never in all his campaigning had he been through an experience so awesome and extraordinary, nor had he ever heard of a man who had penetrated in like manner into the heart of the world.

But time was precious with MacAlpin, for Sandy lay alone under the forest trees, and he must take him to his mother and face the worst; and the strong man's soul was wrung with unspeakable anguish at the thought.

The season had been unusually dry, as has been mentioned, but a sudden storm might at any time swell the tiny stream into a roaring torrent, in which case the great hall in which they had landed would be flooded. All this MacAlpin had to take into consideration. The water which found its way down the gaping channel through which they had passed, flowed through the main cavern, and by another underground passage made its way into a river of considerable volume, twelve or more miles below in the open plain. They had therefore to cross the main cavern and ascend on the other side by the steps already mentioned, and along spacious galleries which wound upward and onward, until they could feel the air blowing about them from the fissures and flues which time had made in these rocky chambers.

It was a toilsome climb, and quite beyond Oona's strength but the two men made a sort of hammock of Alan's plaid, in which they carried her, walking in single file until they reached the chamber-like recess which MacAlpin had amply provisioned, as though for a small army. Heather in abundance had been collected, and a plaid laid upon it, making a sweet scented springy couch, which utter weariness rendered to Oona like a bed of down, and almost before MacAlpin could take his leave, she was asleep like a tired child.

Left to himself, the old soldier made preparations for his long watch. He lighted a fire in the outer

cave, which he called his guard-room, and placed his pistols ready to hand, for unlike MacAlpin, he had come in full panoply of war, if not in armour, at least with weapons which he knew how to use with effect.

There was not the least chance of any human being invading their strange solitude; still, the old soldier felt more satisfied and confident having the means of defence by him. The fire burned merrily, throwing a ruddy light into the nooks, revealing the pillared marvels of their retreat in stately majesty. It was indeed a weird scene.

Before settling himself for his night's vigil he drew forth a volume which he had carefully secured inside his vest, saying softly to himself, 'We maun tak' the Buik,' for what was not spoken aloud hardly seemed his own, and now he went through his devotions as if a score were present. Having made this announcement to himself, he uncovered reverently, and read aloud in an undertone the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, reading the twenty-eighth verse over more than once, 'The world wasna worthie o' them; wanderin' on wastes and mountains, bidin' in dens and caves o' the yirth! Thank God!' he ejaculated with fervour, 'for sic noble anes! Nae ither list o' heroes was ever as graun as this, nae e'en Lord Wellington and the lave o' them, graun as they are. The fragrance o' their example is wi' us, e'en here the nicht, their example let us follow!' And the old soldier, having finished reading, knelt down and prayed with great fervour, trying to speak softly, lest he should wake Oona. He need not have been so careful, for she was wrapped in profound slumber, and even had it not been so, the murmur of the falling waters below would have masked effectually any ordinary sound.

Having finished, he listened carefully, but no noise save that of the waterfall broke the stillness. 'God bless her,' he whispered, 'she mauna wake and think she is by her ain sel' in ony sic' place as this!' His duty was undoubtedly plain to the old soldier, his place was with Oona, but for all that, he was a little concerned for the Rev. Hector Fordyce, who would have to be content with a much less efficient person to

attend him in the discharge of his solemn duties on the coming Sabbath day. It was a pity, he told himself, that a man could only be in one place at a time, but it certainly was so ordered; and his first duty was to the lady asleep a few yards from him. And so thinking, in spite of his best efforts, he also passed into the land of dreams.

Donald had made all possible haste and having emerged from the chasm, he ran at his utmost speed to where Sandy lay. He had not dared to think how he might find the boy. As he approached he heard a voice, faint and weary, saying, 'Faither, Sandy wants a drink.' It was a glad moment for MacAlpin when he heard it, but yet it smote his heart with a sharp pain, as he took in the fact that Sandy might have called many times for his father in vain. He soon brought water from a nearby spring for the thirsty boy. The little fellow's face was wet with tears; Donald wiped them away tenderly, his own eyes no longer dry. 'Dinna greet, laddie, he's here, 'faither's here the noo!'

'Faither,' the little fellow said, 'I canna get up!'

'Dinna try, laddie,' MacAlpin said, hoarsely; 'faither will carry his ain laddie hame to mornin' and then when you rest, mayhap Sandy can get up. An' the boy was content, for no word was ever so sweet as good to Sandy as 'faither's.'

But when the morning came Sandy was still unable to use his limbs, while the shock seemed to have had the extraordinary effect of lifting the mental cloud which had darkened the boy's mind.

It was hard to believe at first, but it proved true. The doctors considered the case a very remarkable one, but stated that similar cases were not unknown. The curtailment of his bodily powers was a sad deprivation to such a child of nature, but the brightening of his mental vision was a large compensation, giving his thought wings, so that the tongue of the stammerer could at last speak plain.

Such medical help as could be procured was of course forthcoming, and that loving care could do was done. The patience of the little lad was

very marked; and his loyalty to the 'lady o' the Island' was in no way diminished; his concern for her safety still held the first place in his mind.

Meanwhile the time passed pleasantly enough at the Hall where Mrs Elton, the squire's sister, and her daughter Constance and Alice aided Hardcastle, or we might say relieved him of much of the fatigue and responsibility of entertaining his numerous guests. It was two days after the events related, when the ladies had betaken themselves to the drawing-room and were discussing the ball given by the Squire on the previous evening. It was on a scale of magnificence in advance of anything that could be remembered of the kind, and dancing had been kept up till dawn. The guests from town were comparing notes, and amusing one another at the expense of some of the local guests, while Grace Skidmore sat at the piano, playing softly for her own enjoyment, and evoking harmony so wild and pathetic, so full of mystery and longing, that all were soon wrapped in the invisible mantle of sweet sound, and more than one paused to listen, and gave themselves up to the mood of the moment. Now a dirge sobbed and wailed through the spacious apartment, like the passing of departing souls, and now a song of passion, stirring brain and blood; and again a note of triumph like the shout of a conqueror rang out with strange insistence, compelling attention, and staying the half-spoken word upon the tongue.

Just then George Poltimore strayed in from the dining-room, convulsed with mirth which he struggled manfully to control, followed by Reginald Hardcastle a few minutes later, looking the picture of misery and chagrin.

'My dear Reginald!' exclaimed Mrs Elton, 'what is the matter? have you been ordered on foreign service? Now don't deny it; we knew you had applied!'

'No, hang it, nothing half so good, worse luck!' replied with scant ceremony, as he bit his moustache as fiercely as any swash-buckler of old romance.

Mrs Radcliffe, whose hearing was a trifle dull,

her character of chaperon for two young ladies, prided herself on knowing the ways of marriageable men; and dropping into a seat beside him, she purred softly with a world of sympathy and understanding in her tone:

'Ah! these affairs of honour, they are so dreadful and so interesting—so shocking! I hope none of my dear girls are in it!'

'Oh, no,' exclaimed Reginald, rising hastily, 'nothing of the sort—on my honour, no. It concerns no lady present, never thought of such a thing!'

'Pardon me Madam,' said his friend Poltimore, bowing gracefully; 'I can elucidate, as Hardcastle is not in a state of mind to do justice to the occasion. They have an island in these parts, madam, a beautiful island, where fairies hold high revels on fitting occasions, and dance to celestial music, which none but the duly initiated can hear or understand, but only a babble of passing waters and the sighing of wind in the tall pines; and to this enchanted island a maiden of wondrous beauty has been wont to repair, and there she weaves garlands of exquisite loveliness, and chants melodies that might well charm the nymphs of the two streams, from which the island takes its name. And now, madam, it seems likely she has in very truth been too successful, for she has vanished like the baseless fabric of a dream, without leaving so much as a flower or a bow of ribbon behind her.'

The company had drawn together as Poltimore told his tale.

'What a gift for fiction you have!' remarked Constance Elton.

'How do you know all this?' questioned Mrs Radcliffe with practical directness.

'How do I know it, gentle ladies,' replied the narrator, taking in the whole company with a graceful wave of his hand; 'I know it by a hundred good tokens, by hunger and thirst and weariness and bitter disappointment, all of which I labour most assiduously to avoid.'

'I believe you!' drily remarked Herbert Masterman, who had heard only the concluding sentence.

Poltimore's face darkened for a moment, as he glanced at the new-comer, but he continued as though there had been no interruption—'Hardcastle and I lay perdu since morning for the chance of a sight of the island beauty, and all in vain. We reached the Hall, as perhaps you know, weary and footsore, to learn that the lady had vanished, carried off, it is said, by highwaymen. There is said to be all the evidence of a fierce struggle, to tell its own tale, and an old soldier named Graham, who was believed to be the lady's guardian and general factotum, has also disappeared, murdered most likely, and thrown to the fishes. The river is deep and swift, and may never give up its dead for any practical purpose of evidence.'

'That at least is the theory of the squire and his brother magistrates. But *my* theory is quite different.'

'What is it?' exclaimed half-a-dozen voices at once.

'Why, that the river gods were so smitten with the beauty of this peerless lady that they have drawn her within their charmed circle, and while we are mourning her loss, she is no doubt disporting herself in elf-land, and dancing to celestial music!'

'Have done. Poltimore,' said Reginald Hardcastle, coming up to the group as the last sentence was finished.

'Why, it's a rehearsal!' remarked Masterman; 'Poltimore is coming out in a new character.'

'It's perfectly wonderful,' exclaimed Mrs Radcliffe; 'I will strictly forbid any of my dear children going near that island; you never can tell what may happen.'

'It would be perfectly safe in their case, madam,' gravely explained Poltimore; 'I can assure you of that.'

'No, no,' protested Mrs Radcliffe. 'I don't believe you, George Poltimore, I don't believe you; you are making it all up—you are—well, you are—' At this point the rest of the party trooped in from the dining-room, and the remainder of the sentence was never heard.

The company soon broke up into little groups, discussing the startling event; some with eagerness, others with indifference or amusement. Mrs Ather-

ton, a guest who had so far taken little part in the conversation, seated herself comfortably near the Squire, and asked him with some interest, if the lady were supposed to be in any danger of life or character. 'Oh, not in the least!' the Squire answered readily. 'Did you say,' she queried, 'that she was some person of consequence?' 'Oh, by no means,' he answered hurriedly; 'nobody at all—came from nowhere—a perfect stranger save to a few poor people of no account.'

'But she was very beautiful,' persisted Mrs Ather-ton; 'they all say so.'

'My dear madam,' said the Squire bowing, 'all ladies are beautiful, that is, all of my acquaintance!'

'Oh, fie! fie, Squire Hardcastle, why do you say such things!' and she raised her fan threateningly.

'Well,' said the Squire, with his best judicial air of great candour, 'because it is quite true, quite true, I assure you!'

'What was the lady like?' enquired Mrs Radcliffe, coming up to them at the moment. 'no one seems to know. She might be a real mermaid or fairy for aught we can tell!'

'No,' said Reginald Hardcastle, joining them; 'she is neither mermaid nor fairy, but a lady of extraordinary charm, by all that's true, a lady of distinction, I say—'

'Softly, softly, my son,' said the Squire, 'no one is contradicting you. You have seen this paragon, and can speak, perhaps, from personal observation, but none of us have been so fortunate,' and the old man's eyes rested upon his son with a strange, questioning scrutiny.

'She was—' began the young fellow 'she was—but what use talking?' he said, stopping suddenly, and turned away with a quick gesture of impatience.

'That's right, Reginald,' said Polinore, joining him, 'just what I would do myself! Keep the picture to yourself—it would never do to catalogue the fine points of a divinity.'

'I believe we'll quarrel yet!' said Reginald, turning savagely upon his friend.

'Oh, no, we won't,' answered Poltimore suavely, passing his arm through his friend's, and giving it a friendly pressure. 'We'll keep our own council, Reginald, instead, and find the lady.'

'By Jove, you are right!' the young man replied, gratefully, with a new light upon his face, as they slipped quietly from the room.

'Your son feels it quite keenly,' remarked Mrs Atherton, 'and how impetuous he is! I love to see them so—I love to see a young man impetuous and uncalculating—all that comes later! But really you know, between ourselves, it is all very interesting, very romantic and bizarre! and in the country too, where people are so good, so unsophisticated—and so dull! But tell me, Squire, really—is it true, island and all?'

'What do you mean, madam?' the Squire asked, a trifle stiffly.

'Well, you have not got it up like a play, you understand, just to amuse us?'

'I? Oh, no! I assure you it is quite real, the person is gone, quite gone, no doubt about it.' The Squire spoke with conviction, nevertheless Mrs Atherton declared it was highly diverting, most exciting—quite unlike the country!

Just then the sound of rapid hoof-beats roused every one. 'There's news,' remarked one of the guests.

'News?' echoed the Squire, with a tense eagerness in his tone, as he moved to the door. Sir Hugh Polworth was announced.

Sir Hugh, a neighbouring magistrate, had ridden over to bring news himself. The carriage had been tracked for many miles, and had then been lost sight of, but it transpired that they had made for the coast, where a schooner had been cruising for several days, and boarding her, the wind serving, they were soon safe from pursuit. It had been noticed that there was more than one lady in the party, but accounts were so conflicting that *how* many there were could not be ascertained. It was also reported that one of the men seemed to be in a helpless condition and was taken on board with difficulty. Beyond these few facts, if facts they were, nothing could be discovered.

Sir Hugh's opinion was that after reporting the occurrence to the proper authorities nothing more could be done locally.

What could be the motive for such an outrage? someone asked. 'Ah! therein lies the mystery of the case,' Sir Hugh answered; 'when the grandmother of the lost girl was seen to-day she could throw no light on it. They lived very quietly, even for persons in their humble circumstances, and had few friends or acquaintances coming or going. Several weeks ago an artist came into the neighbourhood, accompanied by some female relatives, and her grand-daughter became acquainted with them to some extent. They left, it seems, about the time of this affair. An evil-looking fellow was here-about at the same time, selling small wares and curios, but it is certain he left before this outrage was perpetrated. The grandmother reminded me that some twenty years ago a crime of an even worse description was committed here, and the criminal or criminals have not to this hour been brought to justice.'

'Nor are we ever likely to hear more of this affair,' remarked the Squire; 'people are so stupid that the bolder the crime the less the chance of detection.'

'It is most unfortunate,' observed Sir Hugh, with an air of deep concern; 'it is so unpleasant for every one in the county, as it is in the nature of a reflection on our protective system. If we could only get at the motive,' he continued, 'I am satisfied we could run down the offender wherever he is!'

'But that is just what cannot be got at,' put in the Squire, 'and without it we can do nothing.'

'True, true, Hardcastle—quite true; but to-day Janet McLean, this poor girl's grandmother, said some very strange things, and gave it as her solemn conviction that both crimes would be brought to light and the wretches concerned brought to justice. She is a sort of religious mystic, a judge, and spoke with a fervour and elevation of thought not common in her condition of life. I confess to having felt much moved.'

'I would not let the visionary babblings of a half-

crazed creature like Janet McLean trouble me for a moment!' the Squire remarked, a little severely.

'No, no, of course not,' protested Sir Hugh, 'but the woman was so evidently sincere, so remarkably moved by her own thought, that it seemed as though she actually saw what she described, and was inspired like an ancient prophetess to declare vengeance. It really was most extraordinary and impressive. I wish you could have heard it.'

Someone touched the piano—perhaps it was Miss Skidmore—and the tension of the last half-hour was broken, to the relief of every one.

Sir Hugh Polwarth took his leave, and the Squire retired to his own apartment, ill at ease, and much less satisfied with the result of his schemes than he had been for many a day.

'What could have possessed Kinkman to shew himself so openly?—and to go about in daylight?' he mused with bitterness; 'and then to have so many people with him was almost to court defeat!' And yet the inducements to act in good faith and to fulfil his part of the contract were so largely in his favour that there must have been good reasons for the methods he employed. 'Surely there must have been good reasons,' he repeated, 'and all may yet be well!' He paced his room for several minutes in deep thought, and then, locking the door, he took from the inner drawer of a cabinet the miniature of a beautiful female face, on which he gazed long and earnestly.

As he looked, his eyes grew soft and his heart beat tumultuously. 'My God!' he cried, in self-amazement, 'after so many years!' And turning the picture face downward on the table, he covered it with a shaking hand. 'She must be like her mother!' he whispered to himself; 'I wish I could have seen her—I wish I could have found some other way!

'No, no,' he corrected himself, 'this is weakness. criminal weakness, which must be crushed—*crushed!*' and he ground his heel into the carpet, pressed his hand hard down upon the picture, and sat still.

Suddenly he turned the face up again, and looked at it long and steadily.

'I meant everything fair and honest at the time,' he said, like a man defending himself; 'I meant fair, so help me God! but circumstances were too much for me—too much for me; before Heaven, I swear it this night, circumstances mastered me, forced me into the course I followed: hundreds of men would have done the same under the same conditions. To give way *now* is madness! I have been afraid to look you in the face for years, Madeline—yes, horribly afraid! and I must never look again—never again. The image of your living form, Madeline—my Madeline—must never put me to fear, nor my son to shame!' And so saying, he walked deliberately to the fire-place with a firm step, and thrust the picture into the glowing coals and there crushed it into small fragments as it burned until it was consumed. Having thus disposed of it, he heaped fuel upon the fire, and sat down to dream as he watched the dancing flames.

Whatever his meditations were, when he arose it was with a sigh of relief; perhaps there was a far-off echo of something like pain; but all the same he slept like a man who has done a good day's work and had an honest right to the oblivion of peaceful slumbers.

Reginald was soon in possession of all we have related, as told by Sir Hugh, as to the abduction of Oona. His first impulse was to ride over to MacAlpin's in quest of more light on the dark problem; but Donald was from home, and Mrs MacAlpin could not leave her sick laddie to see the King, if he had called, much less the Squire's son.

The young fellow was ill at ease until the Hall was empty of guests, and then, with brief leave-taking, he started out with Poltimore in the hope of learning the fate of the lady of the island. The prospect of success seemed very slight indeed. That an unknown schooner had put to sea under suspicious circumstances was absolutely all that was known. The two young men thought it possible that some tidings or clue could be found at one or other of the many sea-port towns where such a craft would be likely to put in, in case of storm, or to gather news, or perhaps to find a safe hiding-place. And so they went forth, as trusty com-

rades, to play the role of knight-errants and to deliver the lady from the hands of her captors, if so be they were fortunate enough to succeed in their quest.

Reginald Hardcauld hardly knew why the desire to learn the fate of the unknown lady should all at once dominate his life and command all his time and energy but so it was, and for the first time in his hitherto frivolous career all his powers were employed to help and succour another. The air of mystery which had surrounded her from the first piqued his curiosity, and now to learn her fate became the ruling passion of his life.

CHAPTER X

A STORM AT SEA

WHEN the mysterious schooner mentioned in the last chapter put to sea, her name was carefully concealed, and her movements were such as to mislead any inquisitive observers who might be on the look-out for them. However, as it became dark her course was changed; and under every stitch of canvas she could carry she developed extraordinary speed. In fact, the errand on which the ship was just then employed was not very agreeable to the captain or his crew, and the sooner they could attend to other business the better pleased they would be, one and all.

Kinkman and his party were a sorry sight. The two women were half-dead with fright; Heathfield almost dead in reality from his injuries; and Kinkman, battered and bruised in mind and body, was raving like a wild beast, and vowing vengeance on every one concerned.

Heathfield was past caring where he was or whither he was going, but the women were in abject terror, apprehensive of what might lie before them. Kinkman never thought of relieving their anxiety by a single word, and his mood was such that it was not safe to ask questions.

In fact, Kinkman was in the worst possible plight; his only satisfaction, when he had time to consider it, was that he was a good deal richer; but then the bitterness of failure in the larger aims on which he had set his heart poisoned even that crumb of comfort. Still, he had the Squire's written statement, and it would be strange if he could not extort something from his fears.

In short, Kinkman was in a very bad humour. He was angry with his son for being such a poor second in such a fine business; and he was angry with himself for not having disabled MacAlpin before Graham

came up. He might even have shot the girl, seeing he could not carry her off, and so have earned the Squire's guineas—and perhaps his gratitude. If he groaned in mental misery over his defeat, he also groaned in bodily suffering; his bones seemed out of joint, his wrists were blue and swollen, his back felt as though it were broken, and he was, taken all in all, but a heap of wretchedness and baffled greed, cursing his luck, cursing MacAlpin, cursing the Squire, and himself and everything.

It was quite clear to others that his son's injuries were far more serious than he was aware of; but of this he took little note. The young fellow lay still, his eyes closed, and his breath faint and laboured; at times his mind wandered, and it was—or would have been to some persons—pitiful to hear him protesting his devotion to the lady of the island, and vowing to guard her with his life.

Had Kinkman not been so much absorbed in his own misery and the failure of his evil schemes, he might have realised sooner that his son was out of his projects once for all, a wreck in body and mind, so that that part of his wicked devising had come to naught, and the young man's broken life lay at his father's door.

The wind had fallen, and with the approach of night there came a hush of brooding fear, which spread itself like a mystic mantle over the still waters. The captain knew the signs full well, and the crew busied themselves with a will to put the little craft in trim to meet the onrush of the gale. Before night had quite closed in the man on the look-out had noticed the white horses in the far distance charging towards them, while coasting vessels and fishing smacks were making all haste to find shelter before the storm broke.

The schooner dare not, however, follow their example, and had no choice but to stand out to sea, trusting to weather the gale. Sailors are proverbially superstitious, and the crew of the 'Rover' were no exception to the rule. They had a rooted aversion to sailing with Kinkman on board, being fully persuaded that he had private dealings with the enemy of man-

kind, who took special pleasure in bringing sailor men into deadly peril. The captain scorned their superstitious misgivings, and bombarded them with biting sarcasms and oaths, from a rich vocabulary compounded of the evil sayings of many lands. The men obeyed, but with a sullen resentment that might easily become dangerous. Soon they were in the heart of the storm; the sea rose as if under some demoniac impulse, and crashed over them, recoiling, only to return with fresh fury to the onslaught, and bursting upon them again and again with undiminished rage.

The schooner rose gallantly to the contest, and breasted the breakers, quivering through all her timbers, but with a buoyant obedience to her helm which soon filled the crew with delight, and, forgetting their ill-humour, they entered into the spirit of the battle with all their might; and breaking out into full-throated cheers, they vowed that they would back their ship against Kinkman and all the fiends he could command. The night was dark as Erebus, and no sound could be heard but the tramp, tramp of the sailors, the thunder of the elements, and the swish of water. Once and again the Captain bellowed out an order which cut through the turmoil like a keen rapier and braced the crew to the utmost tension of endeavour and endurance.

Toward morning the wind fell, and by dawn there was nothing left of the hurricane but a light breeze and a troubled sea.

About two weeks later, wind and tide being favourable, they were heading for a snug cove on a rock-bound coast. The captain, who evidently knew his ground, threaded his way with marvellous seamanship among dangerous rocks and treacherous shoals, sailing gallantly on, without pause or doubt, where few would have cared to follow, until he dropped anchor in a natural basin that seemed as though specially fashioned to give shelter and safe harbourage to storm-tossed wanderers of the waves.

Here Kinkman landed, but disappointment awaited the women of the party, who were told they had still a journey of many leagues before them, as Heathfield required medical help and care.

The young man, in spite of all the attention they could give him, remained in a semi-stupor from which nothing seemed sufficient to arouse him. If there was anyone on earth for whom Kinkman cared, it was his son; but the man's nature had so long been under the influence of the lowest motives and dominated by greed and crime, that his son's continued helplessness only irritated him beyond patience. His was the disposition of the wolf, that attacks a fallen member of the pack with about as much ferocity as they would the quarry. Having failed in his carefully meditated plans, and the son for whom he laid such excellent schemes having failed utterly to come up to his expectations, he was quite ready to hand him over to the care of others without a word.

For two or three days the 'Rover' discharged her cargo without intermission, during which time the ship was carefully examined, in order that any damage resulting from the recent storm might be repaired. It was no light task the crew had before them; for every thing had to be carried half-way up the cliffs, and then conveyed through a passage cut in the rocks to an underground storehouse, running under a low, rambling building a hundred yards or more inland. This cellar-like receptacle was divided into compartments by doors of great strength, strongly secured, and in one of the least accessible was a rough facsimile of a dungeon-keep, whether for use or as a warning it would be hard to say. These strange underground apartments communicated with the building above as well as with the sea, the whole indicating skilful planning and almost complete concealment.

For some distance behind and on either side the house there were broad stretches of cultivated land, and a flock of goats and a few cows contentedly browsing gave a touch of colour and a suggestion of home-comfort to the scene. There were not more than a dozen trees, if so many, breaking the expanse, and these looked like forsaken sentinels that could hope for no relief, while a solitary thorn-bush, protected from intrusion by a rough bank thrown up around it, stood like a thing of eld, extending bare,

contorted arms, gnarled and threatening, like a witch emitting curses on human-kind. Beyond the bit of cultivated land lay broad patches of morass, rendering approach from the land practically impossible save by one path, if path it might be called, where only those in the secret of its treacherous windings could by any chance find their way.

This was the dreary retreat Kinkman had in view for Oona, where he intended she should remain, helpless and hopeless, until she learned obedience to his wishes and became the willing bride of his son, Walter Heathfield.

And now his carefully devised schemes are in shreds, his son hors de combat and himself baffled and defeated, left to brood over his ill success in a robber stronghold. He was not the man to accept defeat as belonging to the natural order of things; if he paused to think, it was that he might rise at the first opportunity and build his airy castle afresh as though nothing had happened of any serious consequence. The men loved him little, and trusted him not at all. True, they were not saints, but sinners steeped in multiplied offences against the law; but their offences were of the fearless sort that went hand in hand with courage and endurance; and to a man they were contemptuous of Kinkman's supple duplicity and snake-like ways. They were fascinated by the free, wild life of the sea, while Kinkman was above all things a true son of Mammon, and never rose, save in brief spasms of a not altogether extinct conscience, to care for anything but gain. Rightly or wrongly, they were persuaded that he would sell his soul to the devil for money, and would not hesitate to betray every man of them could it be turned to his own advantage.

Fortunately the captain had some hold upon him, the nature of which the men could not fathom, but it was considered sufficient to induce him to commit no treachery; he had never landed at the stronghold before, and it was certain he would never leave it if the men had any cause to doubt his good faith.

It was early autumn when they reached Munk's Castle, as the place was called, and it was early spring

before Kinkman ventured to explore his surroundings. The 'Rover' had come and gone more than once in the course of this time, bringing news from the outer world, and much plunder besides for their store-rooms. Revenue cutters and an occasional warship passed, standing well out to sea, for the dangerous nature of the coast was well known and dreaded. The fact was, the depredations of the schooner were suspected, but as her captain took liberal toll of England's enemies, the commanders of His Majesty's ships had a blind eye for the doings of the desperate fellows, who were really making successful, though irregular, war against the common foe.

That Kinkman chafed at the enforced retirement was natural, and yet there was no other way for his safety or success; and this he knew full well. He explored the cliffs in every direction, but was shrewd enough not to venture into the marsh; yet, for all his prudent regard for his own life, he came near meeting an inglorious end. Munk's Castle was, as we have seen, protected in front by the sea, owing to the dangerous navigation, and behind by marsh; on one side the sea had cut a chasm in the rock which effectually barred the way for anything without wings; while on the other side wind and water had combined to scoop out a valley, locally called the 'Cut,' piling the sand into hills, and cutting off the castle-land from the intrusion of undesirable visitors. This discovery was exceedingly irritating to Kinkman. To be unable to go and come at will exasperated him, and his ill-humour only served to provoke the rough banter of the men, who enjoyed his discomfiture: they, as expert seamen, were able to go abroad by boat when they pleased. They warned him that the sand was treacherous, and that once the sandhill was past there was no return without help, and help might not be forthcoming. Whether Kinkman suspected that they were imposing on his simplicity was never known, but one afternoon he ventured too far, and soon found himself over the lip of the dune, making his way to the bottom without any power of arresting his progress. When at last he came to a stop, and got his

breath, he said many things that can be better imagined than recorded.

The objects that met his gaze were not calculated to inspire cheerfulness. Skeletons of animals were showing through the fine sand, and not far from where he fell a human hand, or what was left of it, protruded threateningly. It stood out like a warning spectre, the rings still upon the shrunken fingers, and the sight of it sent a shiver through the miserable creature's whole being; not the cold of the atmosphere, but a deadly chill, as though all the springs of life had been arrested by a sudden breath of terror. He shouted until he was hoarse, but no human sound answered him; only the sea-birds rose clamorously, and circled round and round; then, exhausted at last, he lay still, cursing himself for his folly, and wondering what miracle could deliver him this time from his unpleasant adventure.

The sun sank in the west, and the stars came out in their twinkling splendour: but Kinkman had no eyes for the glory of the stars—with his own well-laid schemes in tatters, and money—yes, money!—to be won! He was a master of villainy, and had almost under his hand the finest piece of business of his life; and to have it all come to an end in a sand-hole!—and to lay his bones with goats and the fool fellow near by (whose rings he had in vain tried to reach) was maddening to think of.

If he *was* to die now, he would die a dry death, any way: it was not much to be thankful for, but it was something. He hated the sea: it was so terrible and mighty; so indifferent to men's lives and plans; so absolutely beyond control; so reckless of human concerns, tossing them about with supreme scorn, accounting of them no more than of the tiniest feather borne upon the blast. The tide was coming in, and although he thought himself out of its reach he became nervous and anxious: the sight of the foam filled him with a kind of helpless fury. He shook his clenched fist at it, and bellowed out curses; his throat was an open sepulchre: the poison of asps was under his tongue! To him it seemed that the sea roared and

thundered and rushed upon the rocks to reach—and hissed and *sarled* because it could not *get him!*

It was hateful, the sea, because it was beyond any man's taming, because it laughed at men's skill, and brushed aside their power with the ease of matchless might. If he must die ingloriously, he would rather, after all, die in the shifting sands than under mountains of the vast and wandering deep, whose foam fingers seemed so impatient to reach him. At length, exhausted and well-nigh hopeless, he lay still. Soon voices from above roused him.

'Below there?' a man shouted in stentorian tones.

'Aye—curse you!' was the unamiable reply.

'So the old bird's alive, and as sweet-natured as ever!' the man commented to his fellows, while they all laughed boisterously.

Kinkman was furious, but he was also helpless, and far too accomplished a hypocrite not to dissemble his wrath. The men had no wish to linger longer than might be, and without further parley threw him a rope, which he secured eagerly and fastened around his body; but instead of giving the signal to be drawn up, he crawled forward, serpent-wise, to where he had seen the wasted hand protruding from the sand. The night had fallen, but the stars were bright; still, the shadows cast by the banks on either side made his quest difficult. Eagerly he groped about until his fingers closed upon the rings, which he promptly transferred to his own pocket. The men grew impatient, and jerked the rope roughly, but his composure was not to be ruffled again that night; he gave the signal, and was soon hauled up, and safe from harm once more.

It was about six weeks after this that Kinkman was safely piloted through the labyrinth of the marshes and left to his own devices. He was heartily glad to regain his liberty, although he had been a voluntary prisoner and had skilfully planned the retreat to serve his own ends. Now he was free!—free!—to take up the thread of his plans and complete them if he could—yes, if he could, for there were many and great difficulties in the way, and none knew that better than

Kinkman. He was no longer to be a pedlar, but an artist, and he concluded that with his son's sketch-books and what-not, it would be strange if he could not make a success of this new character. His object was to reach the town of Whitford, as the most likely centre of news; but, with the cunning of a fox, he doubled back on his trail, and wandered far afield before he ventured to shew himself in public once more.

The day before he made his re-appearance, two travellers of some consequence rode into the little town; their servants had arrived a day in advance, and their coming created a tiny ripple of interest, just as the town was settling down to its usual quiet after a more than usually exciting assize. They took up their quarters at the famous hostelry of the 'White Hart,' the pride of Whitford; for though no one pretended that it was as old as St Patrick, or even as Brian Boru, it was never disputed that it had played a very conspicuous part in the chequered history of the country. Spanish dons, French messieurs, Royal Dukes and even crowned heads had all reposed under its roof at one time or other, had testified to the quality of its wines, praised its cuisine, and went their way to spread its fame. At least, such was the local tradition. Our travellers, however, seemed strangely oblivious of the interest attaching to this ancient establishment, and concerned themselves mainly with the condition of their horses and the prospect of their soon being able to continue their journey.

The elder of the two men was evidently a clergyman, although for the present he omitted the 'Reverend' from his name and wore a sort of clerical undress uniform. He had a firm, easy seat in the saddle, and looked like a man who had followed hounds in his day and to whom a cross-country gallop would be a pleasant exercise. His companion was comparatively young, the captain of a crack cavalry regiment, hardened by foreign service and now home on furlough. All these small items filtered out through their servants, and were eagerly discussed about the stables.

The Reverend Frederick Barrington was innocent of any intention to mislead or to conceal his clerical character; he had been abroad with our armies, and had ministered to dying men under the stars and amidst drifting snow, and had learned in that rough school how little externals meant when men were face to face with supreme issues.

But the times were full of peril, spies were plentiful, and England's danger lay then—as it has since—in the direction of the Emerald Isle; hence the suspicion that Barrington was sailing under false colours and attempting concealment of his true character for a purpose.

'I likes a parson,' said one of the men in the stables as he rubbed down the horses; 'I likes a parson as is a parson, as has coat tails, as you can tell he is a parson: that's what I likes!'

'By St Patrick!' said his companion, 'your loiks and don't loiks are like Dinnis O'Connor's grand relations, two hundred and one, and all alive and kicking! Ough and sure, divil a bit do I care for coat tails, one way or the other! Riverence or no riverence, he's a rale gintilman, and has a foine seat in the saddle and can ride to hounds, or Mick Molloney is mistaken intoirely!'

'Well then,' snapped one of Mick's companions, with a Saxon's fine contempt for things Irish, 'finer birds than he have been strung up at Tyburn—and serve them right, say I!'

'Ye traitor!' screamed Mick in a passion, rushing at the Englishman without a moment's warning; 'ye murderin' villain! Ye come here wid a cloak of hypocrisy to sware away the life of an innicent gintilman!'

Walters was more amused at the storm he had raised than resentful of Mick's onslaught, and being an excellent boxer the science of fence came natural to him at the moment, while poor Mick danced about him, his arms working like a windmill and his tongue keeping time in his native Erse. It was too much for the Englishman's sense of humour, and in spite of himself he gave way to a burst of laughter, in which

Mick at length, puzzled and shamefaced, had to join perforce.

Just then Kinkman, who had picked up a horse somewhere, rode into the yard, and Mick's attention was turned to business. Kinkman dismounted awkwardly; he was evidently no horseman, and Mick was at once prejudiced against him; moreover, he insisted on carrying his saddle-bags into the house himself, which excited unpleasant suspicions in the minds of both men: soon their late quarrel was forgotten in their joint interest in the newcomer.

Kinkman, having disposed of his property to his liking, entered the dining-room where Frederick Barrington and Captain Marchmont were already seated at table. It was early spring, as we know, and the evenings and mornings were still chilly; and logs blazed upon the hearths at either end of the spacious apartment. The candles were just lighted and, though numerous, made little impression on the darkness, and but for the cheery glow of the fires the room would have been in semi-darkness, as indeed it was according to our modern notions.

Barrington and Marchmont took no notice of the newcomer, who was placed some distance from them, and they continued their conversation as though they were alone.

'I am sorry for the young Glenmore,' the captain was saying; 'we are all sorry for him: he is the best fellow in the world, and the bravest man alive.'

'That is saying much,' remarked Barrington, smiling and looking at his companion.

'Yes, it is saying something; but it is quite true: there are none of us cowards, but Glenmore is superbly brave, and so say we all. He has attached himself to Maynard's division, and means to see service while he is hunting for some clue to his father's whereabouts or fate. Were it not for the need of constant service, he might become morose to some degree; but he is a soldier every inch of him, and could he give his whole attention to the profession of arms he would undoubtedly rise to distinction. Wellington has noticed him more than once, and if there is a

brilliant piece of work on hand you may be sure Glenmore is in it.'

'Who has the old place now?' Barrington asked.

'One Hardcastle.'

'Hardcastle, Hardcastle,' Barrington mused. 'It seems I have an association with the name—there was a man of that name in the north, when I was a good deal younger than I am to-day,' and he smiled pleasantly at this confession; 'it cannot well be the same: the fellow I mean was not exactly a man of low origin, but he had low instincts; he was considered cunning, underhand and greedy of gain, always looking out for himself, and singularly lacking in generous impulses. My mother had a horror of him, and my father—well, you know my father was strong in his dislikes, and he always said such men should be hanged in advance, to prevent them doing mischief.'

Both men laughed heartily: it was the first sign of lighter mood they had shewn since their arrival, and the old waiter, who never left distinguished guests to others, hailed it as a sign that the air of exclusiveness which surrounded them was not quite impenetrable. Kinkman ate slowly, reading, or seeming to read, a newspaper propped up before him, and listening for the least word. It was a wonderful providence, he told himself, that had brought him there at that moment. He was well pleased with his good fortune, and ordered a bottle of wine on the strength of it.

'It is, no doubt, the same man,' Captain Marchmont continued. 'In fact, I feel quite sure of it: the points of character you mention are so much alike. I have heard quite recently that he makes little headway in the county, although by some means he is master of Fosseway.'

'Where did this murder which involved the old lord occur?' Barrington asked. Kinkman at the moment was pouring out a glass of wine and by some carelessness upset the glass, spilling the wine upon the cloth. He pushed back the chair, expressing great contrition, and changed his seat. The change brought him to the side of the table nearest to the two gentlemen, but as the fire was inconveniently near on that side he

requested the servant to move the screen which stood near into such a position as to shelter him from the heat. The screen not only protected him from the heat of the fire, but also from the observation of the men at the other end of the room. It was Kinkman's fancy to have it thus; but so far from noticing him, neither Barrington nor the captain shewed the slightest sign of being even aware of his presence.

'Where did the murder which involved the old lord occur?' Barrington had asked. 'On the estate,' Marchmont answered; 'in fact, not more than half a mile from the Hall.'

'A most grievous and horrible thing, surely,' Barrington remarked thoughtfully, 'and it may go undiscovered for all time. I have had some strange confidences of dying men, who carried with them secrets of frightful crimes, and only confessed at the very end when face to face with the future world.'

'It was perfectly horrible,' Marchmont said, pushing back his chair from the table, 'and Masterman—you remember Masterman?—well, he says the whole county has been again excited over another mysterious event in the same neighbourhood. This time it is the abduction of a lady, and no trace of her can be found. Her guardian, an old soldier, is also missing, and it was thought murder had probably been committed.'

'Lately?' queried Barrington.

'Oh no, at least it was last autumn, and no trace has yet been found of either, it seems. Hardcastle's son vows he will unearth the mystery, if it takes him the rest of his life.'

'Then I fancy he is not much like his father,' Barrington said, with a gleam of satisfaction.

'Not in the least,' Marchmont answered; 'he has certainly sown a plentiful crop of wild oats, but I hear that since this abduction he has been another man, working on the case as if his life depended upon it, very much to the disgust of the old Squire.'

The two rose to leave the room as a man entered with the hotel register—Kinkman had omitted to write his name in the visitors' book: such an omission was unusual, and could not be overlooked. But Kinkman

had no intention of leaving any clue behind him, not even his signature under any of his numerous aliases. He explained to the man, with regret, his inability to write, owing to his having sprained his wrist a short time before. 'It was quite a serious inconvenience to him, and several sketches which he hoped to have taken must be omitted in consequence.' Under these circumstances, there was no other way than for the man to write the name, Harold Jenkins, at his dictation; this he did with great care, deeply lamenting that His Honour had been deprived of the privilege of inscribing his name with his own hand among those of celebrities whose signatures testified to their having been present under that roof.

With the book before him, it was easy to learn the names of the gentlemen who had been so conveniently communicative. He dismissed the man, with a doceur which was quite impressive to the recipient, and congratulated himself on the return of his old-time luck. Who would have thought, he told himself, he would in that out-of-the-way corner have heard the news so precious and necessary to his plans, and at a moment when he thought himself so far from success!

Just what had happened after he got away from MacAlpin was still in obscurity, but the essential point in his favour was that Hardcastle thought he had succeeded, and while such was his belief he could claim the full reward of his villainy, although he had failed to accomplish all he had undertaken. In fact, the Squire had not bound him to any particular plan: his undertaking was simply to get rid of the girl, and he certainly had succeeded so far, for according to what he had just heard she had vanished as completely as though the ground had opened and swallowed her up. Nearly a year had gone, and no trace of her had been found. There certainly was something puzzling and rather disconcerting about it. He remembered several shots had been fired: how many he could not recall. What if one of them had taken effect by chance and Oona had succumbed, and MacAlpin and Graham been afraid or unwilling to make the matter known? The news was good — good! — but it might have been

better—much better. Still, that was past, and it was no part of Kinkman's nature to lament over what might have been: the present and actual had always been enough to tax his wits.

And now, although there were important gaps in his knowledge of what had happened, the fact that the way was clear for him to claim the large reward Hardcastle had offered blinded him to all sense of danger or chance of failure.

In this happy frame of mind he retired for the night; he determined to seek his son, and to wait until the appointed time when he could claim the fulfilment of the Squire's pledges, and then retire to some quiet spot where, not only secure against want, but wealthy, he could end his days in peace and comfort.

CHAPTER XI

AN ANXIOUS MOMENT

WHEN MacAlpin left the cave in possession of Oona and Alan Graham, it was with the understanding that he would not return for some days—in fact, not till all danger of discovery was past.

He had made preparations for such a contingency, not knowing how events might turn out, and determined that their plans should not be foiled either by his own or their impatience for escape from their strange hiding-place.

It was Graham's task to make this and much more clear to Oona as best he could, but MacAlpin had not taken the old soldier into his confidence on much which was of chief importance; and, for that matter, MacAlpin was not himself aware at that moment of several links in Oona's life-story of the greatest interest and value.

He knew the Squire to be resourceful, wily, daring and unscrupulous; perhaps in his anxiety for the girl's safety he exaggerated these unpleasant qualities in his old friend. He sometimes blamed himself for throwing down the gauntlet of open defiance to such an opponent. It might have been wiser, he told himself, to meet craft with craft, and worst the master of Fosseway at his own game. But MacAlpin knew his own limitations, and was aware that he could not match his homely wits against the subtle brains of the Squire with any chance of success. To do so would be like David's going forth in Saul's armour to do battle with Goliath of Gath. Hardcastle, however, with all his cleverness, was as likely as not to be the victim of his own conceit: he had so long compelled circumstances, and obliged others to bow to his will, that he was in no mood at this crisis to accept defeat.

Sometimes Hardcastle talked of honour in a high-

sounding way, for he loved on occasion the glamour of words and the stimulus of ideas that made no demands on a man's life or interests—airy nothings were not amiss once in a while; but it was a stupid thing to be the slave of phrases and fancies about honour when a man's interests were at stake, and when a lie served his purpose much better.

MacAlpin was clearly no match for such a man. Donald had had his fling in his own way, but he had never acquired the art of lying: lying had always appeared to him a mean vice, the vice of cowards, and something that a brave man should scorn. He often wondered how he came into Hardcastle's life at all; and how, having done so, he had not sooner found freedom. But they had been boys together, and the Squire in his youth was an excellent companion, original and vivacious, and not a bad friend where his own interests or pleasures were not crossed. And then young people are not very discerning, and are—or ought to be—tolerant of the foibles of their friends.

It was hard to imagine Eric Hardcastle in his youth and in later years, one and the same person, except that his personal magnetism, both as boy and as man, was a marked characteristic in his dealings with others. He started in life with a fair equipment, and it is safe to suppose that the soil which grew weeds in such profusion might have produced fruit and flowers, except for a certain untruthfulness of disposition which matched strangely with his keen, vigorous intellect.

It was only by a great effort, as we know, and under the double impulse of seeing a wronged man and a helpless girl about to fall into the snares of their relentless enemy that MacAlpin finally threw down the gage of battle to the heartless old schemer.

In planning the cave as a retreat, he had taken Graham into his confidence, with the result, as we know, that the place was well provisioned and was supplied with many rude comforts, conveyed there at odd times and at great risk and toil.

Sandy was doing well, and to all appearance recovering rapidly from his injuries; and MacAlpin's heart was greatly lightened by this, so that he sang more than ever, and his songs were full of cheerfulness.

Sandy could not sing; but to hear his father pour out the 'Kirk sangs' was delightful to the boy. One evening after prayers Sandy said: 'He maun ken a' oor names fine by noo, faither!' 'Why, laddie?' Donald asked, laying his hand tenderly on the boy's head. 'Cause ye tell Him sae often!'

'He kent a' oor names, laddie, before we telt Him.'

'I never telt Him my ain name,' the boy said, a little anxiously, 'but I am glad He kens it. Will He no' forget it, faither?'

'Na, laddie. He never forgets. We hae cost Him sae muckle, and He has been sae lang patient wi' us and miindfu' o' a' sinners—'

'And the pedlar, faither?' the boy queried.

'Yes, the pedlar too, Sandy, if he'll hearken.'

MacAlpin was silent for a little, for the pedlar and his fell deeds perplexed him, and to love your enemies when you have had such striking proof of their existence is never a very easy thing for an honest man, however pious he may be. MacAlpin hoped to get there some time, and laboured to that end, but he could not pay himself any compliments on that head so far, and that worried him not a little.

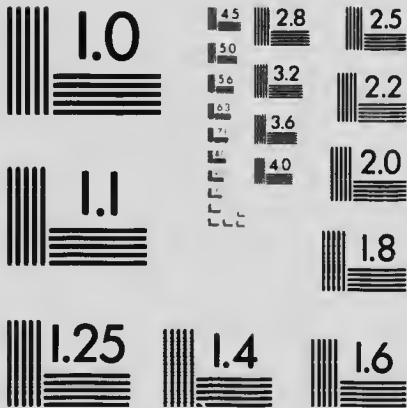
He was about to try what could be done to get Oona and Graham into better quarters, and the undertaking was not without risk in many ways. Fortunately, interest in the strange disappearance had drifted away from the neighbourhood where it had occurred, and whatever concern there was had become directed to the sea-coast where Kinkman and his party had last been seen. All this was in favour of MacAlpin's present plans.

Dawn was breaking as he picked up Janet at her cottage door and rode away at a good pace: Duke, like the noble creature he was, responsive to the least word of his master. The journey before them could not well exceed thirty miles. Donald had, however, learned caution from recent events, and the better to conceal his purpose he travelled by many cross roads, until as evening was closing in they seemed to come all at once on a quaint little village, hidden away among rocks and trees, as though suddenly dropped



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from the sky and not yet discerned by ordinary human folk. Streets there were none, but cart-tracks were visible in many directions, and following one of these leading up a steep hill and round a sharp curve, they drew up in front of a cottage at the foot of a cliff fully forty feet in height. Here an ancient friend of Janet's was pleased to welcome them; that the visit was not of ceremony or of choice was well understood, but little was said about it. It was enough that Janet needed her friend and that Donald was doing them a service to the best of his ability.

Next day Duke rested and Donald went a-fishing, returning in the evening with a light creel but with a wealth of information about the scenery along the river, which, it is only just to say, could not be surpassed within the compass of the British Isles.

The day following, MacAlpin started in good earnest upon his mission, taking Duke with him. The horse was sure-footed and well trained in his master's ways, otherwise he could not have taken him very far over such broken ground as lay before them. When the limit was reached for man and horse together, Donald dismounted and taking off the saddle—a lady's saddle—he turned Duke loose, while he ate some food he had brought with him and thought out the situation.

To secrete the saddle and an overcoat he was wearing, among a clump of gorse near by, occupied but a minute; treating the horse meanwhile as though he were a partner in the concern, he kept up a conversation with him and allowed him to nose the coat and saddle to his satisfaction. To have tied his horse there, Donald reasoned, would have attracted attention; but a horse at large, wandering at will, could not be a very unusual sight. Duke, his master knew, would never wander very far from the coat and saddle which represented his master's presence and commands.

The path along the bank of the river was steep in many places, and not very safe for a careless traveller, but MacAlpin had made the journey so often that he was quite at home in every turn and curve, and could name every stone and root which marked out the way.

It will be remembered that the water which flowed through the great cavern continued its course for some distance before falling into a deep channel, a few feet lower. This stream, judged by its depth and swiftness, must have been fed from more than one hidden source, and evidence was not wanting that in far-past times a mighty volume of water had slowly cut its way through the rock, hollowing out its own path, and forcing an outlet through a tunnel-like opening, where it united with another stream and flowed on through a deep gorge; finally, becoming broader, with less precipitous banks, it flowed on as a noble river through rich pasture-lands, murmuring as it wound its way over a shallower bottom, without a hint of its hidden and mysterious sources.

MacAlpin's plan was to aid Graham and Oona to effect an exit from their strange quarters without again passing the waterfall, and this had the double merit of being at once easier and safer to accomplish, as taking them a long way from the neighbourhood of Fossey Hall. Still, it was no light task which lay before him, for at the outlet the water rushed with great force and volume over huge rocks, with a final fall of over seventy feet.

A ledge had been left within the tunnel by the shrinking of the stream in the course of the ages, on which one might walk without much risk from the inner cave, by torch-light—otherwise the journey would have to be made precariously feeling the way along the wall of rock, with the rush and snarl of a river of unknown depth within a couple of feet—even to the coolest a nerve-shaking experiment! Donald had performed this feat, more than once, for some distance from the mouth of the tunnel, when he thought a torch might attract attention.

A rope secured to a jutting rock within the tunnel and to a tree on the bank was the basis for a rough bridge of tree-trunks and brush, which had served MacAlpin, and he hoped would now serve for the deliverance of Oona and Graham from their strange solitude.

The old soldier had piloted Oona daily to the mouth

of the tunnel, their torches flaring in the vastness and gloom, to the weird music of rushing waters in the dark depths; and sitting within their strange shelter they would view the prospect so far as the banks permitted, and would talk and wonder as to how and when they might regain their liberty, and whether Janet would ever credit the story of their strange experiences, and a thousand other fancies which need not be set down here.

They had made their way down as usual one day, both more silent than their wont; for the strain of solitude had told upon them, and although they had tried to conceal their anxiety there was no denying the fact that their expectations of speedy deliverance had been disappointed, and the sanguine hopes which had buoyed them up on their first coming had been chilled by long waiting.

What had happened after they had reached the cave was a question they often asked themselves. Sandy might be dead and buried, MacAlpin might have fallen into some cunningly laid trap, and with the secret of their hiding-place might have perished: the old soldier thought it was time to make an effort to escape from their strange quarters without waiting longer for MacAlpin. To Oona it seemed as though she had been years in the gloomy depths of this cavern, which was now to her the one reality of her existence—and all beside a dream! In the twilight—in the evening—in the black night, strange thoughts came to her while the deep waters rushed onward and the winds sighed through the crevices and mysterious galleries of this hidden place of Nature's own workmanship.

The material for fuel had become very scanty, and even torches would soon be impossible; and the prospect made their situation very cheerless. The very sight of sky and woods from the open tunnel, which had delighted them at first, became depressing, as if mocking their helplessness. The cave which had delighted them with its wonders, giving them shelter and security, was now a prison, and might easily become their grave and no living soul know how or where they perished!

These were not cheerful musings, but the bravest heart sometimes suffers from depression, and their situation was far from agreeable. Oona sat down near the opening, taking in all that the eye could see. An artist might have found delight in the shadows upon the rocks, and in the diamonds which the spray from the waterfall scattered in such profusion over every tree and shrub. She remembered all this years afterwards, but at the moment they were seen and not seen—and yet the picture was laid up in her mind as clear-cut and perfect as though it had been transferred to canvas by the hand of a master.

Presently she saw something moving in the distance, appearing and disappearing along the bank of the gorge, and she drew the old soldier's attention to it.

'It must be MacAlpin,' Graham said, a trifle anxiously, 'it surely must be MacAlpin!' All the same he considered it safe to have his pistols ready to hand.

'It is MacAlpin!' Oona cried joyfully, as Donald's massive figure became detached from the bushes and trees along the bank; and they knew that their present stress of waiting was almost over.

Graham made use of the time which must elapse before Donald could reach them in returning to the cave for the few things they wished to take with them, talking to himself by the way for want of better company.

The space which separated them from the bank was perhaps not more than thirty feet, but to Oona it seemed a veritable gulf of despair. Even conversation across the short distance was impossible, owing to the noise of the waterfall.

After crossing to them, and taking a brief rest, MacAlpin's attention was at once given to repairing and strengthening the bridge which was their only means of obtaining liberty. His skill and cheery confidence were inspiring, and communicated themselves to his companions. He was so strong and alert, they could not but trust him!

Their crossing was made without mishap, and Donald breathed more freely—to know that there was a drop of seventy feet or so beneath them, into an

unknown depth of seething waters, racing frantically between steep banks, might have disconcerted his companions and played havoc with their nerves! Fortunately his fears were groundless: Oona tripped across the space with nimble confidence, and the old soldier followed with grave courage, as a man who knew that it was quite necessary, but not greatly to be desired!

The mouth of the tunnel was seldom visited by anyone; all the same, MacAlpin had no wish to leave any sign of their presence, and for this reason he crossed and detached the rope from the tunnel end, and started to return. The structure was of the frailest, having been thrown together in haste for its immediate purpose, and when Donald set out to return it swayed and creaked under his weight for a second or two, and then, with a crash, gave way. MacAlpin feared some such break, and held the rope, which was securely fastened to a tree on the bank, and by means of it, he sprang, as lightly as a boy, on a ledge of rock and looking up he met the grave face of the old soldier looking down in a white terror of amazement. Donald's sense of humour was never far distant, and with his free hand he lifted his bonnet gayly in salutation to the old soldier.

Graham was not afraid of fighting, with the proper weapons, and under efficient leadership, but the way MacAlpin fairly tempted Providence, and did things which the Almighty plainly intended should be left to the goats and the conies and such-like creatures, took the old soldier's breath away. MacAlpin had no misgivings of any sort, and with a stout rope he was in perfect safety; but in addition to his natural courage and strong commonsense there was an elevation of mind in connection with this enterprise that day which effectually shut out all sense of failure.

While taking breath, and seeing that the rope was free, several deer on the other side of the river passed at their utmost speed. MacAlpin threw a warning signal to Graham, and lay low against the bank. They were not a moment too soon, as a party of keepers followed the deer, but fortunately, too much

occupied with the business in hand to pay any attention to what might be going forward on the other side of the river. At another time MacAlpin might have been uneasy, as his horse was well-known for many miles, and the river, at the point where he had left him was narrow enough for observation; so narrow as to fill him with misgivings. He soon regained the bank however, and made the best haste possible while the light lasted; when the night closed in they rested and waited for the moon. The halt was welcome to them all, not only for rest, but for an opportunity of hearing what had passed in the interval. MacAlpin told of Reginald Hardcastle's self-imposed task of finding the supposed abductors of Oona, and remarked heartily—'He is not a bad laddie, he is not a bad laddie. Reginald means well, I know he means well!'

Graham groaned in horror at such laxity of thought, as became an orthodox Beadle, with highly important functions to discharge.

'Not bad!' he repeated in amazement; 'they are a' bad—every ane o' them!'

'Na, na, Graham, not a'.' MacAlpin said quietly.

'Weel,' remarked the old soldier, with some deliberation, 'maist o' them, if we maun be sae charitable and precise-like.'

'Aweel,' MacAlpin agreed, 'perhaps maist o' them; but man Alan, the vera' warst may be changed if there be but honest and good soil; and the puir laddie has had nae chance.'

'Nae chance!' Graham snorted, in hot displeasure, 'nae chance! Vessels o' wrath, I say, vessels o' wrath, fitted for destruction! Why man, it's in the Buik!'

Donald looked troubled, and his strong face worked strangely. 'It's a grand buik,' he said slowly at last, 'a grand buik, and says muckle o' mercy, and peety, and loving-kindness and compassion; and I was readin' this vera' morn that Jesus grat' His ain sel—and wha can tell if the soil be not good, even when it looks barren?'

'Wha can tell, indeed!' Alan retorted quickly, 'neither you nor I, not any ane.'

'Vera' true, vera' true,' MacAlpin admitted sadly, 'even good soil may grow war', the vera' tempest o' men's passions may lay waste the best, until naught but foul and rank weeds can grow in it. A man may practise lying and deceit until he kens not the truth when it comes smiling and heartsome to his door, bringing love and peace to the vera' threshold o' his life. Oh! the peety o' it, Alan, the peety o' it, when sinfu' men clap to the door in the face o' mercy, and instead, hold out their hands to welcome foulness and death! But Reinald is young, and there is much hope, yes, much hope!'

Alan made no reply, and Oona listened in awe and wonder.

No word was spoken for a short space. The swish of the water near by mingled with the deeper note of the distant water-fall and filled the silence with their own speech; and once or twice the startled whirr of small wings warned them that they were reckoned intruders by the feathered wanderers of the night.

The moon had risen, and they began to move forward. A great stillness was upon them, a kind of hush of expectancy, as though unseen forces had suddenly encamped about them, touching the mysterious and hidden springs of their being. They were no longer a little band of three, alone on the edge of a desolate moor, with grim danger, perhaps, lurking in the shadows. They were instead a veritable host, inspired by high courage and fair hopes, their minds garrisoned by sublime peace, as though a legion of angels had received a charge concerning them, and had swept into line an invincible army, of unseen and unmeasured power.

It was nearing morning when they reached the village, and Oona was once more clasped in the arms of the faithful Janet.

'My bairn, my bairn!' the aged woman crooned, as she held her in a close embrace; 'my ain bairn!'

'What am I saying?' she corrected herself, sobbing.

'Saying what must always be true, grannie, dear,' pleaded Oona. 'Oh! say I am your own bairn, grannie, for I have none in all the world to love me

but you!'—and the long pent-up sense of bewilderment and desolation had full sway, and the young girl wept out her heart's sorrow upon the breast of her lifelong friend.

A few days afterwards they were on their way to London. Modern means of travel were unknown; and no one could then imagine the speed and comfort of an ordinary express, rushing on its way at sixty or seventy miles an hour. MacAlpin and Graham breathed more freely when Oona and Janet were safely under the roof of their old lawyer, Frederick Maitland.

The law firm of which Frederick Maitland was the principal member, was not concerned ordinarily with criminal cases—affairs of honour sometimes required a little adjusting, but those were not considered criminal, being mere mishaps among gentlemen, which, however much to be regretted, were in no way dishonourable, when the game was played fair and proper as it should be.

Therefore when a charge of murder was brought against Lord Glenmore, it almost seemed like an attack upon the honour and standing of the firm, as well as their client. They were absolutely convinced from the first that Glenmore was innocent; and yet such was the nature of the case and the paucity of evidence procurable, that the utmost they could obtain was, as we know, the somewhat unsatisfactory verdict of 'Not Proven.'

The situation was as cruel as it was unsatisfactory, and the memory of it never ceased to distress Maitland, both from a personal and from a professional stand-point. The disappearance of the child, we know, told seriously against the unfortunate man and nearly turned the scale against him, and doomed him to an ignominious end.

Now, this very child is under his own roof, and MacAlpin has told him all he knows; yet, as though some malign fate pursued them, MacAlpin and Janet's combined story fell short of the absolute proof required to clear Lord Glenmore. Suspicion now, for the first time, pointed to Eric Hardcastle, in the

opinion of Maitland—with MacAlpin it had been a firm conviction for a long time, and so soon as he had seen Oona, it became a certainty. But proof, undoubted proof, was still lacking.

Janet and her husband had taken the child, rescued her, in fact, from the drunken ruffian into whose hands Kinkman had given her. Peter McLean and Janet were not only moved by pity for the child, but also by loyalty and compassion for Glenmore, whose wild ways they deplored, while the murder filled them with dark misgivings of they knew not what. Hardcastle seemed to them the evil genius of their master. They were firmly convinced that he cheated him out of his wealth, and obtained his estates by fraud and trickery, and had driven him to evil courses foreign to his open and generous nature. In this we know their surmises were well-founded.

But the case was much worse than they supposed; for Hardcastle was quite willing to see an innocent man hanged for a crime which he had himself instigated, if not actually committed. To cheat an unsuspecting man out of his broad acres and good name, while pretending to play the part of an attached friend and counsellor, without being found out, is surely a height of villainy attained by few, however, corrupt, deceitful and covetous. Hardcastle having reached this bad eminence, was serene and unmoved, with the air of a virtuous gentleman who was very sorry for the misfortunes of his friend, very sorry indeed!

Maitland was satisfied that while he had not obtained positive proof of his client's innocence, he had found the clue which could not fail in the end to solve the mystery and render fruitless the evil schemes of an heartless and covetous life.

But how was this to be obtained, after the lapse of so many years? The memory of Lord Glenmore and his wild ways had become little more than a tradition, and for all these years, Eric Hardcastle had been master of Fosseway Hall. By what means he had obtained it, few, save Maitland, had any knowledge; and in the absence of Glenmore and the minority of his son, no one seemed called up to enquire into it.

Hardcastle was indeed in possession, but for all that, he was neither loved nor honoured; still, his possession was a fact which many accepted without question. True, the mineral wealth which had lain unknown and undeveloped under men's feet had been brought to light by his means, and where the old lord had little but barren acres, the squire had called into existence extensive industries. Iron works and coal mines were coining gold for Eric Hardcastle, and peopling a whole district with human life palpitating with energy and hope. Small wonder if he felt at times that he had a right to rule in another man's stead. Why, he often asked himself, should a man's penetration and executive ability be limited by the narrow legal and social fictions of which the world, in spasms of virtue, made so much?

He challenged any man to deny that he had built up the district by the might of his power and the cunning of his brains; and no man, he swore, should rob him of his just reward for having done so!

His position was as secure as need be. Hundreds held their estates, if the truth were known, by a worse tenure.

What did MacAlpin's evidence as to a secret marriage in a foreign country amount to? Certainly, not much; and a young girl's likeness to a woman whose love and trust was too easily won proved nothing—absolutely nothing! The Squire smiled, as he recalled MacAlpin's vapourings.

He was always a slow-witted fool, Hardcastle told himself, and wise men had no need to disturb themselves for such as he. And yet a little cloud, no larger than a man's hand, had arisen out of a clear sky, and in due time the heavens would be black with tempest, and the floods of destruction would assail the lordly mansion Eric Hardcastle had built for himself upon shifting sand.

But that time was not yet. The absence of MacAlpin, when it came to his knowledge, was of little interest. Why should it be of interest? His own son was off on a ridiculous quest, all over the missing girl. Why not the fool MacAlpin? And if Donald consid-

ered it his duty to tell all he knew, who in all the world would believe the word of such a roystering fellow against the word of the master of Fosseway?

Why, no one! he told himself, with pleasant assurance, simply no one. It was a settled conviction in his mind that he would be in the front, whoever came behind, that he would rise, whoever fell; and if, by any chance, he were found out, he would lie so well, so confidently, so shrewdly, that his lie would have more weight than another man's truth.

Let MacAlpin look to himself, if he was such a fool as to cross Eric Hardcastle's path; and he swore, with an oath registered in the depths of his own evil heart, that Donald MacAlpin would go the way of others who came between him and what he most desired.

CHAPTER XII

SPIRITS FROM THE VASTY DEEP

MORE than a year had passed, and MacAlpin began to lose hope of Sandy's recovery.

The thought that the nimble little fellow might never walk again was bitter to the strong man, and he served his heart to hope against hope.

'Sandy never walk again!' his mother said, in reply to Donald one day; 'surely not, surely not!' She would not surrender herself to a prospect so distressing; and if such sorrow came to them, she said comfortingly to MacAlpin, 'perhaps it may come to us with such merciful slowness that we can the better endure it. But surely there is better in store for the boy! Oh! I hope so, I hope so!'—and a far-away look crept into the mother's eyes, and a great longing into her heart.

They were both proud of their crippled laddie, in spite of his misfortune, for had he not fallen in his first fight with wrong, like a spotless knight of olden times? It was a sharp enough pain, but they made little outward lament over it; and Sandy took it all with great patience.

No one grudged the services he had rendered; in fact, they both cherished the knowledge of the boy's love of truth and high courage.

'If his body is crippled,' MacAlpin said one day to his wife, 'all the more need that his mind be instructed.' And so Donald began to brush up what he had learned and well-nigh forgotten, for Sandy's benefit. When Donald's limitations as a teacher became apparent, a tutor was found who could devote his whole time to the boy's education. But still, Sandy's best teacher was the open book of Nature, which now unfolded to him wonders he never knew before. It seemed to him as though before he had seen beautiful things in a dream, a wonderful dream; but now he

was awake, and the wonders remained, so that he could, in reality, see and touch and handle them all. The flowers of the field had new interest for him; the birds of the air, and the wild, shy creatures of the woods were his friends.

If the sense of his physical helplessness was hard to bear, he made no sign after the first shock of the discovery was passed. Even then, he only covered his face and lay still, so still that his mother thought he was asleep, and softly left the room.

He was not asleep, but very much awake, and under the sudden shock he was reaching out in the blank darkness for some help—some inner illumination to make clear the mystery. At least, so he described it afterwards, when all the clouds had passed. He was, he thought, like a shipwrecked man suddenly thrown up by an angry sea upon a slippery rock, clinging for dear life to his precarious position, and straining every nerve if perchance in spite of the thunder of the breakers he might hear a directing voice.

When his mother saw him again, he was very calm, with a wistful look in his dark-blue eyes, as though out of his misfortune a wide and effectual door of hope had been opened to him.

The sunny nature of the boy had happily asserted itself, no common ill could long depress him; in spite of his crushed and bruised body he had entered upon a fair new world.

With Oona, too, it had been a year of wonders. Maitland's household was presided over by his widowed sister, Madame Rey, and her daughter Beatrice; and soon the two girls, who were about the same age, were fast friends.

They studied together, went out together with Madame Rey dressed as if they were twins, and entered into such of the gaieties of the capital as the quiet habits of Maitland and his sister permitted. Oona's love of music and song for the first time found full scope under careful training; and the charm of her voice and lightness of touch, combined with her striking beauty, was beginning to attract more than passing attention. It was assumed that she was a

niece of Maitland's, a mistake which the old man was in no haste to correct; in fact, it was a mistake which was exceedingly convenient for his purpose.

'That one old fellow should have two such pretty nieces,' Harry Freedmore remarked ruefully to his friend one day, 'is too much luck for any man.'

'That is just where the pinch comes in,' drawled Frank Woodford, with the air of a man who knows the true inwardness of things social. 'He is said to be fabulously rich, and these two girls are to share it one day, don't ye know?'

'Know?—not I; never heard it before!' Freedmore said, in genuine amazement; 'how has he contrived to get so much?'

'Well, I have heard,' explained Woodford, pleased to be able to impart such important information; 'that his father left him a large fortune, and instead of spending it, as he should have done, when the woman he wished to share it with refused him, he settled down to business like a regular old money-grubber, and now he is not only the head of the first law-firm in the city, but a great financial magnate to boot. All the same, he seldom appears in any transaction personally, but his finger is upon the business pulse of the nation, and he prescribes accordingly. When big undertakings are in the wind, by the government or others, it is Frederic Maitland that finds the cash.'

'You would never think it of him, would you?'

'No, never!' assented Freedmore, looking thoroughly disgusted at the news of so much wealth, for what chance had a poor man against millions?

'Well, it's all true,' continued his friend; 'the whole city swears by him, every man trusts him; you can learn that and much more for yourself any day.'

'I say again, it's too much for any man,' burst out Freedmore, with some heat. 'It's too much to be rich, trusted, and successful in every way, and have two such pretty girls mewed up in his dingy old mansion, which looks more like a fortress than a human habitation!'

'Which means that you would like to be introduced to those two girls, confess it, Freedmore!'

'No sir!—only one of them—I am most generous you know!'

'Generous! The deuce you are! never heard of it before!' What more he might have said we cannot tell, for Woodford whispered suddenly, 'Look man, look, madame herself, and both of them! It's like calling spirits from the vasty deep.' Both men took up a safe position, and watched the ladies as long as they were in sight.

'Now, Freedmore, honour bright—which one?' laying his hand upon his companion's arm.

'Oh, hang it,' Freedmore said, impatiently, 'I have been talking rot!'

'Well, never mind old man,' said his companion slyly, 'I like the dark beauty best, the one with the brilliant eyes and the light step, you know.'

'Go to—'

'Hanover, you were going to say. Well, I have just come from there and have no intention of returning at present. We must not quarrel, Woodford. The lady is not aware of my existence and never may be, but for all that, to tell you the truth, I would give half my life to touch her hand, and look for one blessed moment into her eyes! There now!'

Both men were silent.

'Woodford,' he said impulsively, 'we have both been talking heaps of nonsense.'

'Rank nonsense,' readily assented his companion. 'Come then, let us dine, and forget it. I know a place where the chef is superb, and the wine of the best, and no chance of meeting any of our own set.'

That matter being settled, they strolled on, arm in arm, whistling the latest love-ditty and wondering whether the gates of Heaven would open to them in this life, or whether like luckless wights they would be compelled to see their paradise afar off with a great gulf between.

A few months later all England was stirred by the news of the battle of Vittoria, in which Wellington obtained a great victory over the French under Joseph Buonaparte with Marshall Jourdain as his chief of staff. It was not the first time British blood and

valour had been spent in the service of Spain, for Edward the Black Prince under the impulse of a mistaken chivalry had intervened in the quarrel of Pedro the Cruel with his half-brother, so that Wellington's men unconsciously trod upon the bones of their fathers when they rushed to the charge in the valley of Vittoria.

An extraordinary gazette had just been published, containing a dispatch to Earl Bathurst, Secretary of State for War, in which Wellington announced a complete victory over the French army numbering seventy thousand strong. The spoils of battle were enormous, as the French were carrying with them the plunder of fifty provinces, beside the Court equipage of Joseph Buonaparte, and innumerable camp followers. 'Ladies of pleasure' were very much in evidence, and it was said the French officers sacrificed their army to save their mistresses. Certain it was, that out of one hundred and fifty guns, they carried off but two. The military chest was knocked to pieces in the battle, and its millions of dollars were strewed in glittering profusion on the dusty road, crowded with fugitives too demoralised and too closely pursued by the victorious British to think of picking up the treasure under their feet.

Wellington always ranked Vittoria as one of his greatest victories. His men, strong of heart and strong of hand, had gone into action with unbounded confidence in their leader, and the result was a surpassing triumph for British arms.

Napoleon had been driven out of Germany and now he was driven out of Spain and Portugal, and all the British Isles were *en fête*. The last act of the long-drawn-out tragedy of the nations of Europe had opened, and the star of the great military genius of France had entered upon its decline.

In honour of the event the residence of Lord Bathurst was a blaze of light and splendour, and thronged with all the rank, fashion and valour of the capital. Yet in spite of the general satisfaction there were minor notes, although but faintly heard amidst the public rejoicing; for when all is said of the glories

of war, it is a grim game, and sorrow marks the way of victory as well as of defeat. Therefore while the sons of brave men were moving about among the gay throng, and carrying themselves with heroic calm, there were not a few women at home quietly trying to adjust themselves with a brave heart to the new conditions of life which the loss of those dear to them made necessary.

The Reverend Frederick Barrington and Captain Marchmont had visited many drawing-rooms in the course of the evening, entering heartily into the general joy, save that Marchmont could not reconcile himself to the fate that had sent him home on the eve of such splendid things. 'Deuced hard luck,' he muttered bitterly, 'just when things had become so interesting and opportunities of distinction so plentiful.'

'I'll rejoin at once,' he said decisively to his companion, 'I'll be off to-morrow, with or without leave, whatever comes of it, and——' His flow of speech was cut short, as they were making their way through the crush at the residence of Lord Bathurst, for Reginald Hardcastle tore through between them, with reckless rudeness, for in truth he was like a man demented, and cared for nothing but to get out, to get into the open air and breathe in freedom. Marchmont, considering himself insulted and in high dudgeon turned to follow, when his friend laid a restraining hand upon his arm.

'Something wrong there,' he said, 'did you see his face? take my word for it. that man is 'fey,' or has got his billet for the wrong quarter.'

'Oh well, poor devil, in that case let his ill-manners pass. he is not the only man that has missed his mark in this business!'—for Marchmont's moods were sometimes as numerous as the minutes, and far from as constant, and this his friend and companion knew well.

Reginald Hardcastle, whatever his faults were, had certainly no thought of insulting any one, if anything he was himself the victim of untoward circumstances; for his world had suddenly gone to pieces in an hour,

without preface or warning of any sort, and the blow which had just fallen left him stunned, helpless, blind and reckless of consequences.

He felt that nothing, past present or future, mattered any more. There was no longer any values to be considered, nor ambitions to inspire him. He stood, in his own consciousness, upon the utmost verge, a mere solitary speck without hope or fear, a fragment of the world's refuse upon the cold, passionless, restless waves of the mighty deep. The experience was new and terrible.

Two days later he was on board a crowded transport under orders to join the Royal Scots commanded by Colin Campbell, afterwards known as Lord Clyde.

It is strange how much of misery can be compressed into a short hour or two when fate or the unseen Power which shapes our destiny, call it what you please, tears down the veil from a gay and reckless life and closes the door of hope in a man's or woman's face.

But a few hours before this young commoner had entered the mansion of Lord Bathurst in the enjoyment of prospects so fair that more than one scion of a noble house might well own to a touch of envy— for long pedigrees do not always go with long purses, nor the certainty of a career fall to the lot of all men. Like others, he had been caught in the full tide of national joy, and with a young man's ardour, had surrendered himself to the intoxication of the hour— only to be caught in the eddies of a past crime for which he had no possible responsibility, and driven out into the night in the grip of a great despair.

If what happened had been carefully planned it would have deserved to take rank as a masterpiece of strategy and dramatic effect; but as unpremeditated and unrehearsed, it had a weird suggestiveness of that unseen Power which takes the wise in their own craftiness and brings to naught their best-laid schemes.

For strange as it may seem to a materialistic and frivolous age, men in the strenuous times of which

we speak believed in an over-ruling Hand; and while in no way under-valuing the spirit and daring of Britain's 'happy breed of men,' forgot not that the race is not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong.

When Reginald Hardcastle and his friend Poltimore entered the crowded drawing-rooms, Maitland, Lord Bathurst and one or two men of consequence were engaged in conversation in a recess a little apart from the moving throng; near them, a couple of gentlemen, of whom Herbert Masterman was one, appeared to be guarding them from possible interruption or the neighbourhood of foreign spies. It seemed a needless precaution, as all present were far too eager in the exchange of greetings and the hearing of the latest news from those they met to care much for mere state-craft, or the next move in the great war-game; and besides, foreigners unknown to the government were not supposed to be present. All the same, the spies were on duty as usual on such occasions, and in the persons of those least suspected.

The music from the ball-room was just then sufficiently alluring to occasion a general movement in that direction.

Hardcastle was discussing with his friend what to take in first, when Mrs Ratcliffe, whom we have met before, emerged on the arm of an officer of distinction from what looked like a fairy bower, so skilfully had banks of palms and gorgeous plants of exquisite beauty been arranged to conceal the entrance to a small room close to them. Hardcastle had not met her since she was his father's guest on the occasion of Oona's disappearance, and their greeting was mutually cordial.

'Ah! I have just been thinking of you,' she whispered with breathless eagerness, 'have you seen the reigning beauty—two of them, in fact,' glancing in the direction of Poltimore, 'simple and unsophisticated, with everything to learn about this wicked world. Ah me!' she said, looking up piously, and then glancing archly at the two young men, for in truth she had long passed the time when the 'wicked

world' as she was pleased to call the world she knew and loved best and in which she still took a very real delight, cared much for her piquant criticisms.

'Well!—get Masterman to introduce you, she advised, tapping him lightly with her fan, 'take my word for it, you will think no more of your enchanted island—and——'

'Perfectly true,' remarked Poltimore, who had been making discoveries of his own, 'come and see for yourself, two stars of matchless brilliancy in one hemisphere. Let us renounce the triumphs of Mars for the more delightful conquests of Cupid. Come, Hardcastle!'

'Always the same, Poltimore,' Hardcastle said, a trifle gravely, 'whether it's a ball or a battle you insist on taking it lightly; if Boney was marching on London you would have your joke in the good old way.'

'But man, I am not jesting,' he protested, somewhat crestfallen, 'that's the worst of having a light heart and a ready tongue. No one ever credits you with being in downright earnest, and I am often serious, as you know, Hardcastle.'

'Oh yes, I suppose so,' Hardcastle said provokingly, 'although I have no very distinct recollection of the special occasion!'

'Well, never mind!' said the young fellow, in no way disconcerted, leading his friend toward Madame Rey and the two young ladies. 'There!' he exclaimed, 'forestalled as usual!' as he discovered Woodford and Freedmore being introduced: 'Luck against us once more—dead against us!'

Hardcastle was silent. His eyes were fixed on Oona, and his pulse beat quick and strong. He hastily drew his companion back into the shadow of the improvised shrubbery, and sat down looking so pale and agitated that his friend was genuinely perplexed. All the surroundings were so unlike, not in his most fantastic day-dreams had he conceived of anything like this. Yet the slight girlish figure, standing with such unconscious dignity and grace in conversation with Freedmore and others, could not

be mistaken for another. And yet—what miracle could have brought her here, as the niece of the great financier? Could he but find MacAlpin, he was ready to wring the secret from him at any cost.

In fact, MacAlpin and Graham were quite near, although unknown to him, and very much occupied with some serious perplexities of their own, as we shall presently see.

'What does it mean?' Poltimore asked helplessly, 'have you seen a ghost, Hardcastle, in this highly respectable mansion?'

'It means that the lady of our long quest is *here*,' Hardcastle snapped, impatiently; 'here—yonder!' indicating the little group we have mentioned.

His companion whistled softly; he was answered, but by no means enlightened. 'Then we have most fortunately stumbled on Paradise unawares,' he remarked, 'and should take our luck gratefully.'

'We have stumbled on the devil knows what!' Hardcastle said, with unusual irritation.

'Still, the devil has behaved handsomely for once, Reginald Hardcastle, and——' The sentence was not finished, for the piano was touched softly by a skilful hand in the next room—evidently, someone was enjoying the solitude of a great assembly—and soon Oona was singing with true feeling and expression a song then quite new—

'Soldier, rest, thy warfare o'er,
Sleep the sleep that knows no breaking.
Dream of battlefields no more,
Days of danger, nights of waking.
In our Isles' enchanted hall
Hands unseen thy couch are strewing.
Fairy strains of music fall,
Every sense in slumber dewing.
Soldier, rest, thy warfare o'er,
Dream of fighting field no more!'

Hardcastle found it quite easy to forget everything but the bliss of the moment while Oona sang. He

thought of the Island and the wonderful medley of ballads and songs which she chanted to the weird accompaniment of murmuring waters. She had learned since then to use her voice with more skill, but it was not in the added touch of culture that the charm lay, but in the sweet, full tones which made the listeners feel that the soul of the singer was unconsciously revealed in its exquisite pathos, pity and longing. Hardcastle was spell-bound. It was like suddenly entering a world of fairy wonders, and yet with the far-off echoes of earthly farewells, mingling with the joyful notes of triumph. He was in no mood then to analyze his own sensations, but it all came back to him afterwards, as though he had then received a curious foretaste of his future.

After a brief pause she sang again—

‘Hail to thy cold and clouded beams,
 Pale pilgrim of the troubled sky!
 Hail! though the mists that o’er thee stream
 Lend to thy brow their sullen dye!
 How should thy pure and peaceful eye
 Untroubled view our scenes below?
 Or how a tearless beam supply
 To light a world of war and woe!’

‘Mademoiselle affects sombre pieces to-night,’ said an old musician present, who was celebrated in his day, and who in fact had been her instructor. ‘Cannot we have something brighter—something of a triumphant march in it?’ and he touched the piano to a gayer strain; ‘we are celebrating a victory, a great victory, Mademoiselle!’

‘Oh, I am so sorry not to be gay and light-hearted to-night,’ she said, with a singular look of pain upon her sweet anxious face, ‘but I really cannot! It is all so sad!’

‘Sad, Mademoiselle?’ the old man echoed, questioningly.

‘Yes! Sad, quite sad,’ she persisted, ‘thousands of brave men fallen on both sides is an awful price to pay for victory. Alan Graham says so, and he is a

soldier himself. I cannot feel lighthearted, indeed I cannot, although I am grateful that my country has not suffered defeat, but instead has achieved a great triumph. I know it must seem quite strange, but I feel like this——' and seating herself at the piano again, she sang an ancient dirge by an unknown author, in a low, melancholy key:

'Dust unto dust,
To this all must.
The tenant hath resigned,
The faded form,
To waste and worm,
Corruption claims her kind.

'Through paths unknown
Thy soul hath flown,
To seek the realms of woe,
Where fiery pain
Shall purge the stain
Of actions done below.

'In that sad place
By Mary's grace
Brief may thy dwelling be!
Till prayers and alms,
And holy psalms
Shall set the captive free!'

A strange stillness fell upon those within hearing as the slow, melancholy and singular words passed from her lips. 'Very odd!' murmured someone, with a faint shrug, 'very odd indeed!' Madame Rey was much surprised at Oona's sombre song. Her Huguenot sympathies were severely touched, and it was with difficulty she concealed the mental agitation which she really felt. She continued the conversation, however, in which she was engaged, without appearing to notice the singer or the song. His Lordship the Bishop of——, who was passing near, paused to take in the curious group, and remarked to

his chaplain that it sounded strange at such a time and in such a place, 'but of course we must make allowances!' he remarked amiably, with an easy tolerance which was quite becoming to him, and gratifying to those who considered earnestness not only fatiguing but bad form. 'Yes! we must make allowances,' he continued, 'for the imperfect understanding of some, in these troubled times, and the impulses of natural emotions on certain occasions. Oh yes! of course we must make allowances! Yes, yes!'

A few good Catholics who chanced to be within hearing as the weird strains reached them, paused for a moment, and crossing themselves devoutly, passed on, satisfied that the business of the other world was in good hands, and consequently they might very well attend to the present with a contented mind.

MacAlpin and Graham were, as we know, both quite near, and saw and heard it all. They had travelled express to bring Maitland news of the greatest importance. Both men were greatly excited by recent events, but all these things were overshadowed for the moment when Oona sang her strangely mournful dirge of death.

'God sakes, MacAlpin,' the old soldier exclaimed, clutching Donald's arm; 'it's pure Papistry! Where could she have learned such a sang! It will kill Janet! Poor Janet! How can I ever break it to her? Oh, man, man, it's far waur than death—far waur than death!'

'Hist!' MacAlpin said hoarsely, drawing Graham away. 'Let us get air!' Donald for once showed every sign of fear. He was pale and trembling, and almost groped his way out like a blind man. 'Papistry,' he said, 'yes, Papistry, and bad Papistry at that! It's uncanny, Graham, it's more than uncanny; it's a plain miracle!—I heard the lassie's mother sing the same mournful ditty before the lassie was born.'

'For shame! MacAlpin,' Graham said wrathfully. 'It may be uncanny, it may be of Satan, but it cannot be a miracle! Would the Almighty work a miracle for mere Papist bodies? Answer me that, Donald MacAlpin?'

'Nay! I cannot answer anything,' Donald said with an air of helpless defeat unusual with him; 'I canna understand! I am a dull-witted callant, at the best, Graham, but I heard the lassie's mother sing that same sang before she was born, as I said and w ken she left her ow're young to have heard or learn'd it from her. Papistry it is, yes, Papistry if you will; but surely the Almighty can find some way of His own of speaking to His creatures, in spite of their strange fancies and bewildering beliefs. The ministers are a' wise, unco' wise, but the Almighty has taken nane o' them into H's confidence sae much that they ken a' His mind, nor bound Himself to deal wi' a' folk accordin' to ony written plan. I would not undertake to do it mysel', Graham, then how can folk expect the Almighty to do it? And if an angel or spirit hath spoken ony thing to the lassie which is hidden from us, let us not fight against God; for sure I am that the lassie's soul is as pure as the driven snow, and her mind as an open book. But man, Graham, it is fearsome to suddenly feel that the Infinite and the All-seeing is so near you, and that no wisdom, or might, or cunning or plan of human devising can shut out the lightning flashes of the All-powerful.'

If the old soldier had anything to say he was in no haste to say it; and both men in silence gazed out into the night, awed and perplexed, but still trustful and courageous. The wing of mystery had touched them in the innermost recesses of their being, albeit it had touched them differently; and in spite of all the wisdom of the ages, there is still something that now and again comes to us for which we have no name, and against which neither have we any armour of proof.

The mystery of the song was solved satisfactorily long after.

Beatrice Rey could stand it no longer. 'Oona,' she exclaimed, 'you are like a changeling to-night! I thought you had a braver spirit, something has bewitched you, we must exorcise the treacherous imp! I think it would have been splendid to have seen the battle! I would like to have been in the thicket of it.'

'Beatrice!' Oona exclaimed, amazed and wondering.
'Yes, I would,' continued the youthful fire-eater, with rising colour and a touch of defiance, 'I would like to see a sea-fight as well! I would rather see a sea-fight than a plain land-battle—and hear the booming of cannon over the breakers, and the cheers of our men. I feel like this,' she said, singing to her own accompaniment the long since forgotten song—

'A wet sheet and a flowing sea,
A wind that follows fast
And fills the white and rustling sail
And bends the gallant mast;
And bends the gallant mast, my boys,
While like the eagle free
Away the good ship flies and leaves
Old England on the lee.

'Oh for a soft and gentle wind!
I heard a fair one cry:
But give to me a snorting breeze,
And white waves heaving high;
And white waves heaving high, my boys,
The good ship tight and free,
The world of waters is our home,
And merry men are we!

'There's tempest in yon horned moon,
And lightning in yon cloud,
But hark the music, mariners!
The wind is piping loud!
The wind is piping loud, my boys,
The lightning flashes free—
While the hollow oak our palace is,
Our heritage the sea!'

The swing of the old melody was irresistible, and many who stood near joined in it. The spell was broken, and the whole current of thought and feeling had undergone a sudden and subtle change, and freed from the recent spell, every one moved in such direc-

tion as pleased him, without farther thought of Oona's strange song and strange mood.

Hardcastle was at her side in a moment, and with characteristic impetuosity was pouring out apologies, questions and explanations without pause or stint, or doubt as to his ability to make everything clear and satisfactory.

She was puzzled, but unmistakably interested. What could it mean? for Hardcastle was much too excited to be strikingly lucid.

'Oh, the Island!' she said at length, as the past slowly filtered through the maze of thought recent events had induced—'the Island!' It seemed strange beyond words that the Island should come so unbidden into this new life of hers; and this handsome and deferential gentleman—could he be the boisterous stranger who had broken in upon her day-dreams upon the little 'Isle of Two Streams' so long ago? It really was not so long ago, but Oona had travelled far in thought and character since then. The rustic simplicity and rural pleasures which had enchanted her under Janet's care were not forgotten, and never could be forgotten; she had grown up under them and had imbibed their pure breath of trust and freedom, but a new and wholly unknown world had opened to her, and its wide outlook and exciting interests had already made her faintly aware that there were still many unoccupied chambers in her mind, many worlds of interest and pleasure to conquer and win for her own. Those who knew her better than she knew herself would have been inclined to add that there were also unmoved depths in the placid waters of her nature that might be stirred to storm and tempest when the slumbering winds should awake from their long sleep.

But so far, no cloud had arisen to dim the horizon, no ripple had as yet troubled the still depths.

She remembered she had been warned against this young man, but could not at once recall *why* she had been warned against him. She had been so fortunate in always having trusty friends around her, that any personal care or anxiety had never touched her life, so

far, to any great extent. She recalled the fact that MacAlpin had taken a very stern view of his intrusion on the Island, and Alan Graham had also regarded it as a very grave offence, but London was so different, and Oona found the presence of a stranger no longer something to be received with a mixture of wonder and fear; and then he had certainly very much improved, and was both courteous and fascinating.

Oona had excellent reasons for her altered opinion of Reginald Hardcastle. As he appeared at the moment, he was a fine enough specimen of British manhood, alert, keen and resolute, with plenty of confidence in himself, and no quarrel of any sort with his lot in life. What he desired enough to consider worth having had always been his without much effort; so easy had his conquests been that they had grown quite uninteresting. Just what had moved him to take a special interest in the Lady of the Island, he could not tell. To analyze his motives or sensations, or seek a reason within his own consciousness for doing this or that, had never occurred to him. It certainly saved much trouble, and made the wheels of life run with most agreeable smoothness. He had been favoured by fortune in a singular manner tonight, he told himself and Oona with perfect sincerity, and had much to say to her which was not unpleasant for a lady to listen to. Yes! she was beautiful—he had not been mistaken: beautiful in the rustic solitude of the little island, and still more impressively beautiful amidst the blaze of light and splendour of a London drawing-room. Whatever the mystery of her life might be, or whatever her rank or fortune, by all the laws of the game she was his by right of discovery from the first, and nothing would move him from that.

The situation was becoming a trifle embarrassing, when Maitland and Masterman found them. Masterman came to claim her as a partner in the next set of the Lancers, which was even then forming in the ball-room. Hardcastle had no choice but to give way: not, however, before he had secured the next dance.

Left alone with Maitland, as the rooms were hot

both men passed out upon the terrace. The night air was cool and refreshing. The music from the ball-room and the distant sound of voices blended with the far-off hum of the great city; and Hardcastle could not but think of the island where he had first seen her and the gay world—his world—where he had just as unexpectedly found her. He was excited and restless, he smoked his cigar in eager whiffs as though it were a business that required despatch and vigour, moving up and down meanwhile. Maitland sat perfectly still and silent, looking at the young man and wondering how it all would end. Hardcastle's patience became exhausted and he could wait no longer, and throwing away his cigar, he plunged into the subject nearest his heart without a moment's hesitation.

'It has given me the utmost pleasure to renew acquaintance with Miss Maitland,' he said heartily; 'I was not aware she was your niece.'

'I was not aware of it myself,' remarked Maitland, a trifle drily.

'Not aware of it!' Hardcastle stammered, standing before his companion; 'in Heaven's name, then, who is she?' he gasped.

'Well,' said Maitland, rising and speaking slowly, 'would you really like to know?'

'I would, on my soul and honour; in fact, I must know before I am an hour older.'

'Are you quite sure?' Maitland asked.

'Yes, I am quite sure. Have I not said so?'

Then Maitland said in clear, slow, merciless tones, which seemed to cut into the young man's soul: 'She is a near relation of your own.'

'Of mine?' Hardcastle asked in wonder, as he grew hot and cold with a strange intimation of coming ill; 'a relation of mine?'

'Yes, of course. Have you any objection to her being related to you?'

'Good Heavens, no!' he protested, at a white heat of curious wonder. 'I would give my life to have her—'

'As your sister,' Maitland said; 'she is your father's daughter. Your wish is already gratified.'

'You lie, by Heaven!' the young man hissed, with sudden fury; 'you lie! Do you hear? I say you lie! What juggling is this?'

Maitland stood still, looking with ominous calm at the infuriated man before him.

'I heard,' he said quietly, and he shook himself as though the words had hurt him, not by weight of impact but by foulness of touch. 'Compose yourself. Mr Hardcastle,' he said, with freezing politeness; 'you are not the first man who does not know his own origin beyond a doubt, but that need not spoil your career in these stirring times, nor hinder your advancement. The lady is your father's daughter in fact and in law, and you are not his legitimate son nor heir. Do you understand the situation now?'

'No! by—,' and he sprang at Maitland with the unreasoning fury of a tiger, then swayed like a man smitten by some unseen force, and would have fallen had not MacAlpin, who had seen and heard it all, caught him in his strong grip.

The sight of MacAlpin brought back everything that had occurred on that first day, and the young man fought with murderous passion for mastery, for revenge: wild, devilish fancies and desires surged through his brain, and incoherent oaths were hissed through his clenched teeth.

'You canting hypocrite!' he panted, 'this is your fine mystery, this is your hellish plot! But it's a lie—a lie; you shall eat your words before an hour's past, you and the pompous old dotard you have made your tool!'

Maitland had re-entered the house, closing the window after him, and Alan Graham was on the alert to prevent interruption. He was decorated with all his war-medals, for the occasion was a grand one, and he felt himself on duty once more in a very real sense.

It required all MacAlpin's strength to subdue the angry youth, and even then it was in part the shock and fury of his own passion that ended the conflict in his sudden collapse.

When all power of resistance had died out of him,

he stumbled into a chair, a deplorable heap of misery. Had his faith in his father's honour and uprightness been more perfect, such statements might have fallen harmlessly for the moment; but although not much in his father's confidence, he had reason to know that he was not too scrupulous, and the fear that tugged at his heart was that it might be true, that it probably was true!

'It *must* be a foul lie!' he said, looking up at Mac-Alpin questioningly.

'No, laddie,' Donald said kindly, 'it is the truth, but it might be waur: many a gay callant would be proud to be her brither, even in a left-handed way!'

The words, well-meant as they were, stung the young man like scorpions, and, struggling to his feet, he rushed into the house and tore through the crowd like a madman, as we have already seen.

CHAPTER XIII

A GREAT BATTLE AND A GREAT DISCOVERY

WHEN last we heard of Aynsworth he was with Wellington's army in the Peninsula, and had the good fortune to be present at the battle of Vittoria. The result of that battle might well, indeed, occasion the wildest joy in England, for it had resounded like a thunder-clap throughout Europe, and was the beginning of the end of Napoleon's career of conquest.

Madrid, as we know, was soon afterwards evacuated, and the whole army of French officials and followers of Joseph Buonaparte made haste to follow their departed monarch in his retreat. But the work was by no means finished, for, although broken and demoralized, there were wings of the great host which still held together; and several of these joined the garrisons of the few strongholds which still remained in their hands. Among these, we are chiefly concerned with San Sebastien, which made such a stubborn defence and soon acquired such frightful celebrity for the unparalleled slaughter and crimes of which it became the scene, and which even now after the lapse of a hundred years reads like a chapter from some hideous inferno.

It was at San Sebastien, you will remember, Glenmore began his pitiful quest to clear his name from the shadow of a great crime, a quest which we know ended so forlornly with his death among strangers.

And now his son, quite unaware that he is treading in his father's footsteps, and unaware of his father's end, is strangely enough brought amidst the horrors of war to the very threshold of his fate, at the same place and under even stranger circumstances.

San Sebastien is situated upon the extremity of a low, sandy peninsula which curves in the form of a horse-shoe, and immediately behind the town a conical-shaped hill rises to a height of over four hundred feet.

The craggy base of this striking eminence is washed by the thundering surge of the ocean, while its summit stands crowned by the ancient castle of La Mota.

At the time of which we are speaking, the Convent of St Bartholomew was situated at the end of the isthmus, and was strongly held by the French; and being considered the key to the position, it at once became the focus of a deadly struggle.

Guns of the heaviest calibre then manufactured battered its walls for days before the bravest of Wellington's veterans dared to advance to the breach. Let us drop the veil over the horrors which followed, for when men inured to the gruesome sights of battle break loose from the strong hand of discipline and let the wild beast in them have full sway, no lurid scene of Hell that has ever been conceived or pictured can equal the unspeakable horrors of which they are capable.

Before night had quite closed in and dropped her sombre mantle over the field of slaughter, a brief pause was necessary on both sides to care for the wounded and the dying, and to bury the dead. It was while a party of men under Aynsworth were so employed that a stifled groan attracted their attention. It came, apparently, from a cell or small dormitory below the floor, which was broken in many places and carved into many fantastic shapes by the shells which had been rained upon it. Several men were hastily turning over the contorted bodies which lay about, not too gently, hardly restrained by the presence of an officer from some act of savage fury or greed—for the resistance had been stubborn and fierce—when a voice from the same quarter whence proceeded the groan asked for water: 'Water, for the love of the Mother of God!' it pleaded in feeble tones of despair.

The men were thirsty for something stronger than water at that moment, and it must also be admitted that some of them had been unfortunately successful in finding it. Meanwhile, two men more persevering than their fellows shouted that it was only an old priest, who was more than half-dead already.

'Give him water,' said one of them with grim

humour, 'he is likely to have fire enough even before he leaves this world, unless he makes haste!'

The brutal jest was terribly true, for eddies of smoke were appearing to windward, and even while they were speaking tongues of flame shot up to the darkening heavens with a fierce glare that illuminated the whole scene of the recent conflict, and sickening odours of burnt flesh soon drove everyone that could crawl from the wrecked monastery.

A kind-hearted soldier knelt by the old man and put water to his lips.

'Make haste,' his companion said impatiently; 'let us chuck him over the rampart to find water for himself and feed the fishes! What time have we to look after such carrion as he?'

Aynsworth heard the concluding part of the man's brutal speech, and turned upon him so fiercely that the fellow quailed and was glad enough to obey with the utmost alacrity the few orders given him. Perhaps his obedience was quickened in some measure by the whispered word of a comrade that the place was mined and at any moment an explosion might dispose in a summary fashion of both life and hopes of plunder, and end all their interests on this earth once for all. It was not a pleasant thought.

But be that as it may, Father Francis—for such it transpired was the old man's name—was carried in safety in a semi-conscious condition within the British lines.

With the horrors of the night that followed we are not concerned here, nor yet with the many redeeming acts of humanity and heroism, the story of which has happily survived; but only with the fortunes of a single man, whose life had long been darkened by a cruel wrong, and with this suffering stranger rescued from a miserable end.

Next day the aged priest was sufficiently recovered to thank the officer who had befriended him; but his previous privations, the shock of the bombardment, and his long abstinence had combined to depress the machinery of life below its power to rally, and the old man needed not the doctor's grave looks to tell him that he was on the brink of the unknown.

As there was no minister of his own faith at hand, Aynsworth was much concerned, for the dying man was visibly troubled, and pleaded pitifully for the ministrations of his church at this supreme crisis of his life.

Aynsworth made every effort to gratify his wishes, but the difficulties were great and delay inevitable.

There were a few who rather chaffed the young officer for taking thought for a man of an alien church when so many men of his own faith and country were left to face the future unattended and uncared for.

'But he is our guest!' Aynsworth objected, 'and is entitled to the honours of war, so to speak. He has a right to die in his own way; and if, like a child in the dark, he asks for someone who understands what he requires, it would be rank discourtesy to deny him his wish.'

'Oh, let him finish his life as he pleases,' chimed in half a dozen voices at once, with good-natured indifference, 'and get him what he asks for if it's in any way possible!'

'He is a game old bird,' said a newcomer, 'if it's the old parson you are speaking of: one of the men brought in, just in the nick of time, says he could have lain in perfect safety if he had cared to do so, but he absolutely refused and attended to the wounded and the dying through the hottest part of the battle, until the flooring gave way under our fire and carried him down into the recess where our men, I hear, found him.'

'Here then, let us drink his health,' said a rollicking young fellow, not long joined, 'and by the same token we make him free of the camp!'

'And,' said another, 'if he is going out with the last post, good luck to him, and a safe journey!' and every man present stood up to drain his glass in compliment to the gallant old priest within their borders.

The doctor came in, and whispered to Aynsworth that the old man could not last long and wished to see him.

'My son,' said Father Francis as Aynsworth bent

over him a few minutes later, 'I fear I must die unconfessed, but if it be God's good pleasure I must submit to such severe discipline! But I have a charge which I must confide to you, seeing that I cannot live to complete my self-imposed task.'

And then, in spite of his laboured breathing and extreme weakness, he told briefly the story of a wounded man who had been left at the monastery among the hills, and whose dying wish he had pledged himself to fulfil.

'And you—you are his countryman,' he gasped, 'and will solemnly promise to carry out his dying request seeing that I cannot do so, although I have strive faithfully; and God deal with you, my son, as you deal truly with this sacred trust, committed to me as a minister of God.'

Aynsworth was much moved. He knew he was face to face with a true human soul; the matter of creed or church never once obtruded itself. Father Francis was dying, yet with that great and awesome business on hand his chief concern was to keep his word to a stranger and speed the delivery of some valuable documents, which might aid the ends of justice and mercy.

The young officer, at the dying man's request, unfastened the curiously constructed belt we know of, and removed it from the dying man body. The old priest was satisfied, and with a sigh of content sank back exhausted, breathing as though he had suddenly gone to sleep, like a tired child.

A very slight examination convinced Aynsworth of the importance of the trust placed in his hands and its value to himself. It was all so unexpected, so sudden, so overwhelming, that he trembled with the joy and wonder of the new-born hope. He had devoted his life to the search for his father and the possession of proof that would set him right in the eyes of his fellow-men; and now it was brought to him in this extraordinary manner, when he had almost ceased to expect success.

He knelt and gently kissed the old man's hand, sobbing out his thanks like a child.

'Good father, I am that stranger's son,' he said; 'you have yourself fulfilled your trust!'

'Ah!' the priest said, with a quiet note of satisfaction, rousing himself; 'is it even so? The saints be praised! I should not have been mistrustful, my son, but I was permitted to walk in darkness for some wise end, no doubt. But now the light has come. God is Light, my son; God is Light!' and looking into Aynsworth's eyes with a strange wistfulness, which he remembered long afterwards, the dying man added softly: 'and Mercy! Yes, God is Mercy; and blessed! are the merciful for——'

It was too much for his failing strength, and he relapsed into seeming unconsciouness and lay like one dead, insomuch that Aynsworth thought he was dead.

Soon the doctor came in; he had no hope of saving the old man's life from the first, still he continued to do all he could to alleviate his sufferings.

He had revived under the doctor's skilful care, and was again asking for a priest, when two of Aynsworth's men entered, bringing one with them. He was a stranger, a Frenchman, and almost in a state of collapse from sheer terror. The poor curé knew no English, and the soldiers knew no French, so that the worthy man was left in a state of torturing suspense as to what was going to happen to him. As the men understood that the situation required haste, they tied the reverend gentleman on a cavalry charger that was by no means the easiest pacer in the regiment, but an excellent roadster, and never had village parson a better ride. A few words from the doctor were sufficient to allay his apprehension for his personal safety, but it was not quite so easy to take the ache out of his bones; and the memory of that cross-country gallop long remained with the worthy man as a heroic tale of danger and daring in the hands of the fierce troopers of Wellington.

Aynsworth never saw Father Francis again. Before daybreak he had started with military despatches for London, and it was some years before he re-visited these wild scenes of battle. When he came again, Napoleon was chafing against his fate in his island

prison; peace reigned supreme everywhere; the peasantry had settled down to their usual toil; the birds sang joyfully in the forests; young men and maidens were rejoicing in the fulness of life where thousands of brave men had fallen, for grass soon grows green over blood shed upon the battle-field; it is private feuds and political crimes that leave long echoes of bitterness and hatred behind them.

He started on the journey like a man in a dream; or rather, perhaps, like a man who had been asleep and suddenly aroused to a sense of the stern facts and realities around him. He had been chosen to carry despatches by Sir Thomas Graham, to give him a legitimate excuse for returning home: a favour it is doubtful if he would have asked for, even under the terrible pressure of the moment.

He read and re-read the story his father had written with such minute care and burning passion, read with an absorbing interest that even the wild and changeful moods of the Bay of Biscay could not disturb.

Slowly, bit by bit, the magnitude of his father's misery pierced his soul and flooded his whole being with the keenest anguish. The weather was foul and threatening, but they were nearing home, and the sailors were roaring out snatches of love-songs lustily; not even the thunder of angry seas breaking upon the deck, nor the voice of the gale calling in the rigging, could stay their music. At times a half-moon cast fitful gleams upon the troubled waters; but no gleam, and no suggestion of home or calm, touched the soul of the young man who was battling alone with the fiercest passions that can rend and torture a human mind.

'God in Heaven,' he cried in his bitterness to the night and the storm, 'is it possible? Can it be true that a man could plan and execute such a hellish scheme against a trusting and unsuspecting friend, entangle a man of honour by legal artifice, strip him bare of his lands and wealth, and fasten upon him a charge of murder of the foulest and most heartless kind, and yet continue to live and prosper amidst the very scenes of his successful villainy?'

Linked Lives

The thought was maddening. The wild strain in his blood clamoured for vengeance, vengeance—swift, terrible, deep—vengeance to fit the crime—vengeance pitiless, remorseless, black as hell. He stretched out his arms as though to grasp the phantom of his hate, with his face raised to the darkened sky, when suddenly a line of light fell across the deck: a cool moonbeam breaking through the storm-clouds and casting an arm of white light, like a ghostly shadow, with sublime calm upon the heaving ship and tossing billows.

He shivered as though all at once chilled to the bone, and folding his arms tightly he held himself as thought to protect and retain his passion of revenge, that it might not be torn from him; for with that line of light came the memory of Father Francis and his dying words: 'God is Light, my son; God is Mercy.'

'What!' he cried out hoarsely to the storm; 'must a man forego his just resentment? Must such human vermin live, and go in and out among men of trust and honour? What could an old priest know of the measure of a man's mind into whose soul the iron had entered? What thought could he have of the unspeakable misery of thwarted plans through long years, the humiliating conditions of his life, the galling limitations to his just ambition, the hideous ghosts of every shape and hue that have mocked and cursed and darkened every conscious day of his existence since early boyhood? What could such as he know of such things? Nothing! nothing, absolutely nothing!

Again a faint beam of light struggled through a rift in the clouds, and the young man's arms dropped as swiftly as a soldier's upon parade, and the same amazing chill seemed to freeze him to the marrow, until he shuddered with some strange sensation—some semi-conscious mental perception, which held him as it were suspended between Heaven and Hell. His breath came in gasps, like a man who had been running for his life and was near enough to the goal to pause for a brief space.

'Neither Father Francis nor any other,' he whis-

pered hoarsely, 'can sound the depths of another's wretchedness, and yet—and yet—if there be a God, that Divine Being must be the fountain of Mercy and Justice—yes, Justice: no man can escape punishment, no man can hide himself from the Infinite!' And slowly the thought shaped itself in his mind that God is sufficient for the government of the world of mankind, including Eric Hardcastle's crimes and Lord Glenmore's wrongs; and imperceptibly his whole being bowed in reverence before the supreme conception of Righteousness and Pity, and he was still.

He had been like a man passion-driven, impetuous, reckless, pouring out his vengeful desires in torrents, until he began to sink into the abyssmal depths of the blackness of darkness, and just as hell's noisome spume had well-nigh choked and overwhelmed him a slender thread of divinest gossamer was put into his hand which led him up the starry way to Mercy and Light.

It had been indeed a fierce and fiery ordeal through which he had passed, whatever interpretation you may be pleased to put upon it. In after-time it appeared to him like a curious and vivid dream, of which some of the points which impressed him most were mystical and indistinct, while the general effect of the whole remained with him.

Be that as it may, the memory of that night continued to influence him, colouring where it did not govern his life and character to the end of his days. Trembling, bewildered and subdued, he sought his cabin, and throwing himself down slept for many hours while the good ship held on her way: so profound and refreshing was his repose that when he awoke he felt like a man who had been bathed in the fountain of youth and had put on strength for all the business and concerns of life that might lie before him.

The morning dawned bright and cold, with a deep ground-swell which rolled its long waves shoreward and homeward. The sough of the gale still lingered in the crests of the billows, and the blue chasms yawned and vanished, hidden by the rush of the boiling foam.

And instead of the cry for vengeance, the new day brought a longing for a larger life, wider and fuller, in which mercy and truth might kiss each other, and reign: the twin stars in one hemisphere of peace.

Would this happy frame of mind last? Could a man be transformed in a few hours by some great upheaval within him? We all know that men are frequently driven by passionate impulses, for which they are unable to account, into the commission of crime; some strange, hidden force, the treasured-up combustion of a life-time, is suddenly fired without warning, resulting in moral catastrophes truly appalling.

Perhaps in like manner the fetters and conditions which bind a man's better nature may be rent asunder at the bidding of some mysterious force within him which calls into being a nobler and better self, creating him a new man for all the higher purposes of existence.

Whether some such event had come to Aynsworth or not, it is certain that when he again examined the precious proofs of his father's innocence his eyes were opened to see something more than the need of vengeance. One thing he saw was a miniature of a sweet woman's face, that moved him strangely and set his pulse throbbing. He studied it long and carefully for days and nights, until it fascinated him, charmed him, dominated his thoughts and held him spell-bound. He must have seen such a face somewhere, he told himself: he hunted through all his life for the memory of such a face; he compared the miniature with his mother's. No! it was not the same; it was not even like it. The nameless charm was there, but the word that expressed its peculiar power eluded him!

A strange shyness touched him as he gazed upon it; he began to feel like a profane person making too free with a divinity; and with a sudden resolution he put it away. But no resolution he could command was able to shut out the new vision that had come to him.

Had he ever seen such a face? he asked himself again; was it in truth a real face, or only an artist's dream?

Again he read his father's story of those last months

in the little hamlet, and found the key to the picture. Yes! it was a real face, the portrait of a trusting and injured woman; and if his father's surmises were correct, it was the picture of a distant kinswoman of his own.

Evidently he was not yet at the end of his troubles: there was still a tangled web to unravel; but Maitland, he knew, was an expert in such matters, and with the long-lost key to the mystery in his hands the result ought not to remain much longer doubtful.

Their homeward progress had been slow, owing to contrary winds; but at last the wind shifted and served, and by dawn next day the good ship dropped anchor in Dover harbour, and two hours afterwards Aynsworth was on his way to London.

As he was entering the carriage a man with his arm in a sling, and who appeared otherwise crippled, saluted soldier-fashion. Aynsworth courteously acknowledged it, and paused to ask him a few questions as to where he had seen service, and pressing a couple of sovereigns into his hands, took his seat. Munro, his faithful servant, was much less favourably impressed with the crippled soldier than his master; there was a strange look of cunning and malignity on the man's face when Aynsworth turned away which puzzled him.

'Does the ill-bred creature accept handfuls of gold from every strange gentleman he meets?' growled Munro, as he settled himself on the box with the coachman.

In truth the world had not gone very well with our friend Kinkman since we saw him last, any more than with his master. He had completely failed to find any clue to the whereabouts of Oona; but then, so long as his employer remained in ignorance of that fact, he had no qualms at all about collecting the money he had bargained for. If he had failed in doing all he had promised, he had suffered much more than he had anticipated; for which, he assured himself, he was entitled to consideration and payment. It was true enough from his standpoint: if he was attached to any human being, it was his son and he had left him four days before a hopeless wreck in mind and body.

without the slightest prospect of his ever recovering the use of one or the other.

Yes! his son had fallen in the service of Hardcastle, and he would wring the last penny in compensation from the Squire. And now to meet young Glenmore was a fresh injury and incentive to revenge; and in spite of all his efforts, the man's evil nature blazed in his face as the young lord turned from him. Oh yes, he would take his gold, seeing the young fool was as eager to part with it as his father before him! Of course he would take it! and he fingered it lovingly. He would take it, and pay it back with interest in a different coinage—see if he would not! And the wretched creature chuckled at his own malicious fancy with devilish enjoyment.

Eric Hardcastle was not in any better frame of mind than his miserable tool. His son had left to join his regiment without any leave-taking, contenting himself with a letter which smote the Squire with such cruel reproach and scorn as no son, he told himself, had ever written to a father—and a father who had schemed and cheated and lied as he had done to secure his child a foremost place in the world!

'Foolish boy—foolish, ungrateful boy!' the Squire murmured as he paced the long library with halting steps. 'But surmise what they may, they have no proofs—absolutely none—or Kinkman has lied deeper than I think he dare.' Still, the thought was disturbing, and he mused long and anxiously, with a white, set face, almost ghastly in its pallor, while his eyes gleamed and shone in the candle-light: clear, cold and cruel.

Nothing moved Eric Hardcastle to such fierce anger as to hear men speak in earnest of such mere figments as 'honour' and 'truth'; and he asked himself where *he* would have been had he allowed himself to be governed by such considerations.

That his son, his own flesh and blood, should quarrel with his own splendid inheritance because, forsooth! it had not been obtained in the usual fool's fashion—despise broad acres and rich mineral wealth which his father's keen wit and splendid unscrupulousness had

gained for him, was gall and bitterness! Were all his long years of sleepless watchfulness to come to hing through the foolish fancy of a pampered boy? Well, if the worst came to the worst, he could lie—no one, he told himself with well-founded complacency, could do it better: he could lie magnificently, confidently, lie so well that he could impose his own will upon honourable men, until the evidence of their own minds failed them. He was so satisfied and re-assured by the consciousness of his own capacity in that respect that he smiled triumphantly, and poured himself out a small glass of brandy, which he sipped with slow satisfaction.

He could lie, he repeated to himself, and they could prove nothing.

It was just as well, after all, that Reginald was out of the way. It would all have blown over before his return. What was the use of great wealth if a man could not build up a strong case and a good character in a pinch by the judicious use of it? Of course, the whole business might turn out very disagreeable—for a time, but it could not be disastrous; and Eric Hardcastle was no child to be frightened by his shadow. The next thing was to go at once to town, and find out for himself what had—well, what had made such an unfortunate impression upon a hitherto dutiful son.

He had no more than settled this to his own satisfaction than the sound of wheels disturbed the current of his thoughts, and the Reverend Matthew Sherwin was announced.

'Why, Sherwin!' exclaimed the Squire with genuine heartiness, pleased to see an old friend, 'what good fortune has blown you into these parts?'

'Good fortune?' Sherwin murmured; 'I am not so sure that it's good fortune, but if you can put me up for the night I'll tell you the whole story.'

'Why, we can put you up for a year or for a night at your pleasure! Delighted to have you, Sherwin,' the Squire said heartily, 'and the longer the better.'

'You are always a brick, Hardcastle,' the newcomer said with sincere appreciation.

'Why, Sherwin, I have not so much as half of you for the last ten years!'

'Fifteen, if you please, Squire Hardcastle!'

'What, fifteen is it?—what a memory you have, Sherwin!'

'For some things only, Hardcastle.' And a merry look crept into the pale, shifty eyes that were turned upon the Squire. 'In fact, I have a very good memory for forgetting! Have to, you know, when you take orders!'

'My poor Sherwin' the Squire said with unfeigned amusement, 'you were always getting into scrapes, I remember, and often required a little help to get out of them.'

'Exactly!' Sherwin agreed, and both men laughed heartily.

If any one had suggested to the Squire a couple of hours before that instead of ordering his plans for a journey to London he would have been ordering his choicest wines for an old college chum, whom he had not heard of for fifteen years, he might have been seriously displeased. But that was just what he was doing, with such evident zest that the whole household had caught the contagion of his cheerful mood, and moved about with a lighter step in consequence.

All the same, the Squire had not forgotten the situation in the least; rather, he had a vague notion floating somewhere in his brain that his old college friend might be useful. Sherwin, he knew, was without any previous knowledge of his life and methods likely to embarrass him in using him for his own ends. To be sure, he was a weak creature, vain of his own powers, and with harmless ambitions that afforded him infinite satisfaction and harmed no one; and except he had changed very much, he was likely to be susceptible to the kind of argument Eric Hardcastle was best able to use.

'And then, of course,' he told himself, 'a man of Sherwin's cloth, on whom his duties sat rather lightly, had many advantages, and in some measure conferred an air of respectability even on the Squire. Hard-

castle had no objection to the clerical office so long as men were without any inconvenient evidences of personal religion, and took a broad and gentlemanly view of human nature.'

It was only when clergymen took their office seriously, and applied the principles they expounded to their own and other men's characters and conduct, that the whole thing became a nuisance—a perfect *nuisance*! The Reverend Hector Fordice had more than once brought to the Squire's notice acts of injustice inflicted on poor people by men in the Squire's employment. It was a grand impertinence, and the thought of it rankled still in the mind of Hardcastle.

Sherwin was of a different stamp, and had a mind above such small matters. When the servants had retired, and both men had grown mellow under the influence of good cheer and good wine, the Squire settled himself comfortably to hear his friend's story.

'Well,' said Sherwin, 'I have written a play, that is about the whole matter, and of course the characters are not saints. How could they be? for naturally I drew upon my own early knowledge of life, and you know our set was not of the Puritan type. The Bishop professes to be shocked—actually shocked—at such an enormity, and I have a year's leave of absence to repent in and make my peace!'

'And will you submit to such a thing?' queried the Squire.

'Submit! No, not I!' stoutly declared the Reverend Matthew Sherwin in indignant amazement. 'When men of genius enter the church, Bishops should know enough to appreciate them—it is their duty to do so—and allow them liberty, ample liberty! How can a man of my intellectual standing be expected to go on week after week, preaching to pious clod-hoppers and old women? I tell you frankly, Hardcastle, it is not reasonable to expect it! Had I been so placed that I could have had intelligent men of breadth and culture to deal with, might have been different. But the sheer dulness of it forced me—literally forced me, Hardcastle—to play the man somehow, in my own

way, without the everlasting drivel which the ignorant clamour for. It was a kind of Puritan parish, you know, where what they are pleased to call the Gospel was dinned into them, until half of them had forgotten what it really meant!

'And you did not din it into them?' the Squire remarked easily.

'No, I did not!' Sherwin said emphatically; 'I aimed at building up character, on broad intellectual lines, without all this wearisome sentiment—yes, character, on such lines as men of culture and brains delight in; and would you believe it, it was all wasted—absolutely wasted!'

'I can well believe it,' remarked the Squire, sympathetically; 'stay here as long as you will, and bring out your play at your leisure. You can be quite independent of your profession, if you like.'

'You are a true friend, Hardcastle, as you always were—good fortune has not spoiled you in the least!' and the admiring and happy Sherwin grasped the Squire's hand with impulsive fervour.

'And you do not even pretend to be religious?' he asked his host.

'Well no, I don't,' the Squire replied with a curious touch of amusement; 'it is hardly worth pretending, you know, Sherwin. In fact, beyond the proper and decorous performance of public service, I am not sure that it is worth while to have any personal opinions on the subject. Of course, there are times when these things are quite useful, but pretending is so fatiguing; and, in fact, the whole business is very uninteresting, except where it can be made to serve some sensible end. But you are saved all trouble about pretending, Sherwin: it is always taken for granted that a man of your cloth is sincere.'

Sherwin mused over the Squire's remarks with some signs of perplexity. 'I am not so sure that I care to be taken as sincere all the time,' he said, 'it is so hard to keep it up. I have felt at times as though I would like to turn brigand, or something equally different from what I am, just for a change!'

'Well, don't,' the Squire said, with a broad smile. 'I can do better than that for you: I can show you how to use your clerical character to your own advantage, without burdening your conscience.'

Oh, my conscience!' said the reverend gentleman, with a shrug.

'Yes, I know,' the Squire remarked genially. 'it is just as well not to have a conscience; it is often so inconvenient to have such a thing, except it is well trained and obedient to your will; it is likely to get in your way, don't ye know!' and both men laughed heartily, as men do when they understand one another. or think they understand one another—which is often about the same thing!

Sherwin sauntered about the large room thoughtfully.

The ease and comfort of his surroundings were pleasant and soothing. The change from his modest rectory and its narrow income, which made the expenditure of every guinea a matter of consideration, was imperceptibly making strong appeals to him. It was like a sudden translation into a new world. Hardcastle, he remembered, was not born to wealth and was without religion even as a young man—in short, he was quite frank on that score—and yet he was master of all this! He recalled that he had meant to do his duty when he took orders, nor had he anything of a flagrant character with which to reproach himself. But somehow things had gone wrong, and he was puzzled to know when and how he had got out of touch with his profession. That he had, there was no denying. Religion, whatever value it may have with respect to the other world, is a poor investment for a man who desires to live comfortably in this life.

He admitted that there were men to whom high ideals appealed supremely, and such got along well enough. Of course, Jesus Christ was undeniably a genius and a gentleman; moreover, He was uncommonly full of kindness and pity. Jesus Christ was honest and sincere; in fact, he had no fault to find

with Him. He had moved among Pharisees without loss of character, dignity or compassion; He was far too great and supremely good to be a tyrant or condone tyranny in others. He certainly was a wonderful man, this Nazarene Carpenter, and His death in its pathos and mysterious grandeur became Him. Small wonder, after all, that so many think the world has nothing to compare with the glory of serving Him!

But—well, Sherwin felt that he was not made after that pattern, and he sighed as the half-open door through which he had for a brief moment caught a glimpse of the Infinite Good closed, leaving him face to face with Eric Hardcastle.

A few evenings afterwards, at the close of a pleasant chat, in which the two men recalled much of the past, the Squire drew up his chair in front of the fire, and filling his companion's glass, spreads out his hands to the cheerful blaze. Hands have as much character as faces—perhaps even more. The Squire's hands were shapely enough, but mainly suggestive of tenacity. If the owner of such hands was clinging to a wreck, you would expect him to hold on when other men relaxed their grip and perished; and if by any chance those hands closed upon the throat of an enemy, you got the impression somehow that when they let go the victim would be a limp carcass that would trouble living men no more. They were, in brief, very purposeful hands, without suggestion of tenderness or pity.

'This is a fine old place, Hardcastle,' Sherwin said after a space of silence; 'how did you come by it? Got it cheap, I suppose?'

'Yes, fairly so,' the Squire answered, sipping his wine thoughtfully, and at the back of his mind resenting the free and easy way he was being questioned by such a contemptible person as his guest. 'I have spent a good deal on the place,' he explained; 'it was very different when it came into my hands.'

'And your son: he must take great pride in such a noble inheritance.'

'Unfortunately, no!' the Squire answered, with a touch of bitterness.

'Not take pleasure in it?' Sherwin echoed in amazement.

'He takes so little pleasure in it,' said the master of Fosseway slowly, 'that he has informed me quite recently that he never wishes to see the place again. So you see there is a fly in the ointment, my friend!'

Sherwin said nothing, but he felt sure there was a good deal more than a fly in the ointment—that, in fact, things were not all they seemed upon the surface of Eric Hardcastle's life; but, with unusual prudence for Sherwin, he kept his thoughts to himself.

It was late in September, and the night had closed in dark and stormy; the sea was some miles off, but the wind carried the sound of breakers with a subdued roar like a distant cannonade. Sherwin remarked upon it, as a safe subject, but not without a shudder.

'You dislike the sound of the sea,' Hardcastle said, looking up sharply, 'but you will get used to it. We have had guests who lay awake in a storm, fancying they heard the wail of the dead in the howling wind, calling, always calling for succour, and always calling in vain!'

'How horrible!' Sherwin said, with genuine emotion; 'how horrible!'

'Oh, of course they were people of no nerve and abundant fancy, the sort of material out of which fools and fanatics were made; but such poor human stuff have little interest for us, have they, Sherwin?'

Before any answer could be given to the Squire's query, the sound of loud knocking upon the outer door attracted the attention of both men.

'Why, it's midnight, the very witching hour!' Sherwin remarked, 'and I must leave you to the tender mercies of the newcomers. Some travellers have no doubt lost their way in the storm.'

'Oh, very likely,' the Squire said, 'and they have travelled miles from the the coach road to find themselves. The world is full of people who can hardly make their way from one county to another in broad daylight without accident.'

Sherwin retired just as McGregor came in to ask

instructions from his master. McGregor was the butler, and he reserved the wee sma' hours as a personal perquisite, to be spent as he pleased.

'Certainly, admit them, McGregor!' the Squire said cheerfully, 'and after they have had some refreshments bring them here!'

The man glanced at his master before retiring to do his bidding—for, in fact, he had already admitted them; and had the Squire been less occupied with his own plans and how to make the best use of Sherwin for his own ends, he might have noticed that his old and trusty servant was unusually agitated.

But as the minutes passed the Squire could not help wondering who these uninvited guests might be, and how long they might remain.

Still, he cracked his nuts while he waited, and sipped a little wine, with a calm patience which nothing, to all outward appearance, seemed likely to disturb.

At the sound of footsteps he rose, a trifle anxious, he knew not why. In a moment the door opened, and McGregor announced—Lord Glenmore and Mr Frederick Maitland.

The Squire's self-command seldom failed him, but now he turned pale, and the hand which rested on the back of the chair from which he had just risen was a trifle unsteady.

'What names did you say, McGregor?' he asked, with a touch of dignified courtesy, as he endeavoured to collect himself. The man repeated them, and retired.

The Squire paused for a moment, and then asked in a steady voice, if a little hard: 'To what am I indebted, gentlemen, for this late visit?'

'To bad roads and poor horse-flesh,' Maitland answered pleasantly, 'as we fully expected to have arrived here before dark. In fact, our business is of special importance, and should not be delayed. Hence our visit at this unseasonable hour.'

'Ah, well, business must of course be attended to,' the Squire remarked with easy assurance, and a touch of weariness which was very well assumed. 'But it is

very late--far too late for the consideration of any matter of serious importance. Do me the honour of remaining until to-morrow, when the matter of your visit can be discussed at leisure. Let me now wish you sound sleep and pleasant dreams at Fosseyway.'

Maitland paused for a moment, uncertain what to do. This meeting with Hardcastle was very different from what he had expected, but clearly the Squire's suggestion was reasonable; and as nothing could be gained by an immediate business interview, there was nothing for it but to follow McGregor to their rooms.

It was a strange experience for Aynsworth. He had not been inside the house since he was a boy, and only once had he seen it from a distance, knowing it to be the home of his family; and now he was accepting the hospitality of the usurper as though it were a matter of course.

It almost seemed as though Eric Hardcastle had the power of benumbing the faculties of other men who came into personal contact with him, until even the best became less mentally alert and capable than their wont. What was it in this man that gave him such an evil ascendancy over others? He was served, and served faithfully, even by men who despised and hated him in their hearts. There was nothing commanding nor impressive in his person or manners, but there certainly was the concentration of all his power summed up and devoted to the attainment of his own ends.

Most men live for many things; but this man lived for one thing--and lived for it with all his might.

Whether the Squire's good wishes for his guests' repose were realized or not, we cannot say; but for once Hardcastle decided that the sweet forgetfulness that so often refreshed his own scheming brain could not be expected that night. Once more he summoned McGregor, and asked what rooms the guests occupied, and elicited the farther information that besides servants they were attended by a man who appeared to be a clerk or secretary.

Dismissing the man at last for the night he settled down to do a little hard thinking. What was their business? He wished he had allowed Maitland to make that clear. What new turn of affairs had brought them without previous announcement to Fosseway? He wished he could find out these things before morning. Some of their servants might be induced to impart what they knew. But how could he reach them?

The wind had gone down, and a waning moon had risen and was struggling through drifting clouds.

It occurred to him that by going out through the French window in the room he might find out for himself where these unwelcome visitors were located, at least whether their lights were out. Perhaps it might be still possible to have a private interview with Maitland, apart from the young Glenmore, from which satisfactory results might be expected.

To unfasten the shutters and draw the blinds was the work of a moment, but as he laid his hand upon the bolt, he recoiled in sudden and visible terror; for outside the window there was a face on a level with his own. It was the face of a man travel-stained, and drenched with the recent rain; a white face, drawn and wild, and two eyes ablaze with insane passion.

The Squire recognized him at once, but in sheer astonishment stood still, staring at the singular apparition.

'Open, fool!' the apparition hissed, while his teeth chattered from chill and fear. 'Open!—you could not look more scared if you had seen the devil!'

The Squire, suddenly recalled to himself, and stung into courage by the contemptuous tone and wild masterful bearing of Kinkman, drew back the bolt, and hastily secured it after he had entered without a word.

It was quite evident that the wretched creature was exhausted in brain and body, and hardly master of himself. Once inside, he sank into a chair, panting like a man who had been running a race and despairing of the goal. He still glanced at the window

anxiously, with a haunting terror in his eyes. Hardcastle smiled at his fears; it was now his turn to be contemptuous: he shook the iron shutter to show him how strong it was, and poured out a glass of liquor, as he said, to steady the fellow's nerves. The shivering creature gulped it down and asked for more. Hardcastle left him to quench his thirst in his own way, while he found him some food. A dainty feeder himself, he watched the wolfish appetite of his guest with amused satisfaction, while he busied himself in finding some dry clothes to replace the wet and mud-stained garments the man was wearing. Kinkman seldom, if ever, drank to excess; in fact, he boasted that he never was drunk in his life—which may have been true, for he was far too cool, calculating and selfish to be moved by love of good-fellowship, joy or sorrow, or any other human emotion to seek liquor as a palliative or stimulant. He drank, however, an amazing quantity on this occasion, which in his fevered mental condition seemed to act as a sedative, and restored him to himself.

When he surveyed himself in the Squire's clothes, the transformation pleased him so much that he laughed softly at his own improved appearance.

'Where are they?' he asked, after a brief pause.

'They? Who?' the Squire asked sharply, with admirable composure.

'Who?' Kinkman echoed scornfully, 'do you think I came here for nothing?'

'Well, no,' the Squire answered drily; 'I think you have generally very good reasons for your movements.'

'Yes,' Kinkman replied savagely confronting the Squire, 'you may take your oath on that,' and he snapped his teeth like a wild beast at bay. 'I have moved a good deal to oblige the master of Fosseway, while he tasted all the sweets of his distinguished position, and left the bitter to his humble colleague; and now I want a fair settlement, once for all!'

'Well,' Hardcastle said suavely, 'if that is what you have come for it is not necessary to deliver an

oration. Have you earned a fair settlement as you call it? Have you done what you undertook to do?' and the Squire's voice grew hard, and his keen narrow eyes searched the face of the man before him.

'I have earned my share,' the fellow said, doggedly, 'and I'll have it.'

'Then, what are these men doing here to-night?' the squire demanded, with the tone of a man who has his sword-point at the heart of his adversary, and knew his advantage.

'I don't know,' Kinkman said, shifting uneasily, 'that is surely your business!'

'My business!' the Squire echoed.

'Yes, your business,' the man said with rising anger, 'and but for a piece of devilish ill-luck I had rid the world of one of them not many hours since. I have dogged their steps since they left London, and after MacAlpin left them——'

'MacAlpin?' the Squire repeated, with a paler cheek than usual; 'what about MacAlpin?'

'Why, MacAlpin came down with them! He is the devil's own marplot, I'll catch him yet, and settle old scores with him!' and the mis-shapen creature growled out a hideous imprecation under his breath.

The Squire sat back in his chair, regarding his visitor with a puzzled look, not often seen upon his crafty countenance; which soon, however, gave way to one of keen scrutiny.

'Might I ask,' he said slowly, 'what is the bone of contention between you and MacAlpin?'

'That will keep,' Kinkman said shortly, with an ugly gleam in his eyes, and a tightening of the muscles, like an animal about to spring. 'I followed him when he left them to go home through the woods and covered him as he stood out against the sky; in another instant he would have been a limp heap, when my pistol missed fire. He heard the click, for his ears are as sharp as a fox's, but for all that he turned back and beat the gorse like a madman, careless of life.'

'And why did you not fire again?' the Squire said, leaning forward with a look of savage longing in his eyes.

'I dare not! I dare not risk another miss!' and he almost whimpered in the bitterness of his disappointment; 'he would have strangled me—strangled me with his naked hands. Why in Heaven's name has the devil made him so strong and fearless?' and Kinkman, in spite of himself, trembled under the twin passions of fear and hate.

'Well, whether he is under the special protection of the devil or not, he is by no means proof against lead, and a well-aimed bullet is sufficient at any time—'

'Yes, yes,' Kinkman agreed, with the utmost agitation. 'Why did I not risk it? I ought to have risked it!' and he drew out his weapon, and examined the unused charge with anxious care. The hungry look in the man's eyes did not please his employer, alone as he was with him, man to man.

The Squire, under these circumstances, thought it best to be prepared for contingencies, and opening a drawer near him, under pretence of looking for something, he slipped a brace of pistols into his pocket. It was adroitly done, but all the same it did not escape the notice of his astute companion.

'Well, what do you mean to do?' Hardcastle asked, with a business-like air.

'What do I mean to do?' Kinkman echoed, with a touch of insolence, which startled the Squire somewhat; for Hardcastle flattered himself that the tools he employed knew their place, and although they served him, were immeasurably beneath him. He could pay for what he wanted in the coin of the realm; that done, he considered his obligations ended, and no man, least of all such a creature as Kinkman, had any right to presume.

'What am I going to do?' Kinkman repeated. 'Well, now that you have asked me, I'll tell you! I am going to receive a good round sum from you—then the loan of a horse from your stables—you can say I stole the beast if you like—that little business settled, I will leave the master of Fosseyway in peace!'

'So that is all!' the Squire said, with suppressed

passion, 'your modesty does you credit. Might I ask if you have earned such liberal consideration?'

'I have done enough to receive some handsome acknowledgment, and I mean to have it,' he answered doggedly.

'Why then, are these men here at this moment? Let me have an answer to that, Kinkman.'

'You ought to know more of their business than I do, seeing you have seen them,' he answered sharply.

'Be careful,' the Squire said with ominous calm, rising, with his eyes fixed upon the man before him. 'I must have the truth!' He spoke with a curious ring of menace in his tone new to Kinkman.

'I suppose the truth is useful, sometimes,' the fellow said, with an air of grave consideration, 'and yet, you have paid fairly well for several good wholesome lies, and for—'

'Silence!' Hardcastle said, confronting the man fiercely. 'I will have silence about the past!'

'Oh, well,' Kinkman said, composedly, 'pay for silence, that is all, pay for it!'

'What have you done with the girl?' Hardcastle said suddenly, ignoring his demand for money.

With the mention of Oona, all the bitter defeat Kinkman had suffered welled up in the wretched creature; the wreck of his son's life and his own thwarted plans rose up before him: to be so near to success and then to fail, the thought was maddening! An extraordinary look of mingled fear, grief and malice swept over his pale, haggard face, and, slipping his chair, he swayed to and fro, like a man in a paroxysm of mortal pain.

The Squire observed the effect of his question with much satisfaction; the wretched man, he felt, was still in his power and like clay in the hands of the potter, could be fashioned to suit the plans of his master. The thought gave the master of Fosseyway much consolation.

'I can tell you,' Kinkman said, slowly. 'I can tell you that and more when you have paid what was agreed upon.'

'Miserable fool!' the Squire muttered in contempt, looking down upon him with supreme scorn; 'I can wring the truth from you, pay or no pay, to the last breath!'

'Can you?' Kinkman said, coolly, settling himself in the chair with compressed lips, 'well, and what if I refuse to be silent, or refuse to speak, as you are pleased to command?'

'And what if I refuse to pay another guinea?'

'Ah!' the man said, with a malicious gleam, 'in that case you know best!' and he looked around the room significantly, remarking, 'it appears to me you have a few things to lose; but I have led a wandering dog's life, and may not understand the sweets of comfort. Or perhaps you forget such little things.'

'I forget nothing,' the Squire said sharply; 'my memory is excellent.'

'The Lord help you then,' Kinkman said piously; 'I sometimes lie awake at night myself.'

'Is that so?' the Squire questioned indifferently, 'I am an excellent sleeper, and now that I think of it, it is rather late, or early, I should say.'

'You are right, Squire,' the fellow said, holding out his hand. Hardcastle reflected a moment; he was clearly at a disadvantage; the situation was critical and it was now nearly dawn. In fact, he had no choice.

'You must answer my question,' he said, with as much dignity as he could command, 'and if you do, I will double what I have promised.'

'There now!' Kinkman said, rising with alacrity, 'that is spoken like your old self!'

It never troubled Hardcastle to pay money for the furtherance of his own plans; he had not found anything in the course of his life to shake his faith in money as the great moving power of the world—that is to say, not yet.

Kinkman was soon ready for his journey.

'Well, about the girl?' Hardcastle asked.

'She is in London,' the fellow answered, 'Maitland can tell you where to find her.'

For a moment the Squire stood in amazement. 'In

London,' he gasped, 'and known to Maitland! Wretch! Traitor!' he hissed in a sudden torrent of pent-up passion; and drawing a pistol he covered Kinkman with unerring aim. He was one of the best shots of his day, and Kinkman knew it. The miserable creature turned deathly pale, whether with fear or anger or both, who can say? He handled his own weapon with cold, nervous fingers, while his eyes never moved from the Squire's face, and then, either by accident or design, he allowed it to drop.

'Fire!' he said, as he stood defenceless, 'fire, and have done with it. A dead man is no worse than a dead woman, and you can no doubt make suitable explanations. Perhaps the one may balance the other!'

'Silence!' the Squire thundered, forgetting all prudence, 'pick up this thing!' and he kicked the pistol toward him with supreme contempt; and barely giving him time to clutch it, he seized him, and shaking him in the fulness of his wrath, he thrust him out into the night, which was then darkening toward dawn.

He had hardly closed the shutters when there was a knock at the door. The Squire opened instantly. It was McGregor.

'I thought I heard voices, sir?' the man said, with a look of concern.

'So you did, McGregor,' the Squire said, promptly. 'I had an unpleasant visitor, and was about to call you; he has gone now, fortunately, and I have decided to make the journey I had intended before these gentlemen came. Call Jenks, without disturbing any one, and tell him to make haste.'

'What? now sir?'

'Yes, now of course, and without delay. Meanwhile, can you put the horses in yourself?'

'Yes, sir, certainly,' the man said.

'And you can drive, can you not, McGregor?'

'Oh yes, sir!' the fellow answered, evidently well-pleased to be of special use.

While McGregor was carrying out his master's orders, the Squire made some hasty preparations for his journey.

'Explain the matter to the gentlemen in the house,' he said, as he entered the carriage, 'and beg them to wait my return. Mr Sherwin can entertain them, of course, he is a capital hand at that sort of thing, and enjoys it thoroughly.'

In all the years the man had served Hardcastle, he had never known him make such an unseasonable journey, and with such slight preparation; but he concluded the Squire knew his own business, and McGregor knew his sufficiently to observe his master's movements in silence.

CHAPTER XIV

A SICK MAN AND AN EVIL CONSCIENCE

It was a grave enough party that sat down to breakfast next morning.

Maitland could not conceal his keen disappointment, so unexpected was such a move on the part of the Squire, for of course none of them were in the secret of his plans or aware that his journey had been decided upon before their coming, and was only hastened by the information he extracted from Kinkman.

Sherwin was the only one in high good humour. He was immensely pleased with himself. To his thinking, Hardcastle was the prince of good fellows, and in his heart he vowed everlasting loyalty to him. In fact, it was to the impulsive parson infinitely delightful, if only for a short time, to do the honours of Fosseyway in the name of the Squire, a piece of good luck quite unlooked for.

The guests, however, were not very responsive, although Maitland accepted a mount, and rode out with his own man. Aynsworth excused himself, and started afoot to spend the day after his own fashion. His destination was Woodlands, where his trusty old retainer still perforce reigned.

Sherwin was disappointed, he would have found it much more agreeable to have been occupied in getting up some impromptu recreation, a hunting-party, or some such thing, but Maitland's manner, although perfectly courteous, was decidedly discouraging, and consequently it happened that every one went his own way.

It the course of the day, Maitland sought out MacAlpin and told him the new turn of affairs. Donald was unusually agitated over the news, and concluded that in spite of all their precautions Oona's

whereabouts must have become known to the Squire. In this surmise we know he was only partially correct.

Hardcastle had indeed heard that she was in London, and that Maitland knew of her being there; but the information went no farther.

Reginald, in writing to his father, was too angry and amazed to be precise in his information. The sudden enlightenment as to his own unfortunate position so completely overwhelmed him that how the Squire might be affected by it never entered his mind. Both MacAlpin and Maitland agreed, under the circumstances, that Oona and Janet should return at once to their own cottage. There were, of course, many difficulties and objections to such a step; explanations were exceedingly inconvenient, and in fact, impossible until farther developments were assured, and yet no other way was open to them.

'But when they are safely brought here,' MacAlpin asked, 'what then?'

'What then?' Maitland echoed. 'Why, the Squire has to be confronted with the living proof of his villainy, as well as the written evidence of Lord Glenmore!'

'But the lady, Mister Maitland, the lady knows nothing of her father's misdoings, not even that she has a living father,' MacAlpin said anxiously.

'Yes, yes, I know,' Maitland said, with a touch of impatience, for in truth he was himself ill at ease on that head. 'It's a hard case to deal with, a very hard case, MacAlpin, a very hard case, and I have no hope of carrying it through without wounding some of the principal parties concerned—this young lady, for instance——'

'——and the young laird,' MacAlpin added.

'Well, yes, perhaps the young laird, as we may still, for a time continue to call the young Glenmore. Of course he does not yet know of the young lady's existence.'

'They have met,' Donald said, quietly.

'Met!—met!—bless me! bless my soul, s that cannot be! Who has told you such a thing?'

'I was an eye-witness of their meeting, two years

ago, and moreover it was a Sabbath morning, and Janet also was aware of it; but neither recognized the other for what they are, and most likely have forgotten all about it.'

'MacAlpin,' Maitland said gravely, 'I should have known of this.'

'Nae doots,' Donald said shamefacedly, falling back into his native Scotch as usual, 'but to what end?'

'Yes, yes, to what end indeed? It is a hard case, MacAlpin, as I have said, a hard case, and one part of the hardness consists in the fact that I must set aside all personal feeling in order to re-instate the son of an injured man in his ancient rights, and recover the wealth which justly belongs to him, and to do this I may be obliged to bring a most serious charge against Eric Hardcastle. I see no way out of the difficulty which does not involve serious unpleasantness to someone. No sir! I see no way without going into painful particulars that cannot but be grievous to this young lady, to Lord Glenmore, and to all of us.'

'Faither,' said a small voice near by.

'Yes, laddie,' Donald said, tenderly; 'I had forgotten you!'

'Ye winna let ony harm come to the lady o' the Island!' Sandy pleaded, looking from one to the other, anxiously.

'No, no, bairn,' Donald said, 'we must not let harm come to her. She is coming home to live here, ye ken.'

'Oh faither,' Sandy exclaimed, in breathless excitement, making an effort to sit up, and then falling back with a stifled sob of misery, he murmured, 'I canna, faither, I canna run ony mair!'

Donald laid his hand caressingly upon the little fellow's head, but said nothing. Maitland had heard of the boy's devotion to Oona, and the service he had rendered at such cost to himself, and bending over him, he said, 'Perhaps you may be able to run again, Sandy. We shall see by-and-bye, when the lady returns. Some of our doctors in London do wonder-

ful things; and who knows what good things are in the future?’

Sandy looked up brightly, and confided to Maitland that he had ‘heaps and heaps o’ things’ to tell her when she came.

‘I daresay,’ the lawyer remarked, observing the lad with great interest, ‘and when you have told her all the fine things you have learned, we must try if we cannot have you set upon your feet again.’

A far-off look, half of pain and longing touched with wonder, crept into the boy’s eyes. ‘It hurts,’ he said, plaintively looking up.

‘What hurts, my boy?’ Maitland said kindly.

‘To think,’ Sandy replied, with a quivering lip, and a great effort to keep back the tears; ‘I canna—I canna run ony mair!’

There was silence between them, until the little fellow said cheerfully, while his eyes still glistened with tears that had not fallen, ‘I can make pictures for her, if I canna run!’ and timidly holding out a sketch-book, he said, ‘I am learning. I have squirrels and birds and a rabbit and half a deer, it ran away because Tammas came; Tammas is my big brither, and he likes to shoot a’ things, and I dinna.’

‘So Thomas is a mighty hunter, and you are setting out to be an artist,’ Maitland said, gravely.

‘I dinna ken,’ Sandy said, falteringly, not quite sure of Maitland’s meaning.

Donald had moved away a little during their conversation, but now returned as he had noticed his wife in the distance; she had grown anxious, owing to their long absence, and gathering up the boy in his wraps, Donald lifted him from the rustic seat where he had lain, and carried him toward his mother.

‘I hear your heart beating, faither!’ Sandy said, as his father held him close and tenderly in his arms.

‘Oh, you are dreaming, Sandy man, just dreaming, you will be hearing the grass grow next!’

‘Na,’ Sandy said, ‘I canna hear the grass grow, ’cause it grows at night, and I canna ever keep awake lang enough. I think whiles it grows in the day-time too, but I never kent when.’

'Well, well, we must find out!' MacAlpin said comfortingly. No wonder Sandy heard his father's heart beat, for his pulse was bounding under the sudden excitement of a new hope; the hope that his wee laddie might one day regain his lost powers of movement.

The week passed without any sign from Eric Hardcastle, but evidently the world of affairs could not stand still, even for the Squire, and Maitland returned to town, leaving his confidential man, Rufus Williams, at Fosseyway, and the young Glenmore at Woodlands. Williams was a jolly good fellow, to whom nothing came amiss, and Sherwin was well pleased with his society; he was equally at home in the hunting-field or the ball-room, and could play any game under the sun; and as a fitting finish to his accomplishments he was a man of exuberant spirits and unflagging energy.

The days passed pleasantly enough for the two men; callers were quite numerous, not being aware of Hardcastle's absence; and Glenmore's return to the district was commented upon with general satisfaction—all of which was very mystifying to Sherwin. All the same, no one quite understood the situation, and the feeling which hovered in the air was as perplexing as it was intangible and illusive.

There was nothing remarkable in the absence of the Squire, although his journeys from home in late years had been quite infrequent, owing, it was understood, to the condition of his health, and now it was said that his journey was occasioned by the need of special medical advice, as the local physicians had found the symptoms obscure and sometimes alarming.

But Eric Hardcastle had not gone direct to London, as the faithful McGregor reported on his master's authority. He had called by the way at a small place on the borders of Yorkshire. It was the property of his son, which he inherited from his mother, and the Squire had seen little of it for many years. His coming was unexpected, but most gratifying to the steward, who prided himself on being always ready to receive his master.

Here in comfort and safety he paused to rest and think out his plans.

It was about the first time in his strenuous, self-seeking life that the necessity of weighing the pros and cons had been forced upon him so sharply, and as we shall see, the few days of uncertainty cost him dearly.

His hand, somehow, seemed to have lost something of its cunning to shape the ends he desired, and a new element of doubt had crept into his mind. Having found Kinkman less faithful than he believed, he was chary in trusting another, with the result that the messenger he sent on before him to the city was too imperfectly instructed to be of much service. In one point only he had scored a perfect success; he had been in time to stop the payment of the cheque given to Kinkman, or that when that worthy, in his usual make-up for such business, presented the order, it was declined on the ground of some informality, until further instructions. Kinkman acted his part to perfection; expressed the proper degree of astonishment and desired to hear the exact words of the instructions; he complained of the inconvenience, while he requested to have some notes changed into gold for present convenience, and left, stating in a very business-like way, when he would call again.

But all the same he knew that a crisis had come, and that it meant death or ruin to one or other, or both.

His son, for whom he had schemed so industriously, and from whom he had hoped so much, could no longer benefit by his successful crimes, 'but neither shall the son of Eric Hardcastle!' he told himself, with a wild gleam of fiendish enjoyment. 'We'll be even, and cry quits yet! See!' and his hands worked mysteriously, like one rending some hateful thing, while his evil face showed hideous contortions. 'The miserable outcast Kinkman of many aliases can pull down the soaring ambition of the man who aspires to rank high on the strength of his ill-gotten wealth!' he murmured, with evident satisfaction.

The intensity of his passion for revenge burned so fiercely that he could not rest, and without waiting for further developments, he hurried back on his way to Bosseway, his usual caution having forsaken him for the time. His bitter disappointment at a time when he thought he had secured a great success made him reckless, and called out all the vicious, defiant elements of his character.

He travelled, to all outward seeming, as a decent poor man, who had been called in haste to be near a dying relative. His grief was so deep and bravely restrained, that his fellow-travellers regarded him with admiring sympathy. Some, with touching delicacy, pressed gifts of money upon him, which he declined. He was poor, he said with fine simplicity, but honest, and had enough for his present needs, thanking them all the same. The glory of playing his part so well roused his self-appreciation, and gave him a fine sense of superiority over his companions.

In spite of his pleasure in excellent acting, however, the burning desire to complete his journey and exact full satisfaction, was still the master passion, urging him on with feverish haste. But even Kingman had worked the human machinery to the breaking-point. His self-imposed privations, his consuming greed and all it involved had well-nigh burned up brain and body; and in spite of all his determination and wrath the wretched man was really ill. He left the coach between the regular stages, both to save time and to hide his destination. In his usual state of excitement, he over-rated his knowledge of the district, and although it was yet day-light, he missed his way, and before night closed in he was exhausted and suffering, as well as miles away from the place he sought. It was no new thing for him to sleep under the stars; perhaps indeed he owed much of his vigour to his wandering out-door life. But he was no longer as in former years when in the full enjoyment of abundant life; and the days of bitter despair and craving for revenge had exhausted him more than he knew. With night came confusion as to his loca-

tion, and utter weariness. To make his situation worse, a violent wind storm came up, accompanied by rain, and in spite of all his efforts and skill in finding shelter, he was soon soaked and shivering in the dense darkness.

It seemed as though the very elements had leagued together to defeat his just claim for vengeance. The miserable creature in his perplexity and loneliness prayed for life and light that he might proceed on his way and accomplish his enemies' destruction.

That heaven might be deaf to his prayers, and deny him his just claim, seemed to him impossible. It would be so childish and unworthy of the Almighty to take advantage of a man's failings, he said, with some degree of comfort to himself. He had no misgivings at all as to the existence of the Deity, but he was not so sure of his unaided ability to persuade or compel the Deity of his conception to favour his own plans.

The very thought was torture to him, torture of the keenest and bitterest kind.

When day dawned a scarlet arch of glory spanned once more the heavens, the sun rising amidst gorgeous colours of matchless splendour only seemed to him like limitless power magnifying his helplessness, and putting on beautiful garments while he lay in sackcloth and ashes; and he cursed the sun out of the depth of his evil heart. He tried to move, only to fall back like a trapped creature, chained to his lair and helpless.

What could it mean? His limbs refused to do his bidding, but his brain still worked with lightning speed. His whole mental apparatus was on fire, seething with swift thought, and uncontrolled by any suggestion of caution or reserve. The man was laid bare by his own tongue in his hideous nakedness, belching out fury and foulness. The intensity of his passion lent him strength to drag himself into the open, where with one blood-curdling scream, which rang through the still morning, he fell down, apparently lifeless. The weird sound and the

waving arms of the excited creature startled every bird and beast within sight or hearing, and fortunately attracted the notice of two foresters who had been early afoot.

The men were soon bending over the stranger. 'Is it—is it murder?' asked the younger man, breathlessly. They were father and son. 'Murder!' his father echoed; 'surely not—and here! murder!—murder!—never, never,' and he tramped nervously all over the ground for some distance, examining every track. He soon found where Kinkman had spent the night, and traced his erratic movements hither and thither for some distance.

'There is no murder,' he said confidently, 'what made you think so?'

'I cannot tell,' Hamish answered sheepishly, 'it looked so strange. What does it mean?' he asked.

'Ah, there you have me, son mine!' the old man answered, 'there you have me for sure, for in all the long years I have never picked up a man, living or dead, in these forest-lands, no, never one, for shure, never one!'

They took up the helpless creature and moved toward the cottage, which was not far off, although hidden by the trees. As they came within sight of the house they paused, and laid down their burden, for a man on horse-back was talking to a woman who sat upon the trunk of a fallen tree. 'Lord Ruthven!' both men said in a breath, 'and the Lady Nola!'

'His lordship has not been here in a year, and the lady not in five, and now they are both here by some strange chance, both here!' he said, wonderingly.

The woman looked a trifle tired, but absolutely self-possessed. She had taken off her bonnet, which lay beside her, and her scant hair, touched with grey, was blown in some disorder about her face, but she made no attempt to smoothe it into place. Her eyes were keen and observant, and snapped and twinkled with some inward thought, or perchance amusement, of which Lord Ruthven seemed fully aware, but without being able to detect the cause.

He had apparently been questioning her without receiving much satisfaction, and thought it was time to make clear his position. 'My good woman,' he was saying, 'this is part of my estate. What is your business here?'

'Trying to exist,' she answered briefly, 'and I am not your lordship's good woman, so far as I know, perhaps not a good woman at all!'

'Have I ever met you anywhere?' he said, with a puzzled look creeping into his face, and a more courteous tone taking the place of his former brusqueness, 'your voice sounds strangely familiar, very strangely so! Are you—are you really a genuine poor person?'

The woman smiled at the naiveté of the question, but answered readily, 'Oh, quite genuine, and quite poor! How could your lordship ever have met a person of my humble station at any time?'

'I cannot tell,' he answered with increasing perplexity, 'I cannot tell!—It is very strange, very strange!'

At this point the men approached, with Kinkman, limp and helpless. 'What is this, Grant?' his lordship said, dismounting.

'I don't know, sir!' the man answered; 'he is a stranger.'

'Is he dead?' Lord Ruthven asked, with some concern.

For answer, Nola advanced, and hastily examined the sick man, and remarked: 'It is only a fainting-fit; take him in and put him to bed, Grant.'

The forester touched his cap, and prepared to obey. The act of reverence may have been in honour of Lord Ruthven, but that was not his lordship's opinion; and the woman whom we have introduced as Nola became a still greater perplexity to his lordship.

Just then a wave of sound was borne towards them on the still air, rousing man and horse. 'The hunt is up, madam,' he said courteously, turning toward her. 'Permit me to offer you my apologies and wish you good morning!' and bowing low, he was soon in the saddle and off at a good pace.

A tinge of colour touched the woman's face as her eyes followed horse and man.

'Walter rides well!' she said softly to herself. 'Trust a Ruthven to know a good horse or a good dog, whatever else he does not know—whatever else he may not know!' she repeated curiously.

The cottage on one side looked out through a gap in the trees upon a wide expanse of country showing rich pasture and meadow lands, with here and there patches of wood, through which far-famed trout streams wound their way.

The morning was clear, and some miles away to the right, Ruthven towers were plainly visible, and a few miles beyond to the left of where she stood the sombre outline of Fosseway Hall could easily be traced by a practised eye acquainted with the district. The intervening landscape was dotted with farm-houses and cottages, from the chimneys of which smoke was now rising, signifying home and comfort. The woman sighed, and turned away resolutely, as though thrusting away a disturbing vision of an earthly Paradise, long-lost and never to be regained. Her face had grown grey and tense in that brief space, and her eyes glowed with unwonted fire.

'The service of others,' she said to herself, 'must suffice for the present; and the memory of what has been may perhaps still be permitted as a far-off echo of a forgotten world! Surely so much may be indulged in without sin or shame!' she murmured in self-excuse for her momentary glimpse into the past. 'Surely, surely!'

And what had she seen in that strange flash of recollection? Dare it be told? Yes, to this extent only.

She had seen a gay assembly in honour of the coming of age of Walter Frederick Wyndham, fifth Lord Ruthven, when Nola Ophelia Leslie-Anstruther was the reigning queen of their social world; but that was nearly thirty years ago, and the story which lies between must be reserved for the present; perhaps it may never be told, for society has but a short memory

and no heart, and the curtain is usually best dropped over the tale of broken lives, whether past or present.

Jane, the forester's wife, had been waiting unnoticed for some minutes, not wishing to intrude upon Nola's evident preoccupation. There was something strange and mysterious to her in the fact that while she was near enough to touch with her hand this strange guest of hers, had she so desired, she knew that her thoughts had far outstripped the bounds of her surroundings, and had travelled miles away. She waited patiently until Nola turned toward the cottage.

'The stranger is delirious, ma'am,' she said anxiously, 'and is raving fearfully; my husband and son find it hard to control him.'

'I had forgotten him, Jane,' Nola said, penitently, 'and that is quite wrong, you know.'

'I wish I could forget the things he says, ma'am,' Jane said, with a shudder of horror. 'My husband says,' she added impressively, 'that it is not fit I should hear the awful things he is saying, not fit or safe!'

'He must be very ill!' Nola remarked thoughtfully, as she made her way to the room.

'You will not go near him?' Jane pleaded, 'you will surely not go near him, ma'am!' and she put out her hand to detain her.

'Of course I'll see him, my faithful, foolish Jane,' she said, a bright smile lighting up her face, and banishing any trace of the recent sorrow which had clouded it. 'He is a poor, sick, demented creature, and needs care and kindness, and we must do our best.' But the sight which met her gaze, to any other than this strange woman, might have amply justified Jane's solicitude.

Kinkman was in a perfect frenzy of fever and fear, and was fighting the two men with extraordinary determination and power, taxing their united efforts to hold him; while at the same time he talked with amazing rapidity in a medley of European languages.

We know that he had picked up a very full vocabulary of foreign tongues in his wanderings; but the

strange thing was that his long-practised habit of secrecy clung to him even in his state of mental disorder; and when he spoke in his mother tongue it was in a whisper, as though fearful of being heard and understood.

Nola observed him closely for a few minutes without moving, as he lay exhausted after one of these fearful outbursts, and then touched his wrists lightly to feel his pulse. Slight as that touch was, it roused him like a shock of an electric battery and with a look of fiendish hatred, he sprang at the throat of an imaginary enemy, the fingers of his left hand working with convulsive fierceness and tenacity, while the right hand drove home the death stroke. Then, with a hideous smile of satisfied ferocity, he went through all the actions of wiping the death-dealing weapon and putting it away for future use.

It was a sight unspeakably horrible, and held all the occupants of the room spell-bound. Then suddenly he started up with an eager look, as of a man listening; then crouched and waited with a look of extreme cunning; presently he levelled an imaginary pistol and fired, and after staring into space with intense eagerness, like a man wishing to learn the extent of his aim, he smiled, with extraordinary complacency, his face wearing a look of perfect innocence and satisfaction, as though a veil had suddenly fallen over his evil nature; and then falling back, limp and helpless, he lay as one asleep.

Nola had been away from the district for many years. Her life and character had been moulded by circumstances over which she had no control. A woman at once strong and tender, she had abundant sympathy for others, and a brave self-denial equal to any sacrifice.

Why she should have left the ordinary paths of womanhood and constituted herself an early Florence Nightingale, caring for the suffering and the poor, cannot now be told.

She waited till the sick man's breathing told her that he was asleep, and then pouring some drops of

medicine into a glass of water which stood on a table within reach of his hand, she retired to think over what had passed.

The man's ravings were sufficiently incoherent to indicate his physical condition, and at the same time sufficiently startling to suggest a criminal career of appalling horror, for Nola was able to follow him in his use of foreign patois, and the result was that his crimes were startlingly revealed.

It would have been easy enough to have called in the guardians of the law, and furnish information which might have led to strange discoveries.

She did not, however, consider it her mission to punish crime. The sick man indicated names with which she was familiar, and the fact made the situation exceedingly perplexing and full of difficulty.

There was no hurry, she told herself, the man's condition, whatever his evil deeds, was such that he could not be moved for some time. There was time to consider what was best.

And so the wretched creature tossed and moaned, through weary days and nights, while the fever ran its course.

The man's strange ravings came back to her, and in spite of herself almost she pieced them together, until the broken and tangled utterances brought back the long-past gossip of the neighbourhood, until there was no longer any doubt in her mind of whom he spoke. Had this knowledge been hers twenty-five years before, much of this story need not have been written, and more than one life would have shaped its course on far other lines than those we have briefly sketched in these pages.

CHAPTER XV

AN OLD FRIEND

HARDCASTLE had succeeded in punishing Kinkman for his duplicity in a way which he thought would be most effective and likely to bring him back, humbled and pliable. He had other business in London, for his interests were extensive; but when he discovered that Maitland had returned, and that no lady answering to the description with which he had contrived to furnish his confidential messenger, of Oona, was known, he was more non-plussed than he cared to own. The effect which his disciplinary measures had on Kinkman was absolutely beyond his imagination.

Kinkman to him was but a tool to be used as he dictated, but hardly a being to whom his employer had thought of attributing any marked touch of human passion. In fact, it was his perfect machine-like operations which made him so indispensable to the Squire's plans. At least, such was Hardcastle's estimate of the creature he employed, and as we know, he was very nearly correct.

But that single exception in Hardcastle's knowledge of Kinkman was far-reaching, and although but a tiny rift in the darkness of the wretched man's character, it let in sufficient light to frustrate the Squire's schemes, although not enough to enlighten and save the instrument of his wickedness and turn him from his evil ways.

An uneasy sense of possible failure crept into Hardcastle's mind at last, in spite of himself, and yet how could such a thing be? His success was not a thing of yesterday, and the wealth which he had acquired had been used to develop great industries and furnish employment to many hundreds of home-makers. Whatever his faults, he had done well for others as well as for himself, a fact which he felt he

could challenge any man to deny. It would have been much more agreeable to have continued the even tenor of his way without clashing with any man's interests, in which case he would not have been burdened with such a man as Kinkman.

But things seldom fall out as they should, and when obstructing circumstances or persons intervened, of course they had to be brushed aside; and he told himself now with undiminished confidence, as he had told himself in time past, that he was justified by the results, let fools think or say what they please.

Still, Maitland's visit to Fosseyway with the young Glenmore was singularly unlooked for and somewhat disturbing. Had Kinkman other information which in his terror or cunning he had failed to communicate? Hardcastle asked himself now, with much perplexity: or could it be that he had at last repaired his imbecile bungling, and once for all removed this most undesirable young woman out of the way? Ah! In that case the Squire felt he could afford to pay without stint, if indeed the service was complete and sure beyond doubt or question. In that case he knew he would certainly hear from Kinkman. Kinkman was not likely to do such a signal piece of service for his employer and miss his reward. And yet if Kinkman had walked in at that moment and demanded his villain's hire, the Squire would have haggled over it as usual, like a man holding a bone almost within reach of a hungry dog, meaning all the time to give it to him when he had gratified his whim to the full in making him jump for it to his own satisfaction.

However, Kinkman continued absent, and with every hour's delay the Squire's anxiety and wonder grew. It was a service, he repeated to himself, worth more money than he had ever offered; yes, much more, and money always turned the scale with Kinkman. Still, the hours passed into days and the man never came. The Squire tried to put it away from him, sure that a solution, a simple and favourable solution was bound to come; but when days became weeks, Hardcastle grew positively ill with suspense;

his confidence in his own plans and successful manipulation of other men's weaknesses began to forsake him. A kind of chill of coming disaster touched him for the first time, as though the air was charged in some mysterious way with danger which eluded all human vigilance. Hardcastle had moved forward all his life with a dexterous calculation which seemed almost unearthly, and now that he stood face to face with circumstances so menacing he was not the man to give up the fight or give terms to the enemy.

He would think it out, and the Manor was a better place for that than Fosseway.

He certainly had made an excellent bargain with the old lord, and could afford to make many concessions to the young Glenmore without in any way compromising his position or crippling his resources; and it would look well and show a fine spirit of generosity.

Having come to this conclusion, and thinking it worth while to consult his lawyer with a view to giving effect to his good intentions he made his way at once to Mr Jacobie's office.

'Ah!' the man of law said joyfully, 'I was just going out to find you.' There was a note of suppressed excitement in his voice and manner which did not escape Hardcastle. 'Did you meet a gentleman leaving as you came up?'

'No!' Hardcastle said, in some astonishment, 'I met no one.'

'You might have done so,' the man of law said, pleasantly, 'as he has just left. It is really most strange, most extraordinary!'

'Pardon me,' the Squire said, with a touch of formality, 'but I have not yet heard what is so strange and extraordinary.'

'No, of course not,' Jacobie said humbly, 'I am forgetting that you could not possibly know! No, of course not! Well, a representative of the firm of Maitland and Rockman has just been here to give notice of a claim upon the Fosseway Estate and all properties connected with it.'

'Certainly it is very strange, and in fact extraordinary

as you have said,' the Squire remarked, with no appearance of undue interest.

'Their claim,' continued the lawyer, 'runs up into many figures, and is really most surprising from such a firm.'

'The sources of their information must be well looked into,' Hardcastle said, with great composure; 'it is quite easy to be misled in such things, and it is hardly likely that they seriously intend to take up such a preposterous claim.'

'Perhaps, perhaps,' Jacobie remarked, 'but the reputation of the firm hardly lends itself to any supposition of make-believe.'

'Very true,' the Squire admitted thoughtfully; 'there is just this much ground for their action, that the property is now exceedingly valuable, much more so than anyone could foresee at the time it came into my hands; and there may be a suspicion in their minds that I was better informed as to its possible value at the time than I really was. In fact, I knew no more than did Glenmore of its real worth, and dealt as fair as a man could without expert information. But, in any case, Glenmore wished to leave the country, and it is doubtful if he would have done any differently even if he had known. The place had become hateful to him; and he desired to part with it and settle up old scores at any price. He was a man of no business sense, you understand, to whom the best things of life, in a financial way, had no proper value. He would have made the same concessions to any man willing to furnish him at the moment with ready money—it was all the same.'

'Ah, indeed, I see!' Jacobie remarked, looking much interested; 'it is just such careless men who furnish us with interesting cases!' and he smiled knowingly, intending a joke which Hardcastle failed to see.

'I came, in fact,' the Squire continued, 'to see if arrangements could be made for placing a good sum at the disposal of the young Glenmore, as a voluntary acknowledgement, you understand, of my old friend-

ship with his father; but, of course, I cannot admit any claim—cannot possibly do so!’

‘I could hardly advise such liberality under the circumstances,’ Jacobie said very thoughtfully; ‘besides, they threaten to raise questions touching the murder case for which Glenmore was tried. At least, so they inform me.’

‘They cannot really mean that,’ the Squire said hastily; ‘I am amazed at such a thing! The case was tried with the utmost care, and the finding of the court is well known.’

‘Yes, so I pointed out to them,’ Jacobie said.

‘And besides,’ remarked Hardcastle, ‘Glenmore is said to have died abroad somewhere, and—’

‘He is dead, then?’ Jacobie said promptly, with a note of query; ‘if he is dead they are, I presume, in that case aware of it; but he has left a full history of the case, it would seem, with documents and circumstances in detail, and the names of all persons concerned, many of whom are still living and can be called as witnesses. In fact, as I understand it, a great body of new evidence is in their possession.’

‘I don’t believe it,’ the Squire said, rising with nervous haste; ‘everything perished with him. They have no evidence.’

‘Then in that case we can beat them easily,’ Jacobie remarked, with marked satisfaction; ‘that is, of course, if we can prove what we say.’

It was a slip of the Squire’s; he had no intention of indicating, even to his solicitor, that Lord Glenmore had ‘perished,’ or that he had any information as to the place or manner of his death. Did Jacobie notice it? he wondered. He sincerely hoped he had not; in which hope he was quite disappointed—the lawyer not only noticed it, but also the momentary spasm of dismay which flashed over the Squire’s face, and which determined him at once to read up the long-past trial of Lord Glenmore.

Hardcastle, when he left, in spite of all his self-control was restless and ill at ease. He was experiencing several sensations that were quite new to him.

and for once, at least, was in doubt as to the best course to follow.

He would wait developments, he said, at the Manor, which was nearer London than Fosseway by many miles. The next hour he concluded he would return to Fosseway, and again he decided in favour of the quiet Yorkshire retreat. Finally, however, he convinced himself that he must return to the Hall, and attend to business of importance without delay.

A curious sense of isolation smote him, for which millions were no solace.

'My son, my son!' he repeated to himself, 'he will surely learn wisdom and return; surely he will return. I need him! I need him!'

MacAlpin was against him, he told himself, only because he was a visionary fool and unable to judge right in ordinary human affairs. He had never learned how to grow rich; could, in fact, never make the most of this world; and now, forsooth, he was trying to do his business for the next.

Bah! it was impossible to have patience with such men! Still, he had been a pleasant fellow enough when they were young together; and he was a gentleman, that was one thing in his favour; but, curse him, why did he leave him at such a pinch as this? Kinkman—Kinkman had much to gain, and he would turn up if he was above ground; gold was the sure lure for Kinkman, and he could just now be exceedingly useful. Sherwin—yes, Sherwin might be of service, if he did not consider it necessary to be so confoundedly respectable. No, he was not religious, even if he was a parson! Hardcastle was somewhat comforted when he remembered Sherwin's easy way of looking at life. Of all things, religion was hateful to the Squire; the mention of it made him gnash his teeth in a sort of dumb fury. It spoiled men, he said in explanation, for any large success; it imposed obligations, and fettered a man's liberty in dealing with his property or his employées in an absurd and intolerable manner.

It was in this mood that Hardcastle started for Fosseway. In his return there were no tender recol-

lections which touched him; it was his property, not his home; he was the master, but he was no man's friend, and he expected no kindness from any other. For, with all his getting, he had not got the love or trust of any human creature.

He felt it now, in some sort of way, but hardly with regret. It was a fact to be recognized, not deplored.

It was almost sun-down when the carriage turned into the drive. The leaves had fallen, and were now blown about in fitful gusts by the autumn winds, and the Hall came plainly into view three miles or more away.

Here and there a woodpecker drummed upon a tree, full of business and expectations. The squirrels were taking thought for the future and laying up stores against winter's storms, and now and again a partridge rose for a short flight. But the Squire was too much occupied with his own affairs to take interest in the affairs of birds and beasts. He was impatient to reach the Hall, and leaning out of the carriage he gave the men instructions how to shorten the way by about a mile. The short cut led them across the Long Walk, not far from the spot where the unfortunate woman was murdered so many years ago.

Did the master of Fosseway forget when he gave orders to drive that way, or did he do it in bravado, throwing down the gauntlet to Fate after the manner of the old-time Eric Hardcastle? If the latter, Fate seemed to take him at his word, for as he crossed the walk MacAlpin, the young Glenmore, and Oona rose from a rustic seat and turned homeward. A beautiful hound, an Irish setter of perfect breed and training, accompanied them. He was at the moment receiving caresses from Sandy, whose carriage-cot stood under the friendly shelter of a cluster of the large-leaved laburnum, and as the Squire passed the dog's bristles rose threateningly, and a low growl indicated his displeasure; the horses at the same moment shied a little, and the Squire, who was sitting back a little in the carriage to escape notice, leant forward to see the cause, and thus caught a glimpse of the crippled boy.

'Faither; faither!' Sandy called in a frightened whisper so soon as he got his breath, 'it's the Squire, it's the Squire, faither; and his face is white—oh, sae white, faither!—and his eyes on fire. I saw it mysel', faither, this minute!'

'Why, Count,' Oona said lovingly, laying her hand upon the dog. 'what has spoiled your temper to-day? what is it, my beauty?' and she laid her cheek against the splendid head of her dumb friend. Glenmore was almost jealous of the caress, but he liked the dog none the less that he had won the confidence of the beautiful girl before him.

Hardcastle had taken in the whole group at the moment Sandy was startled by his white face. MacAlpin and Glenmore he knew well enough; and some strange instinct, quickened by a touch of recollection, told him who the young lady was. The scene so suddenly sprung upon him filled him with mingled confusion and fury. His good angel pleaded for the child of his dead wife; her mother's face, which her own so strikingly resembled, for one brief moment flashed across the years. Had he met her alone, perhaps—he haps—who knows what might have been? But in the company of the men who were the enemies of all his interests, his soul was locked and barred against any whisper of justice or pity.

'What foul work, what deceit is here?' he muttered; 'what treachery?' Was the devil inspiring every hand raised against him? His son, Kinkman, MacAlpin, and this cursed girl, who had no right to live and least of all to be seen in open day within sight of Fosseway Hall! He felt at the moment that he would give half his life and all his wealth to be able to go out and take one terrible hour of revenge, and shoot them down like vermin! Why should a man when tempted and tried beyond endurance be denied the common right of brutes to work his will upon his enemies? Why indeed!

He had abstained hitherto from placing himself in the actual line of criminality, but now he had no hand he could command to strike. Sherwin was out of the

question for that sort of thing. If he had built high, he had laid his foundations deep—deep and true. They should stand, except God and the Devil were against him, working his ruin through the machinations of fools. It was almost unthinkable.

By the time he reached the Hall the storm had passed; his face was still as white as Sandy had seen it, but a decent veil had fallen over every manifestation of his worst self. Was he not, in spite of everything, Squire Hardcastle of Fosseyway Hall? And Squire Hardcastle of Fosseyway Hall he would remain in spite of Heaven or Hell.

Sherwin was delighted to see his friend back again. He had been six whole weeks in solitary possession of the Hall, all the guests having left, and was heartily weary of his own company. The society of grooms and keepers did not suffice for spice and interest, and even a call from the Reverend Hector Fordice added little to the pleasures of life. The minister was a man of serious deportment and views; he called, not knowing that the Squire was absent, and was so full of his plans that he opened his mind quite freely to Sherwin. There were cottages on the estate not fit for cattle-sheds; and the aged and sick in these miserable hovels must certainly perish in extreme wretchedness except repairs were made before the winter set in.

Sherwin was greatly impressed with the need of these poor cottagers, and the minister's sincerity.

'I really believe,' he said to the Squire after dinner, when seated cosily in the library, 'that he takes his duty quite seriously.'

Hardcastle smiled in spite of himself at the naiveté of the remark.

'Yes, I really do believe he means it!' Sherwin affirmed eagerly; 'and after all the Church, you know, is not a bad place for a man who can really do that.'

'I daresay,' the Squire said drily, sipping his wine thoughtfully, and watching Sherwin with some touch of wonder, 'but you have to be made that way to begin with, and have very small ambitions and no gentlemanly tastes.' He remarked after a pause: 'You could not play that role, Sherwin.'

'I don't know,' Sherwin said doubtfully, his courage vanishing under the Squire's scrutiny; 'I really do not know, and yet I have been thinking a good deal since you left. Do you know how long you have been away?'

'Yes, of course I do,' Hardcastle said; 'a little over six weeks: I have not lost my memory!'

'No, of course not,' Sherwin remarked quite earnestly, 'but I wish I could lose mine sometimes and find it again, free from some things that cling to it!'

'What do you mean?' Hardcastle answered, looking up sharply.

'Oh, I mean—that I have been an ass, and missed splendid chances! That fellow Fordice makes one feel uncomfortable: why, he believes in God so thoroughly that he actually maintains that the Deity is behind the consciousness of men who have even no knowledge of Him, and that there are "events of the soul" or what not which change all a man's life!'

'Oh bosh!' the Squire answered impatiently, rising and taking a turn about the room; 'he is an "event" which wise men may well dispense with. You are not fit to go alone yet, Sherwin!'

'Well, he really is a fine fellow—you ought to know him, Eric!'

'I know him!' Hardcastle answered with scorn; 'I have no desire to know such human trash!'

'But he thinks and says some quite fine things, and there may be something in it after all. He declares that many of the springs of human action are inspired by trust—*trust*, remember—and that men who dare not cry loud for God are crying under their breath for help and deliverance. Do you know, I think I believe that.'

'Deliverance from *what*?' Hardcastle said, turning round quickly and facing Sherwin.

'From—from—oh, from—I suppose from bad things generally,' he answered falteringly.

Hardcastle smiled bitterly. 'I had thought better of you, Sherwin; you have lost your head and have taken to romancing again. Fordice must have been

more impressive than I have ever known him to be, to have filled you with such rubbish as this! Deliverance indeed! A man has only to face the actual business of life to forget these visionary things, in which men like Fordice trade all the time. It's their business, no doubt. Here is a case for you—I am threatened with an action the aim of which is to sweep this estate out of my hands and out of the reach of my son.'

'How dreadful!' Sherwin said with quick sympathy and alarm, everything else retreating to the backward. 'And would it take all your wealth?' he asked eagerly.

The Squire smiled at the question. 'Oh, by no means,' he answered with comfortable assurance; 'a man takes care that his investments are beyond the reach of accidents of that sort. But this fine fellow Fordice would no doubt consider my defeat and ruin, could he see it accomplished, quite legitimate, and a Heaven-sent punishment for God knows what! That is the kind of man he is!'

Sherwin was aglasiast with horror, and looked absolutely appalled, as though the harmless minister was a messenger of Satan. 'Really, really,' he said in perplexity, 'you amaze me. I considered him not only respectable, but—but positively interesting! and of course judged that he had a due regard for the rights of property—which, of course, is the foundation of everything.'

Both men sipped their wine in silence for a time, busy with their own thoughts. 'Life is a strange game, after all,' Sherwin was saying to himself, 'and the rich man is little better equipped to play it than the poor man, in the last resort—very little better! Who would have thought it?'

Hardcastle was, for his part, owing to himself that he had a difficult problem to solve, more difficult than he had ever imagined. In fact, he had grown to consider his position absolutely secure and all his troubles almost ended. There was only this young girl, this most unnecessary young girl, and it should not have been a difficult matter to have removed her out of his

way. He felt like going out, even before he slept, to find MacAlpin and appeal to him once more on the ground of their old friendship to respect the present long-established order of things and consider the interests of his son. He even thought of trying to get the girl into his own hands. It might even be possible to marry her quietly to Sherwin and send them both, sufficiently provided for, to the ends of the earth! Ah! if he were only free to act himself and carry out reasonable plans, all would be well.

But that was just what he dare not do, and hence the situation was becoming every hour more threatening and exasperating to a man of Hardcastle's temperament. Was it possible, he asked himself, that the old lord found out the truth before he died? When he heard of his persistent search he had some misgivings, and hence Kinkman's mission to dog him to the death and secure any evidence he might have procured. Surely there could have been no serious failure? Still the question came back: Could Glenmore have learned the truth? Could he have found out that he had played him false? And even if he did know the truth he must surely have cursed his own folly, rather than the subtle and effective brain that had played so daringly for such high stakes and won! Still, it remained a bitter thought that Glenmore might, after all, have discovered his treachery before he died.

A sense of dread and horror crept into his mind; and in spite of his self-assurance and iron nerve he felt at times like a criminal under some strange compulsion obliged to look into the eyes of his victim, until in defiance of his deadly work the gaze seemed to follow every movement with a fearful, haunting insistence, when in truth they were for ever sealed to sure oblivion, like a burned-out star!

Yes, he would like to know whether Glenmore had found him out; it would make no difference, of course, but he would like to know!

He was thankful now that Reginald was out of the way; it was best so!—all things considered; he had

imbibed fantastic notions about honour and such-like that were in no way to a sensible man's advantage, but on the contrary embarrassing in dealing with the every-day affairs of life.

Of course, he repeated, it made no difference—could not possibly make any difference, but it would be a satisfaction to know if Glenmore died believing in him as his friend; his good opinion of him, if such was the case, might even be of some material service to him now. Heavens! It was a hard battle to fight!—he would fight it out all the same; but he would like to fight it in the open. A man likes to fight where he can see his foe. The thought came to the Squire with much bitterness; he felt himself an ill-used man. It did not occur to him that through his own devilish machinations a brave and honourable man had fought to the death in the dark, leaving his son a smirched reputation and a barren heritage. But Hardcastle seemed to have no capacity left for any appreciation of the other side of things touching himself. Perhaps under the pressure of painful circumstances some seeds of human justice might after all come to the surface; but that was a possibility quite out of the question at present.

His mind turned from every other consideration to the pressing question of how much Maitland knew, how much evidence he could produce, and, again, where had the link failed in that chain which he had forged with such skill and care? He looked across the room to where Sherwin was turning over the leaves of a book with much interest, evidently forgetting the existence of the master of Fosseway, and quite unconscious of the unspoken fear tugging at his heart.

Could he make use of him? Hardcastle wondered; he certainly had intended doing so, but it was doubtful if he could get any service out of him.

'He is evidently a spoiled parson,' the Squire said to himself with a touch of contempt, but it was by no means clear to what other use he could be put; he had nothing of the stuff out of which a good useful

villain could be fashioned. In short, Sherwin was disappointing, and the Squire was inwardly chafing over the discovery. He was an empty creature enough, he told himself—had always been so, easily moved by small vanities, and with whimsical notions about what he was pleased to call his ideas. 'His ideas!' murmured the Squire scornfully, looking across the large room to where his visitor was happily ensconced in a deep arm-chair, engrossed in the perusal of the rare volume which he had unearthed, and as absolutely oblivious of Hardcastle's existence as though he were in another planet.

'A man,' mused the Squire, 'without money sense is useless for any practical purpose; you cannot buy his services however much you require them, and great issues may be lost because some fool has not learned how to make the best use of this world's best things. If he were only a commonly wide-awake fellow, he might contrive to marry the girl on the slightest hint, and take her anywhere he pleased, well provided for the rest of his days; but no man living could beat sense of that sort into such brains,' and he threw another contemptuous look across the room in the direction of the unfortunate Sherwin.

It began to dawn upon the Squire a few days afterwards that he was under surveillance, in a very unobtrusive but really skilful way. It came as a snock, but instead of depressing him it roused the fighting instincts of the man to the highest pitch. He went out more than he had done for years, in sheer defiance; he rode and drove everywhere over his large estate. He made calls which he considered highly judicious; he visited the works, and shewed marked interest in the great concerns from which he derived so much of his wealth. He even offered to hear complaints—an unheard-of condescension from Hardcastle, and actually shewed such consideration for the Reverend Hector Fordice's opinions as to order the repairs of the cottages of which he had complained in his absence; and to crown the edifice of his good intentions, he thoughtfully stopped at

two cottages to ask after the welfare of men injured in a serious accident. Sherwin's 'ideas' got a very happy turn under such pleasant circumstances, and it is certain if the Squire had just then stood for Parliament he might have carried the popular vote; so strong and general was the good opinion his humane consideration had awakened that the general goodwill came back to him as an encouragement and inspiration. He was actually for a time touched by a vision of a larger and better life; his mental outlook was higher and finer than he had known since he had left his boyish wonder-land behind him.

It all came to him as a novel experience. It was evident that a man of great wealth might, if he had a proper depth of human brotherhood in him, make this world a sort of earthly paradise, and inspire men with hope and courage in the battle of life. In fact, he began to wonder if it was not worth while trying it; and felt something very like regret that he had not discovered the fascinations of such human sunshine sooner. The village life was all of his own creating; no man, he was sure, could deny him that praise; he had, by sheer right of his own penetration, rescued the whole district from stagnation and clothed it with progress and prosperity, and yet he had never before had any assurance that he had touched or won the goodwill of the community. The sensation was decidedly agreeable, and quite unlooked for; and he prized it as something rare and curious—but it was just a trifle late! That was all.

The after-glow of this happy mood remained with him for days, and had not spent itself when one evening after dinner, a couple of gentlemen of the neighbourhood being present and the conversation flowing freely—for the wine was excellent—a servant brought in a letter which he said had been left at the lodge an hour before by a stranger, and the keeper had brought it over as the messenger seemed to consider it urgent.

The Squire looked at the missive with misgivings as it lay on the spotless silver, but with a decided disinclination to touch it. It had evidently passed

through hands little used to dainty ways, and had an unwholesome air about it. His first impulse, for this reason, was to ask the man to put it in the fire; but on second thought he concluded that in spite of his disgust he should open it; and directing him to take it to his study, he excused himself and retired to examine it.

The moment his hand touched it a strange sense of coming ill smote him, and his late fastidious repulsion became changed into an overmastering terror.

He threw the letter down with a shrinking horror, and recoiled from it; and yet he knew by some strange intuition that he must read it, whatever came of it, and that to destroy it unread was more than he dare attempt.

The letter was unsigned and ill enough constructed, but Kinkman was writ large all over it. Yes, Kinkman! the Squire murmured in horrified amazement. Kinkman, who had reaped such a golden harvest: Kinkman to do this! What black ingratitude! what blind folly!

'So this is the man I have trusted, employed, and enriched!' he said to himself; 'this bitter, vicious message, with its horrible charges, its bitter, vicious, savage snarl! and withering threats! Heavens! to think of it, and from such as he!'

He rose and paced the room; movement of some sort seemed necessary to give him power to collect himself. He crushed the ugly- dirty scrap of paper in his hand now without shrinking, so much easier is it to face the known than the unknown. Fairly face to face with his evil fate, all his fighting instincts came back to him.

'Well! let the deluge come, and we shall see—we shall see!' he told himself with a touch of his old courage; 'yes, we shall see!'

True, his world was changed at a stroke—who could have thought it? His pleasant fancies that had made him forgetful of his true condition were but as a dream or a shadow, flitting for a moment through his brain—to vanish for ever.

Now, he thought, he knew the reason for the surveillance he had been subjected to; this wretch whom he had used at so much cost was at the bottom of it—at least, so he thought; but in this we know he was mistaken, for the whereabouts of Kinkman were at that moment as unknown to Maitland as to Hardcastle himself.

It was in reality this fact which saved the Squire from the grip of the law. Maitland had no desire to risk defeat a second time in his defence of the character of Lord Glenmore, and was in no haste to move until he had the whole evidence under his hand. Kinkman was simply playing his own game in his own way with all the ferocity of his nature.

The Squire was reminded that he had guests by the peals of laughter which came to him from the other room. He would rather have had it otherwise; but he was determined that no man should see any sign of weakness in Eric Hardcastle, come what might.

Perhaps his courage and self-control had never been put to a severer test than in facing his guests with cheerful make-believe for the remainder of that evening. But he succeeded to his own satisfaction, and no man could have imagined that his pulse beat faster nor that he was acting pleasant host with the sword of Damocles suspended over him by a single hair.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BULLY OF THE WORKS

KINKMAN'S recovery looked doubtful enough for a long time, and even Nola's long experience hardly prepared her for his return to health, nor did he ever regain his old vigour of mind or body. It was quite true, as he told the Squire, that the terrible experience he passed through the night of Lord Glenmore's assassination had shattered his nerves and taken years out of his life.

In fact, it was only the overwhelming temptation of a large bribe, and the chance which he saw of outwitting the Squire and beating him at his own game, which lured him from his safe obscurity to risk everything upon one last effort to secure all he desired.

It failed, as we know, at every point, and nothing could convince the half-demented creature that his failure to carry out his infamous plans was not owing to some treachery on the Squire's part, aided by the devilish strength and ferocity of Donald MacAlpin.

Any misgivings which lingered in his mind on this point were settled beyond doubt by the refusal of the bank to cash the draft Hardcastle had given him.

It was the last straw which broke down whatever self-control remained and, coupled with his extreme physical exhaustion, threw him into a raging fever which well-nigh ate up his life.

And now that the fever had left him, and the events which preceded the attack came back bit by bit, his disordered wits could think of nothing but revenge, and had his brain and opportunity been equal to his malice, Hardcastle would have had a short shrift and a fearful end.

But the man's mind could never again work out long connected plans, and his body, save in spurts

of insane fury, was a poor or enfeebled instrument of his malicious desires.

The forester and his family were kind to the sick stranger, without questions of any sort: they would have been kind to the unthankful, but Kinkman was not without a species of gratitude, and in truth they had fitted into his plans and unconsciously served his ends.

Now in his recovery, his helplessness appealed to them; he would tell them all about it, they said among themselves, when he was stronger and better. So gentle and thoughtful he seemed as he progressed towards convalescence, and so carefully and cunningly did he conceal his real character, that he soon won their good opinion, and all the frightful sayings and acts which had shocked them at the time of his delirium were forgotten or set down to the severity of the disease and not to the depravity of the man.

So soon as he could walk out into the woods, and had learned the direction of Ruthven Towers and Fosseway Hall, he grew gloomy and restless, but then that was quite natural in a forlorn creature in such a miserable plight, with nothing to occupy his mind save his own unhappy thoughts.

'We have never heard your name,' the forester's wife said one day, as she brought him some savoury mess specially prepared for him.

He looked up sharply, so sharply that the good woman recoiled, for an instant, with something of the old repulsion. Her look recalled him to himself, and he answered pleasantly enough: 'Dare, ma'am, Dare—Robert Dare, at your service.'

'Well, Mr Dare,' she said with great kindness, 'be careful not to take cold, remember you are not yet strong. This is a pleasant spot, but exposed and often wind-swept; and my husband always says when the wind is in this quarter and he shivers in the keen air: 'The Fosseway ghost is abroad to-night!'" She spoke in a half-whisper which startled Kinkman in spite of himself; he rose hastily, and looked about him.

'Oh, not here!' she said; 'no ghost ever comes here, only the biting wind which stings and searches your very marrow, when the poor thing wanders. It is awful,' she added.

'Awful?' he answered; 'it's nonsense, woman—sheer nonsense!'

'Maybe,' she said quite humbly, 'plain folk of the woods cannot know much, but the murder was quite real! See,' she said, pointing towards Fosseway, 'if you only knew the district you could almost note the exact place where the woman met her end, for they have cut down two fine trees that sheltered the spot to let the blessed sunshine sweeten and purify the place of death if it can. You see the gaps in the avenue, do you not?'

'I see nothing,' the man said ungraciously; 'it's nonsense—rank nonsense!'

'Maybe the ghost,' she said again, 'but not the murder—Oh no, not the murder, for Lord Glenmore was tried for his life and only got off because they could not find out all about it to convict him. And many think he never did it after all, and was quite innocent, poor gentleman! although he stood his trial like a common criminal. My father,' she added, 'was a wise man if he was without book-learning, and he always said murder could not be hidden, and that those who lived long enough would see justice done.'

'Your father's name was what?' he asked a trifle eagerly.

'David Cospatric,' his daughter answered proudly; 'he was a good man, Mr Dare, and a wise; all who ever knew him said so.'

'I make no doubt, ma'am,' he said politely as he turned away towards the woods.

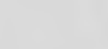
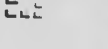
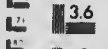
When he got there he allowed himself to say quite other things, under his breath, coupled with the name of David Cospatric, which are best left unrecorded.

'What could Cospatric know of the matter?' he asked, and answered his own question with absolute conclusiveness. 'The murderer?' he repeated scornfully; 'it is not the man who strikes the blow that is



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the murderer, but the man who plans the business and profits by its accomplishment. Her ghost should dog Eric Hardcastle,' he said, 'not me! No, not me; and even so a man should fear no woman, living or dead, nor——'

He started, with a smothered exclamation, his face drawn and livid—a fir cone had fallen from a tall tree with a soft thud near by, and the wretched man's nerves, for all his daring, were not proof against such a trifle.

Henceforth, he avoided the hill overlooking the valley but took long walks elsewhere. The forester never met him in his rambles; but he noticed how wearied and worried he looked when he returned. One morning, some time after this, as he did not appear as usual, he sent his son to the room, thinking he might be ill again. The room was empty; the bed had not been slept in; but instead a handful of money, with a word of thanks, made it clear that their mysterious guest had left as strangely as he came. He was evidently capable of gratitude of a kind which satisfied himself; his inmost nature was not wholly starved, that is to say, he had no touch of meanness in material things. He would not scruple to cut a man's throat and relieve him of his purse if it came in the way of business, and was well worth doing, but on the other hand, he could give to a man in dire need, though in a soulless way, and he expected Heaven to set down the one act against the other with a balance in his favour. To do otherwise was in his opinion a miscarriage of justice against a man who was doing his best—his very best.

It was not long before he turned up at the Hall in one of his strange disguises; in fact, it took very little to transform him so that few could discover him under ordinary circumstances. It was only when he became excited or forgetful of his part that he gave himself away. He was a born actor, and his facial contortions alone, even without his shrewd wit, might have made his fortune upon the stage. He had been several times to Fosseway, and though told that the Squire

had gone abroad, he had reasons of his own for doubting the information; and he came again and again at all sorts of odd times, hoping for better success.

At last Sherwin offered to see the old man, and listen to his story.

Yes, the Squire had gone abroad, and all communications for him were addressed in care of his London solicitor.

Kinkman's eyes, in spite of himself, gleamed viciously. He was satisfied that Sherwin was speaking the truth, and abundantly sure that Sherwin, whoever he was, had not been taken into confidence by Hardcastle.

The only satisfaction he had was in the thought that Hardcastle was afraid—yes, afraid! The Master of Fosseyway had at last been touched by terror; he, Kinkman, wretched and miserable as he was, had power to inflict misery equal, he hoped, to his own. The Master of Fosseyway, indeed! It was in his hands to see that Eric Hardcastle was Master of Fosseyway no longer! Yes, in his hands. 'And when do you expect him back, Mister?' he asked with humble eagerness.

'I cannot tell——' Sherwin said, a little doubtfully as it occurred to him that he had no precise information on that point, 'perhaps in the spring.'

'Oh, in the spring,' the strange creature remarked, with a touch of sarcasm, 'Fosseyway is evidently not as healthy as it once was for Eric Hardcastle!' The name had slipped out with a touch of bitterness, and Sherwin noticed it with some wonder. 'The Squire,' he commented to himself after the man had gone, 'has some strange acquaintances, if this old fellow is one of them.'

Kinkman on the whole was pleased with his visit. He concluded that at last Hardcastle was aware of his danger, and the new sense of power filled him with satisfaction.

Following bye-paths, well known to himself, he was soon a good two miles from the Hall. It was calm and mild for the season, the sun was warm, and

selecting a pleasant spot, he sat down to rest and think. He was weaker, owing to his recent illness, than he knew, and soon he was asleep.

How long he slept he could not tell, but the sound of voices quite near at last called him back to the business in hand, and cautiously peering through the undergrowth, he was almost petrified with amazement to see Oona walking with the young Glenmore, his arm through his horse's bridle, the animal keeping pace as though he were included in the conversation, and appreciated his master's confidence.

They had not more than passed his hiding-place when the bark of a dog attracted his attention, some distance away; and when he dared to look again it seemed as though all the furies of hell had been suddenly let loose in the tortured soul of this miserable creature—for there was MacAlpin, with a fowling-piece across his arm and a beautiful dog working for game in a field beyond him.

For a time he was a sheer demented being, venting his malice in dumb fury upon himself, as he could reach no other. He dug his fingers into the earth, and tore up the coarse grass by handfuls, he clawed his hair and beard with demoniac fierceness that was appalling in its repulsive horror, and sunk his teeth into his own flesh until the blood came. Then, as he became aware from the dog's bark that the hateful MacAlpin was moving in his direction, he bounded to his feet, and ran, as fleet-footed almost as the hound, notwithstanding his years and condition, until he was far away out of sight and hearing.

Soon afterwards MacAlpin and the dog came out upon the path, and met Oona and Glenmore returning near where Kinkman had rested. The dog caught up the scent with an angry growl, and started to follow; but his master at once recalled him, and neither ever knew what evil eyes had been upon them at that supreme moment of self-revelation and mutual understanding.

The industrial character of the place had become increasingly interesting to Aynsworth, while he

waited for the slow movements of Maitland, in unravelling the story of his father's misfortunes. He rode over daily to the works, where he never grew weary watching the men perform the miracle of transforming the shapeless lumps of iron into the bars and rods of commerce. Long years of familiarity with such things have taken the wonder out of it, but the age has well supplied us with new marvels peculiar to our own times.

True, the way lay past Janet's cottage, where much had happened, as we know, to change her opinion of the young laird, as well as of Donald MacAlpin.

Apart from the ever-increasing attraction of Janet's cottage, however, Aynsworth was greatly interested in his fellow-creatures and in the tremendous possibilities for the country which lay within the range of their skill and labours.

One day he asked the manager to allow him to enter the works as a learner, seriously to take up the business of mastering such details as he might, and become a workman with the rest.

Middleton smiled, well-pleased at the young man's request. He was not a native of the district, and its local gossip had no earthly interest for him; still, he thought it best to consult the Squire, as it was quite a new departure to admit a gentleman on a common footing into the works.

When he drove over to the Hall, however, he found the Squire absent, and not likely to return for some months. He had received no information of it, of any sort, and was a trifle nettled to find no message left for him, written or otherwise. Hardcastle had fallen into the way of using men's brains and bodies as stepping-stones to his own progress, without taking much account of their individuality, or their likes or dislikes. To do him justice, it never occurred to him that they might desire any further recognition. Middleton was the real head of the concern. It was his brain which directed the business which was coining gold for the Squire. Hardcastle knew just enough not to interfere, so when Middleton decided now with-

out seeing him to accede to the request of Aynsworth, he did no more than he would have done in any case, even had the Squire been at home. A new age was opening before the vision of mankind, for those who could see it. Steam power was about to revolutionize the world then, as electrical power and ships of the air are destined to revolutionize it in years to come. The wooden walls of England, enshrined in song and story and forever linked with the names of Britain's best and bravest sons, were then soon to give place to iron-built and steam-propelled monsters of destruction, the full value of which has yet to be tested in some great sea-fight of the future.

Middleton was a silent man, of marked perceptions and broad outlook. All his mind and soul was in his work; it was more than a money-making concern to him; it was a bit of destiny, crude enough, but reaching out in its effects to the uttermost ends of the earth and opening up illimitable possibilities of expansion and human progress far and near.

Some men would, no doubt, have set him down as a mere visionary and dreamer. He was not that; he was a man with an intellect as keen as a falchion, and yet linked with a touch of poetic insight, a man inspired to work in iron and steel, and to grasp the soul of things material in all their ramifications, until they touched and transformed human history.

Small wonder that he took a fancy to the young man whose frank astonishment and interest was so genuine and hearty. It was something quite different to the business bond which alone bound him to Hardcastle. Aynsworth was a man after his own heart, a man who saw, not only wealth in the concern, but industrial and national progress, and human betterment.

The men soon learned to respect Aynsworth's understanding of the business, as well as his thews and sinews, which, as we know, were quite respectable. 'He is a man, every inch of him,' a brawny fellow said one day soon after he came, 'even if he is, as they say, some kind of a lord.'

'Hast felt the weight o' his hand?' a sly companion said with a mischievous twinkle in a pair of honest grey eyes. This innocent question produced general mirth, for it was put to the bully of the works, who for some time had been more careful of his conduct than formerly. It was rather a tender spot to touch upon, but the incident was then a few weeks old, and is worth telling. Aynsworth in passing through the works one day found the big fellow initiating a newcomer into the ways of the establishment. The lad had been sent on some fool's errand, and when he returned empty-handed the bully proceeded to punish him for the general entertainment. With his open hand he would strike him on the side of his head, and catching him with the other hand, send him back again. He had practised it so long that he had brought it to such perfection that it was considered a first-class performance to see him tumble a newcomer from side to side at will, without allowing him to go over. The youth stood it for some time without resistance, as others had done, but at last his passion mastered him, and he flew at the big fellow like a mad creature, which soon resulted in his being felled with a clenched fist.

'Shame!' called Aynsworth from a distance, as he walked towards them. 'Shame!' The bully turned upon him with a look of supreme contempt.

'What business is it of yours, Mister?' he demanded threateningly, 'and who the devil has sent for you to lay down the law to the men in these works?'

'No one sent for me,' Aynsworth answered, meekly enough; 'all the same, I am here, you see, and I say, shame on such brutal conduct!'

'Go to the devil!' the man said fiercely, stepping up to him 'and mind your own business, and leave me to mine!' and without another word he struck out with his left hand so swiftly that there was not time enough to evade it. Aynsworth staggered under the blow and before he could recover himself the champion of the works struck him again so deftly with his right that he went down with great force.

'Better leave this kind of little exercise to me!' the

boldly said, well-pleased with himself, tucking up his sleeves with great care, while he winked knowingly at the little crowd of admiring comrades standing round.

Aynsworth, when he got up, took his coat off as though he wished to join in the exercise; which seemed exceedingly interesting to the champion of the works. The fellow was so delighted that he came dancing up to him with great glee.

'Got hurt, Mister?' he asked pleasantly, 'sorry; it could not be helped; when John Hammerman strikes that's always what happens! Never mind, we can call the carriage, if you would like to go home, and promise never to do it again!'

'Look out!' Aynsworth said for answer advancing towards him, to the fellow's astonishment, 'and perhaps you had better call the ambulance.'

'Well, I'm blowed!' he said with a touch of admiration; 'ye're game enough any way, and now that I come to think of it, I hate to hurt you. Go,' he admonished, 'and bear no malice! You won't? well, well then!' and another left-hander came as quick as lightning.

Aynsworth caught it this time, just as quickly, and striking with all his force Hammerman went down like a stricken bullock to the amazement of the little crowd.

When he got up he was like an enraged animal. His character was at stake; to be knocked down ignominiously before the men he ruled with brutal severity was not to be endured.

He rushed at his antagonist, blinded by passion and mortified vanity, with only the reckless purpose of overwhelming his opponent by sheer force. But when he came within striking distance he went down again. It was skill against strength, skill backed by a well-balanced power, against strength blinded by passion.

When he got up again, he had lost much of his courage and all his cheerfulness. He tried with more care to get near, but the heart was taken out of him by his unexpected defeat; and again he went down with such force that he was in no hurry to get up.

'Here! one of you!' Aynsworth called out to the men, 'get him on his feet, will you?'

The men sprang forward to obey, but the champion seemed dazed and helpless. 'It's not fair!' he stammered, when he found his tongue, 'he has learned the thing, he has! I never had a lesson in my life, never one, so help me—no never one! I never said I could fight them that have learned! No, I never did. You know I never did?' looking about him questioningly.

'Let him sit down,' Aynsworth said, as he drew his coat on.

'It's quite new, sir!' he said, looking up helplessly.

'Perhaps it is,' Aynsworth answered, 'and we shall call the game off, and say no more about it.'

'Yes, sir,' Hammerman assented humbly.

'And there must be no more tormenting of lads or men in these works, Hammerman, do you understand?'

For answer the fellow held out his hand, a trifle unsteadily. Aynsworth understood, and gave it a friendly grip. 'Some time I'll give you a lesson or two on the science of the business, Hammerman,' he said. 'To know *how* is often very useful. You strike with the force of a battering-ram or a steel-hammer, but a little skill won't hurt, you know!'

'Thank you, sir,' Hammerman said, gratefully, smiling through the grime, vanquished but happy at the prospect of the distinction promised him.

Seeing Middleton in the distance, returning from somewhere, Aynsworth hastened to meet him, and both men walked away, leaving Hammerman and his admirers to their own meditations.

'Who would have thought it?' one of them said, looking after Aynsworth, 'now if it had been a fellow like Donald MacAlpin, I could understand it, but he don't look like it, no-how, that he don't!'

'Mav be!' Hammerman said, dolefully, 'but I happens to know what it feels like after standing up to him! That's different you know!' The laugh was general, and in spite of himself, the champion joined in it.

Hammerman spent the remainder of the day on a heap of waste in a corner of the engine-house. Some of them thought he was asleep, but others concluded he was only taking time to adjust himself to his new position, and trying to find out how it all came about. It was a new kind of stock-taking for the bully of the works, but he worried through it in his own way, safely enough.

It was soon after this that Aynsworth decided to secure rooms in the town near the works and have them fitted up, soldier-fashion, for his use.

But Munroe, his trusty servant and companion in all his campaigns was far from being satisfied with the new arrangement. It could not be made, in his opinion, to harmonise with his master's rank and dignity, a point of great importance in the mind of the worthy fellow.

It was bad enough for the young laird to go into the Fosseway works and soil his hands like a common labourer, 'but to gang into the town and live by his sel' in a pitman's cottage was far waur—it was no' fit for a gentleman, indeed no!

'Come, Munroe!' Aynsworth said, with a show of severity, 'an officer who cannot camp with his men is uncommonly poor stuff; and besides, they are right good fellows—when they are sober!'

'Just so!' the trusty Highlandman said, nothing daunted, '—and when they are drunk—yes, when they are drunk?'

'Well,' Aynsworth said, 'when they are drunk they are just like other men in like condition, soldiers for instance—'

'Vera' true, vera' true, Master Aynsworth,' Munroe said with an air of perplexity. 'It's an awfu' bad practice, for it empties a man o' strength and sense, and fills him with foolishness and imbecility. I hae not been drunk for the last seven year cam' New Year, but I ken a' about it!'

'Why, I had forgotten you ever were drunk, Munroe,' Aynsworth said penitently, 'seven years is a long time. I wonder what the next seven years have in store for us!'

'We are comrades, you and I Munroe, it is not just master and man, is it? We have gone through too much together to allow artificial barriers of any sort to come between us; and I do not mind telling you that the most trying part of the road has yet to come.'

'Surely not!' the old servant said, with keen interest, all his sympathies alive with intense concern; 'I thought the worst was long past, and that it was only the matter of a little time until a' would come right!'

'Perhaps,' Aynsworth said, somewhat gloomily, for in fact he felt more perplexed and downcast than he had been for a long time. 'Perhaps! but who can tell?' Munroe was silent, content to serve, and wait for the cloud to lift. The pitman's cottage was made ready without further protest.

The truth was Aynsworth longed to be farther away from Fosseway Hall; the sight of the old place kept alive hopes that might never be realized. Then he desired above all things to measure his strength in the battle for existence with men of the million toilers, and to stand, man to man in the ranks. And let it be confessed also that he hoped to find Janet's cottage not so temptingly near in his daily walks.

The first night in his new quarters was unlike any other night he could remember. He had almost all he had striven for for long years under his hat, and yet he never felt more uncertain of the future. His desire to right his father's wrongs had been nurtured into a passion. It was the one object for which he lived; no other ambition or interest had hitherto succeeded in luring him from his path, which was the path of duty and honour. It was only a few of the mysterious experiences which came to him on his way home that this passion became chastened and softened; and now it seemed ready to perish under a passion more powerful and compelling still. He spread out on the deal table before him a bundle of papers he had received that day from Maitland, and read and re-read them with the utmost care and eagerness.

The old lawyer approached the matter with perfect calmness and impartiality. It was his opinion that Eric Hardcastle was at last aware of the hopelessness

of his case, and dare not even face the uncovering of his doubtful business transactions with Aynsworth's father, much less the tragedy of the Long Walk. He might never return to Fosseyway, but he could, even by his absence create no end of difficulty, and delay all proceedings indefinitely, and perhaps force them to offer some terms of settlement. It would be like the old fox, the lawyer said bitterly, to oblige them under some pressure of pity or necessity to let him escape the just consequences of his villainy.

If they could find the miserable creature who had been his tool and accomplice, and get him into their hands, they might be able to compel the Squire under threat of a serious charge to make restitution in full. Aynsworth, Maitland thought, should not scruple to take this course. As to leaving Reginald Hardcastle a poor man, that need not be if a fair return on his father's own money invested were allowed him, if he cared to have it made over to him. It might thus be possible to clear the fair name of Glenmore without much publicity; and some grace might even be extended to the wretched man who was induced to commit the crime for which the old lord was tried so long ago. As Maitland said pathetically, he was an old man himself, and as he had defended his father throughout those frightful days now long past, he would like to live to see the case settled with credit to Lord Glenmore's memory, and profit to his son.

It seemed all clear enough as stated by Maitland, all possible also, if fortune favoured them. But the lawyer had overlooked some of the most difficult and essential points which were just at this moment driving Aynsworth to the point of despair.

'Not one word of Oona,' he said, as he pushed the papers from him, 'and yet she is this man's daughter! Surely Maitland has forgotten! If my father's name is worth vindicating, this monster of cruelty and greed must also vindicate the name of this sweet girl, whom he has so deeply wronged.'

For Reginald Hardcastle, nothing could be done save what money could do; and how little money could do in an affair of life and honour all men knew.

Aynsworth paced the floor of his narrow lodging in a fever of hope and longing and despair, which mixed and mingled like colours in a rainbow before fading into nothingness.

'To think of it! To think of it!' he murmured to himself in the stillness of the night,—'One man sins, and many men and women suffer, who are wholly innocent of his sins; not even a transformation of such a man as Eric Hardcastle at this late hour of his existence into an honest and worthy member of society,—if such could be,—could lift the actual burden which his crimes have laid upon others. God Himself cannot recall the results of a man's acts, or make crooked things straight in a man's life, this side of time. For the rest—who knows?' To hunt down a criminal was one thing; to hunt down to the bitter end Oona's father was quite another.

Had his own father known all, could it have been possible for him to know all, he would never have burdened him with a task so terrible; and yet that task was laid upon him. Nothing could obliterate from his mind the fact that he was the son of a man over whom the gallows had once cast its ignominious shadow, nor that it was Eric Hardcastle who was responsible for that terrible situation.

And yet we know, as Aynsworth came to know in the end, that with all Hardcastle's greed and heartlessness, he had not deliberately planned this crowning horror. The coming of the unfortunate woman with the little child was wholly unlooked-for, indeed, it was the last thing he could have imagined. He had to meet a sudden emergency. To be found out, discredited, disgraced and shown in his true colours meant absolute extinction on the very verge of a great success. He never once blamed himself for the course he followed, nor could he ever understand why any rational person could blame him in the light of all the circumstances. He never intended to connect Lord Glenmore with the murder; but if that gentleman blundered into the hastily contrived meshes of his plans, it was no business of his to throw himself away to save him from the consequences of his

own ill-luck. Had Glenmore been found guilty and suffered the extreme penalty of the law it would have been a pity in a way, but it would after all, have saved much trouble and many anxious days—at least, so thought the Squire, when reviewing the past!

There was always some little mishap, some saving clause, marring the life and fortunes of Eric Hardcastle.

But that was not the young laird's opinion just now. Evil was to him abundantly triumphant in the person of this heartless man, and justice was battling against overwhelming odds, notwithstanding the old lawyer's excellent opinions.

What would Oona say? What would she think? he said to himself, as he laid before him the miniature of her mother, which he had reserved when he handed over Hardcastle's picture with the papers to Maitland. What would she feel if she knew that he had this priceless treasure in his possession? And how could he ever tell her without also telling her a story so sad and painful as to cloud all her days?

'Need she ever know?' he asked himself. Might the picture not awaken some dim, childish recollections, and bring back sights well and mercifully forgotten? And then, had he any right to win her for his own heart's treasure, he of all men, with the solemn vow laid upon him? And who dare tell her of her father's crimes and cruelty? Not he, certainly!

Would it not be enough if this miserable tool of Hardcastle's could be found and compelled to own his guilt, as Maitland suggested, and let Hardcastle keep his ill-gotten wealth? Why should she ever know of his evil fame? And then—and then—might he not win her, and spare her all the pain and misery of a history so bitter?

Through the long night, the young man battled with a great resolve, a great renunciation and a great love, until the witchery of the dawn turned the grey reaches of the river in the distance into purple and gold and opal; and the splendour of a new Heaven and a new Earth in a higher and nobler purpose filled the soul of Clifford Aynsworth.

CHAPTER XVII

WATERLOO

MEANWHILE, great events of world-wide importance were going forward, with supreme indifference to the hopes and fears of individual men. Aynsworth knew full well what the coming struggle meant, and knew that at such times of stress and turmoil the little world of men's private wrongs counted for nothing before the great juggernaut of war which now moved on with solemn terror and garments rolled in blood toward the final agony.

It was the evening of the day of Waterloo. The French army was in full retreat and hopeless confusion after in vain performing prodigies of valour for a leader who knew not when to die. What need to recount the oft-told tale? It is sufficient to know that on this eventful day the Great War Wizard who had at last staked his fortunes upon a single cast and had perforce to 'stand the hazard of the die' found his kingdom numbered and finished, and he, the erstwhile master of millions, henceforth naught but a broken and beaten man. All resistance was over before the sun went down, and the brave army of France had, for the most part, become a mere panic-stricken mob, weary and dispirited, driven before a triumphant foe. Wellington, with a few officers, rode forward in the fast-gathering darkness over the hard-won field, the confused murmur of the fleeing host greeting them on the still air, as they picked their way among the abandoned cannon, muskets, ammunition and baggage-waggons, dead horses and dead and dying men. It was a scene never-to-be-forgotten. The moon had risen before their return, and the sight was weird and appalling, even to men enured to carnage. The roar of the artillery had ceased, and in the hush that followed, the soft shadows of the moon fell upon many

a white face streaked with the grime of battle, and stamped in their last stillness with the fierce passions of the fight. It was a ghastly and a ghostly scene upon which the stars of that June night looked down.

The horses picked their way with singular carefulness over the human wreckage left upon the field. It was here, someone said, that the Guards with the Greys and Inniskillens charged the Cuirassiers, 'And somewhere here Picton met his death!' said a young officer, whose sense of personal loss could not be obliterated by a great victory. Wellington overheard the remark, and said sadly, 'This, gentlemen, is the terrible side of war, which all sane men loathe and dread. It is "after the battle" which tries the stoutest heart. It is the terrible price we must pay for national security and honour and peaceful progress, and woe betide the man or nation that forces the merciless arbitrament of the sword upon a peace-loving people!'

Two of the younger officers had dropped behind to converse with greater freedom, when one of their horses, neighing, was answered from some distance by another. Both men pulled up sharply.

'Listen!' said one of them. 'I fear the worst for Hardcastle! My horse and his were stable-mates, and that whining is the sorrel's as sure as fate! and Hardcastle cannot be far off!'

'Don't be so gloomy, Poltimore,' his companion said; 'let us hope the best!'

'Hope anything you please, my friend,' the sometime gay Poltimore answered wearily; 'but Hardcastle was "fey" to-day, if ever a man was fey,'—and then he hummed the old ballad under his breath:

'We'll turn again,' said good Lord James;

'But no,' said Rothiemay,

'My steed's trepanned, my bridle's broke—
'I fear this day I'm fey!'

'Oh, don't,' the other man said, 'those devilish old rhymes get on a man's nerves and take the heart out of him!'

'Ah, there you are mistaken!' Poltimore said; 'a man inspired by such thoughts, however unwelcome, goes into action as light-hearted as into a ball-room, and fights his very best to the music of that high call to the halls of Vallhalla!'

'Heavens!' Nesselrode answered, 'it sounds heathenish and unnatural; I prefer to fight like a Christian, and keep death at a proper distance as long as may be; and in spite of all this gibberish, I expect to find Hardcastle with some fight in him yet!'

'I hope your expectations may be realized!' Poltimore answered, as he peered in the uncertain light at every object near them. 'Listen!' he said. The stillness was broken, as he spoke, by a groan, and the struggle of a wounded animal, and presently by voices, for others, like themselves, were searching for friends, not knowing how they might find them. Another faint whinny guided them to the spot—yes, it was the sorrel, cruelly wounded and dying, and Hardcastle near by, apparently dead, with a French colour in his grasp, and the colour-bearer stark beside him.

Poltimore raised him tenderly in his arms, and tried to get a little brandy between the clenched teeth. It was useless, but the effort roused the dying man, like one falling asleep being called back a moment from the land of forgetfulness. In the uncertain light, it seemed as though his eyes opened wide in wonder, as if he were about to speak, but speech and thought had alike passed into another state of being. Whatever complaint or protest he might have made against the hardness or injustice of his lot remained unspoken. Taken all in all, it was a brave ending to a brief career; perhaps the ending above all others he would have chosen, had the choice been offered him, under the cruel circumstances of his life.

Be that as it may, the calm look of content which made beautiful his face in death was often spoken of by those who saw him reverently laid to rest, with other brave men, on the field of Waterloo.

But all this belongs to a far-past time, and the hand

of nature for whole generations has touched the soil, once saturated with the best blood of many nations, into smiling and fruitful fields; even the wild flowers, in profuse splendour, putting on their most serene loveliness where once man's wrath wrought terror and desolation.

News travelled slowly in those days as compared with our own; and life proceeded at Fosseway as usual, in total ignorance of the blight which had fallen upon the hopes of the Squire in the death of his son.

That a great battle was imminent, all the world knew, a battle that would decide great issues for many years to come; and thousands of homes waited with trembling hope for Wellington's despatch. MacAlpin, like others, was uneasy, for the hush and tension was felt everywhere; and Alan Graham had even ceased to discourse on the proper tactics of battle, and waited with stern composure for the great event. When the battle-psalms of David were sung in the kirk, the old soldier seemed to grow visibly larger. 'Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered!' was an unfailing inspiration, and Janet, possessing her soul in more patience than in former times, would croon softly to herself the familiar words:

'Kings of great armies foiled were,
And forced to flee away,
And women who remained at home
Did distribute the prey.'

MacAlpin had fallen into the way, on these long summer days, of taking his crippled boy out in the early morning to hear and see the birds in their own haunts, and watch the shy wild creatures at play. But however early they were, old Martin, the aged keeper of Fosseway, was out before them, sitting in his accustomed seat, 'taking,' as he said, 'the morning air.' His son reigned in his stead in the real business of the place, but the old man's interest in all things was as keen as ever.

He had come to Fosseway with Reginald's mother,

and his devotion to her son never failed: his great sorrow was that no son of his had gone to the war to look after the son of his dead mistress. It was a misfortune which he often deplored.

The day was glorious, and the grey turrets of Fosseway rose clear and yet sombre against the morning sky, flecked with the magnificence of the dawn which had already passed through a thousand changes of exquisite colouring.

'Faither! faither!' Sandy said, in a startled whisper, 'the flag is no' right at Fosseway this morn. Has it broken down, faither?'

Donald looked, and pulling off his bonnet, stood uncovered, gazing at the great tower, and the half-masted flag, hanging limp in the stillness of the new-born day.

'Has it broken down?' the boy still asked.

'No laddie, it has not exactly broken down in a way, and yet there is a sad break somewhere, for someone!' MacAlpin spoke slowly, moved by many conflicting thoughts. 'The flag has been placed that way on purpose, laddie, because someone is dead.'

'But who is dead?' the boy asked.

'I cannot tell, laddie.'

'Dead!' the boy echoed to himself, with great awe. His thoughts of Fosseway had never been associated with death; the great house was the type of the things that live and continue always. 'Dead!' he said aloud, 'who could die at Fosseway, faither?'

'Any-one, laddie,' Donald answered gently, 'may be the Squire—may be Master Reginald, who is away, fighting for the kin. But let us go on, and ask old Martin.'

The old man was in his usual place, but older-looking than ever, and rocking himself to and fro, muttering in misery.

'Yes, yes, Mister,' the old man said; 'the young Squire is dead,—killed in a great battle, and the Squire is away, and the great house is empty and desolate,—empty and desolate! Master Reginald was all his father had,—all he had! He lived for him, and

for his great wealth, and the house is empty and desolate, and Master Reginald dead and gone, dead and gone! Old Martin has known him since he was a little wee boy—it was always “old Martin” with the young Squire. Yes, I am an old man, and the little Squire is dead and gone, dead and gone! Most like there will be changes, yes, there will be changes. That is what death does for the living. It makes changes, changes, changes! But that is naught now. I am an old man, and Master Reginald, the young Squire, is dead and gone, dead and gone!’

MacAlpin turned away, trying hard to swallow something in his throat, the old man’s words, ‘empty and desolate’ ringing in his ears, and the pitiful refrain, in the quavering voice, ‘dead and gone, dead and gone,’ following him upon the still morning air.

Among Reginald Hardcastle’s belongings, which in due time reached his father, there was a letter, the drift of which can only be surmised, but be that as it may, the Squire was never the same man again.

Old Martin was right; the Squire had lived for his son, he had acquired wealth for his son, he had sinned, and cheated, and plotted other men’s destruction for his son; and this son had died cursing him, flinging in his teeth his wealth, which, living or dying, he disdained to touch.

It was the kind of blow from which the Squire was not likely to recover. His son was mad, he said to himself, stark mad: he had thrown away his life for sheer nothing! He had piled up a mass of romantic fiction without reason. Why, in Heaven’s name, should he, Eric Hardcastle, forego his own best interests for any man’s friendship? Why should a pretty face and a form of words bring him to poverty when he might have wealth and honour? To think that a man of his genius, who only needed a good safe start to show the world what brains could do in the splendid art of money-getting, should be foiled at last by his own son, pulled down like a stag at bay by senseless hounds.

The news smote him as a hurricane might smite a

defenceless way-farer, when least prepared. That his son was dead was terrible enough, but it came at the bitterest moment of his life; the moment when, man of iron as he was, he craved for some trusting human fellowship; some sympathetic appreciation of his motives and genius in achieving success. And instead—instead—his son, for whom he had schemed so successfully had not only thrown his life away, but died cursing him—cursing his own father, with his latest breath!

He had ever been a man of keen mind, unscrupulous in his methods and unrelenting in his hate; and yet with such an impressive veneer of suavity that most men and all women were deceived. But now the merciless wind of adversity blew upon him; and the purple and fine linen—the soft clothing in which he had so long wrapped himself, was torn to shreds, and the real man, naked to the very soul, shivered in the bitter blast. His instincts had never been high, but his wit was far too keen and calculating not to see the advantage to be gained by the careful observance of all decent forms. Such small moralities as were required were not only perfectly easy, but distinctly useful in furthering his ends, and highly becoming in a man of his position.

Recent events, however, had played havoc with his finely woven schemes, and with the character which he had so long assumed. It was, in truth, a desperate situation and a moment of extreme bitterness to such a man

He was no longer young; and dull-witted men whom he had despised for their dullness had baulked him in all his interests, robbed him of the distinction he coveted, robbed him of his son, and laid his honour in the dust! Yes, his honour! He would dare any man to deny that he was entitled to honour and respect, upon a hundred or more solid grounds! He was rich, in spite of all men's malice, so rich that he could afford to pay back every penny Maitland could possibly claim for his client, with interest, and still be wealthy beyond many men's dreams! He rubbed his hands, with

a touch of his old satisfaction, and smiled, well-pleased, for the moment, with his own thoughts.

But the smile soon faded, and the weary look crept back into his keen old eyes. A puzzled, be-fogged sense of something intangible and terrible touched him. What, in Heaven's name, is amiss, he asked himself? Ah!—he knew full well! It came to him at times, in lightning flashes of terror which chilled his whole being. 'And yet,' he said, 'it is not just, business is war!—of course business is war, war on other men and other interests when they clash with your own. It is a game of brains—a fine enough game to satisfy any man. You look after yourself, that's all it means! You plan your success and you work out your plans; it is only fools who expect a man to pause to let lame dogs pass.' He had never been a fool. And yet, somehow, things were not right—in short, they were wrong, very much wrong; and hence the perplexity which haunted Eric Hardcastle. The very dead seemed to rise before him, until the room appeared peopled with accusing forms. A man, he whispered, should be able to forget at will. 'It is the very devil of a thing, to have to remember, whether or not!'

'It should not be—should not be!' and, rising, he shook himself as though to free his person from some actual touch of compulsion.

It was a glorious night. The moon was at the full, and not a breath stirred a leaf. He passed through the open window on to the balcony of the villa which he had rented in the neighbourhood of Naples. The prospect, in the soft moonlight, was one of marvellous loveliness. The bay was like a sea of glass, on which ships,—phantom ships they might have been,—passed under full sail to their unknown haven. Vesuvius rose grandly in the distance with all its lurid mystery; and beyond, the mountains stood out in faint outline; the whole making a picture to treasure to one's dying day. But the man who now paced up and down the narrow space was seeing other things.

A man should be able to forget at will, he had said;

—but he could not forget. The memory of the sanctities he had desecrated, the Holy of Holies which he had profaned, returned now with relentless insistence, until he could stand it no longer, and throwing himself down on the balcony bench, he moaned out his misery in the solitude his crimes had made for him! Had not even his own son reviled him, and in the fulness of his young manhood courted death to hide himself from the odium of bearing such an inheritance of shame!

'Oh, Reginald!' the wretched father cried, in the bitterness of his anguish, 'oh, my little lad, my little lad, my joy and hope! come! come! your father needs you, your father needs you my boy, oh! so much. Come child, come! Your father can explain everything, you are too young to understand, far too young to understand, child,—but father can make it quite clear, quite clear!'

His face twitched fearfully as he spoke, and his hands plucked with nervous haste at imaginary objects. He passed his hand across his forehead with a puzzled look of extreme perplexity upon his keen face 'How dark it is, child, how very dark! and they would have it that it is full moon! Ah, Reginald, they cannot deceive your father, can they my boy? Come,' he said, 'we must go in now!' and he held out his hand to lead the child inside. 'It is so dark, Reginald, we must have light, yes, light!' and he turned to enter the room he had left, falling against the door as he did so, and overturning a chair which stood in the way.

His man was on the way with letters which had just come in, and the noise quickened his movements.

'Letters!' he said, pleasantly, pausing in wonder to look at his master.

'Ah, letters indeed! I was just going to ring for lights,' Hardcastle said, falteringly, as one groping for his words.

'The lights are all burning, sir!' the man said, anxiously.

'No, no, Williams, the lights are not burning!'

'Yes, sir,' the man said, gently—fearful of he knew not what.

'Burning, are they?' Hardcastle said, putting out his hand, tremblingly, to feel for some support; 'I think you are mistaken this time, Williams, I think you are mistaken! It is pitch dark, you know, pitch dark, and time for Master Reginald to go to bed! He ought to have been asleep long ago!'

'Yes, sir,' the man said, touched to pity by his master's condition.

'Then why do you not attend to the boy, Williams: it is no time for him to be about!'

'He is asleep, sir!' the man said.

'Asleep, did you say? Why he was here just now; but perhaps it was my fault, Williams. I should not have called him, he needs rest, see that he is not disturbed!'

'Yes, sir!' Williams replied, with a catch in his voice which his master was far from noticing.

'I will also retire. Another time let there be more light, Williams, the darkness is so disturbing—so very disturbing!'

For many weeks Eric Hardcastle hovered between life and death; and when the crisis had passed he was still in darkness.

The doctors gave it as their opinion that it was coming on for some time, and that the shock of his son's death had precipitated the inevitable. He might never see again. They could not tell. The case was peculiar, and an absolute opinion was impossible. Time might do something, and furnish some grounds for hope, but no man could say anything more definite.

It was in truth a grim outlook indeed for the master of Fosseyway Hall.

CHAPTER XVIII

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM

THE young Glenmore had long since ceased to be a terror to Janet McLean, for much had come to light since that first Sunday morning long ago. She had learned, for one thing, how to possess her soul in patience and hope. The drift of things between the two young people was becoming clear to her, clearer perhaps than to themselves, all of which filled her with wonder and thankfulness. 'Who would have thought it,' she said to herself, as she laid her horn spectacles upon the open page she had been reading. 'who would have thought it, the old lord, with all his wild ways, innocent, perfectly innocent, and the other—the other—puir lassie. The Lord hae mercy upon us!' and throwing her apron over her head, as was her wont when deeply moved, she leant back in her arm-chair to have it out with herself.

Like many others, she had concluded that the old lord had committed a great crime. It was their respect for the old name, as much as their humanity, which moved them to shelter and protect an innocent child. Of this Maitland was now well assured. Now that the tide had turned, and the dark places were becoming clear, she was impressed by something above and beyond the mere working of human ingenuity, something for which she had quite another name. Putting on her spectacles again, she read aloud in the silence of her home: 'Because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever, he shall wander from sea to sea, for though he dig into hell, thence will mine hand take him; though he climb up into Heaven, thence will I bring him down!'

'Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!' she

murmured softly under a deep sense of awe, as she closed the book; 'woe unto the man who buildeth up his prosperity upon the ruins of other men's lives; woe, woe unto such a man!'

In the distance, Oona and Aynsworth could be seen from the cottage window, slowly walking towards the house.

'It sal be as it sud be!' she said triumphantly, falling back upon her native speech as usual in moments of excitement. 'They are baith guid and bonnie, they hae baith been wranged—sair wranged; but a' things cam' richt in His ain guid time! But it is aft weary waiting!' she added with a sigh; 'weary waiting in the gloamin' with a sair heart. Still, He kens—He kens!'

Oona and Aynsworth passed the cottage, still absorbed in their mutual happiness. Surely never had 'love's young dream' been chequered by so many vicissitudes, and never had the triumph of the master passion been more complete. What in that hour of supreme discovery was name or wealth? What could the shadow of a crime do, at the very worst, to a man who felt himself at that blissful moment in full accord with all the music of the world—full-hearted, strong, tender, illuminated, divine! Love had come into their lives as a great tranquilizer, as well as a great inspirer, lifting them above strife and struggle. There might still be storms before them, but for the moment they had reached the purer and serener air.

'We must tell grannie!' Oona said, resting her head in happy confidence against her lover's arm.

'Yes, we must tell Janet,' Aynsworth assented, touching the cheek so close to him with his lips. 'We must indeed tell Janet. She has suffered much and borne heavy burdens for us for long years; and now by the mercy of God, dearest, we can lighten all that!' Aynsworth, in spite of his outward calm, was yet aflame with a thousand conflicting emotions. How strangely everything had fallen out! How different from what he had expected, and how past all his deserving he had obtained such sweet bliss as comes to the lot of few!

They stood a moment in silence before entering the cottage, heart to heart, their souls charged with all the unspeakable mystery of a Divine union of two human lives.

He left Oona in the shelter of Janet's arms, and went out in search of MacAlpin and Graham. Oona had much to tell. She had passed into a new world, all her faculties had expanded under the influence of a great awakening; and the past, illuminated by the present, became clear. Janet's devotion to her, tempered often by sternness, appeared in true colours. It had often touched her painfully, and clashed with her unspoken longing for a fuller, a larger life. Her desires seemed often to mock her as being things of shadow, fore-doomed to pass into their native nothingness.

It was only under Maitland's roof in London that she awoke to the full measure of existence, and in music found an outlet for the pent-up passion of her being.

With quick and understanding sympathy she could now appreciate all Janet's loving care; and it was a relief to sob out her gratitude as she covered the strong hands with warm kisses—hands so full of character and tenderness, so full of purpose and service.

When the young laird made his announcement to his household it was received with a rapture of wonder and delight. A bride at Woodlands! Why, no such event had happened in the history of the place in two hundred years! Fosseyway had usurped the honours long enough. Woodlands, Munro thought, was at last about to receive fitting recognition. 'My lady's chamber' must be attended to forthwith, my lady's boudoir must be made ready without delay. The old servant's importance grew with every detail which he catalogued with scrupulous care. A Glenmore is a Glenmore, whatever name he is called by, and nothing must be omitted, nothing overlooked, trust Munro for that!

MacAlpin and Graham received the good news with profound thankfulness.

'The clouds will pass! The clouds will a' pass! I hae had inklings o' it langsyne,' Graham said; 'the clouds will pass and the still small voice will speak to us a'—we hae but to harken and wait!'

MacAlpin had little to say, but the whole bearing of such an event passed rapidly through his mind. Truly, it was a happy ending to the misery of years. As he went home he could not help murmuring to himself: 'The lassie is an angel of mercy and peace—the lassie is an angel of mercy and peace!' and then the old song came back to him and he sang softly while he marched in time to the lilt of it:

'Bid me to live and I will live
Thy Protestant to be;
Or bid me love and I will give
A loving heart to thee!'

When the young laird laid the whole matter before Maitland, the old lawyer smiled, well pleased. 'A very pretty romance, Lord Glenmore,' he said with grave formality; 'a very pretty romance!—Yes, I understand,' he said, as Aynsworth made a movement to speak, 'it is a pretty romance, in spite of the dark background of tragedy. It means the closing of the chamber of horrors into which we have been obliged to look so long, and the opening of an agreeable future for you both.'

The old lawyer, however, had evidently no intention of spending much time upon the romantic aspect of things. It was to him, in reality, a very happy and opportune 'alliance,' which at once became a part of the 'case' placed in his hands, and for the proper conduct of which he considered himself responsible.

'You should be married here in London within the next few weeks,' he said, looking across at the young laird.

'I——' the young man said in surprise; 'I really cannot say!'

'No,' Maitland continued, 'perhaps not, but you must persuade the young lady to take a business view of the matter, as the case cannot wait.'

The 'case' had retreated a long way into the background of the young man's mind, but with Maitland it was still in the forefront.

The fact was, the lawyer had information which he thought proper to keep from his client for the moment. He had shadowed Hardcastle over half the continent of Europe, and only just lost track of him at Vienna. Of the personal misfortune which had overwhelmed him he had learnt nothing as yet; but he was aware that Kinkman was on his trail with the frenzy of a madman and the vindictiveness of a fiend. There had been enough bloodshed—more than any one cared to think of—and he was labouring night and day to prevent more. 'Yes,' he said, continuing his own line of thought, 'you should be married with as little delay as possible, and spend six or twelve months on the Continent. Now that peace has been declared, there can be no great difficulty in the matter of travel, and—well, you might meet Eric Hardcastle!'

'I meet—Hardcastle!' Glenmore exclaimed, rising and pacing the floor; 'I meet *him*—the—'

'Hush!' Maitland said; 'don't say it! You can afford to meet him better now than when we walked in upon him at Fosseyway. You can meet him much better, and out of the depths of your own happiness you can shew him mercy!'

The young man covered his face with his hands, as though to shut out some unpleasant sight, and threw himself into a chair. He was his father's son; the blood of his race was hot in his veins. How could he meet this man? this unnatural monster, who had spent his life plotting other men's ruin that he might flourish! How could he? So hard it is for a man to know his own heart—so easy it is to touch hidden springs of waters of bitterness! How soon a tiny spark may produce a great conflagration! For had he not thought that under the new impulse which had come so graciously into his life he was beyond such upheavals of the natural man?

Then the death-scene of Father Francis on that far-off battlefield came back to him with extraordinary vividness, and the strangely impressive words, as though he heard them again in the expectant hush that surrounds the dying:

'God is Light, my son; God is Light—yes, God is Light—and Mercy—and blessed are the merciful for——'

He knew the missing words now—he had learned them since then—and he filled in the blank, with a deeper sense of their meaning than ever before: 'they shall obtain mercy!'

Yes, he would try to be worthy of mercy, if mercy can obtain mercy; surely it was worth a great effort—and the Most High had not forgotten him in his misery!

And so it came about that the marriage took place in London from the residence of Mr Frederick Maitland, Madame Rey being mistress of the ceremonies and her daughter one of the bridesmaids.

It was, owing to the circumstances, a very quiet affair, but those who were present to witness the important service made up a most unique company. Janet, of course, was present; Graham, MacAlpin, and Sandy—and Sandy's mother, Mistress MacAlpin, had been persuaded to make her first and only visit to the Metropolis for an occasion of such significance. 'Tamas,' Sandy's eldest brother, was also there; in his case business and pleasure were combined, as having set his heart on being a soldier a commission had been procured for him, and he was not returning to the parental roof until he had seen some service.

Mistress MacAlpin felt the pressure of her own personal circumstances keenly, while she did her best to present a cheerful countenance to others who had more cause for rejoicing. All this she made clear to Madame Rey, as an apology for being less light-hearted than the joyful occasion demanded. One son a soldier and another a cripple were facts in their home life that sometimes became depressing, for although they said that the war on the Continent was as good

as over, there was much unrest in North America, and who could tell what the next few months might bring forth! Still, she had her crippled laddie at home, and would hope the best!

'Sandy is not always to be a cripple, Mistress Mac-Alpin,' Maitland said, entering at the moment; 'I was just coming to tell you that two of our ablest surgeons say that the chances are a hundred to one that he can be cured.'

'Cured!' she repeated in amazement; 'Sandy cured!'

'Yes, Sandy may be cured; the surgeons say that in six months or so he may be on his feet again. That he shall be the agile boy he was before the accident, no one can tell; but they are satisfied he will be on his feet once more.'

'Faither,' said Sandy gleefully, 'I'll hae heaps and heaps o' things to see! Won't I, faither? I wad like Mister Maitland to tell the doctors that I want to be well mended, 'cause I want to climb big trees, and I want to see intil an eagle's nest! I ken where it is, but I never telt Tamas, 'cause he shoots a' things, ye ken, and never waits to see their pretty ways at all!' and so the little fellow from his cot prattled on, lifting tons of misery, quite unconsciously, from many minds.

Time passes quickly: eight months and more had come and gone, and Sandy was home, so well recovered that it was a standing subject of conversation and wonder. Woodlands was ready for the young laird's home-coming with his bride, but as yet there was no sign of their return. Sherwin had left Fosseway, and things were as dull at the great house as they usually are where the master is absent—or would have been, but for various rumours as to coming changes which exercised the minds of the community.

The past was recalled, and lost nothing in the telling. At the works the hum of vigorous life was felt throbbing in every department, and some interest had been created among the men owing to the Reverend Hector Fordice and the doctor of the works protesting against the unsanitary conditions of the workmen's

homes. Nothing of any consequence could be done, or nothing dare be done, in the opinion of the Steward of Fosseway, in whose hands these things rested, in the absence of the Squire. That the death-rate was rising out of all proportion to the population was considered by many a visitation of providence instead of a result of unhealthy conditions which could be remedied. Sanitary science was young in those days, and in fact is not very old yet. It was proper enough for the minister to notice such matters; and the doctor—well, the doctor's business was to cure sick people, and not to lay the blame of their dying upon others!

See what the doctors in London could do for Sandy MacAlpin, one of the men declared in the inn parlour—that was something like! But—well, most like the doctors that could do such things never thought of living in the country or giving their attention to working men's homes!

'Wait till the young laird comes hame!' Mine Host said meaningly.

'And when will that be?' one of the men asked doubtfully.

'I dinna ken,' he replied with an air of great wisdom; 'but Sandy telt the postman yesterday e'en that his faither had gane to fetch him hame.'

'Gane to fetch the young laird hame! For sakes! gane to fetch the young laird hame, is he? Most like he's gane on his ain proper business! The young laird will come hame when it likes him, except he *never* come hame, like his faither afore him!'

'What is the matter wi' the Squire? Why does he not come hame?' another said.

The question was beyond any man's power to answer, although no one seemed at a loss for hints and suggestions, which in the common dearth of information received much attention, with some winks and shrugs more expressive than words. Still, the spell of the Squire was not yet broken; and if his name no longer imposed silence and awe, it certainly counselled a large measure of prudence, even among the visitors of the inn parlour.

CHAPTER XIX

THE BITTER END

It was a glorious day in autumn, and Glenmore and his bride, with MacAlpin, had spent the long pleasant hours, which seemed all too short, in seeing the wonders of Naples. They had spent much of their time in Southern Italy, and were leisurely planning their return, but not until they had spent a few weeks, at least, within sight of purple-grey Vesuvius, for the spell of the enchanter was upon them, and the mystery of the great mountain was, as usual, compelling in its weird attractiveness. The world was younger in those days, and the faculty of wonder and awe had not been relegated to the museum of forgotten things.

To Lady Glenmore it was all new and fascinating beyond words. Not so with Glenmore and MacAlpin, it was neither their first nor their second visit, and the memories it brought back were not all pleasant or welcome. The mind works according to its own sweet will, and treasures up the experiences of life, for good or ill; and for both men, across the sunshine of the hour, there came unbidden shadows from the past.

As they approached the villa which Glenmore had rented, they were aware of an unusual commotion, and were just in time to see a travelling carriage drive off.

'Oh, I know!' Oona exclaimed excitedly as she hurried forward.

The hall was to her happy eyes delightfully littered with baggage; and Maitland's servant, full of importance in the midst of the foreign household, adjusting everything to his satisfaction. Maitland, Madame Rey and her daughter were awaiting them in the drawing-room.

'Why, it was only yesterday,' Lady Glenmore said.

'that we were wishing you were here, and you were actually on the way—only think of it! Now we need not return so soon—need we, Clifford?' she said, looking toward Glenmore.

'Perhaps not,' he replied, 'if we can persuade our friends to remain.' His glance, meanwhile, which rested on Maitland, was full of question. He was well aware that this visit was not for pure pleasure, but could not imagine the cause of their sudden appearance.

Dinner passed off pleasantly; there was much to speak of, and Madame Rey was full of the incidents of the journey. She had contrived to see the brighter and more amusing side of things, for the most part, but there were other incidents which struck a different note. Soldiers imperfectly recovered from their wounds, footsore and in rags, begging their way to their homes, hardly knowing how they might find them or who might be in possession! Brave fellows for the most part, who had done their best for a lost cause and a thankless master.

So soon as the ladies had retired and they were alone, Maitland plunged into the subject uppermost in his mind.

'Eric Hardcastle is in Naples,' he said without preface of any sort.

'Heavens!' Glenmore exclaimed, rising much agitated; 'and we might have met him any day!'

'Why, that is surely what we most desire!' the old man said, with a touch of impatience; 'have you forgotten what is at stake? It is urgently necessary, to prevent legal and other complications, to obtain this man's signature, duly witnessed, to certain documents.'

'How do you know where he is?' Glenmore asked.

Before answering, Maitland walked to the door to make sure it was closed, and MacAlpin adjusted the window-blind carefully, apparently with the same thought in his mind.

'I have secret information,' he said after a pause, 'and I think it is correct. The men who do this kind of work for Governments or individuals carry their

lives in their hands, and guard themselves often even from the knowledge of their employers, lest they should be trapped or identified. It is, of course, a risky business, and never more so than now; but Governments must be served, in the interests of justice and diplomacy, and private matters which touch wide interests in like manner should not be allowed to fail if these secret channels of information can aid in their elucidation. Here is the utmost I have been able to obtain,' and he spread out a very rough plan of one of the most ancient quarters of the city. 'It is worth following,' he remarked, 'if only to prove or disprove the correctness of the information furnished.'

The whole weary business had become repugnant to the young Glenmore. It had, in one form or another, dogged him all his life. 'Will this thing never come to an end?' he said impatiently, 'and let us have a little peace!'

'Yes, it will come to an end, Glenmore,' Maitland answered.

'And it must come to a right end,' MacAlpin added, 'while those who know all the circumstances are alive to make answer. We must not, after all these years, purchase present ease and future misery for others by considering what is safe or pleasant for ourselves.'

'You are right, MacAlpin,' Glenmore said after a moment's thought, putting out his hand, which the older man grasped. 'You are right. I was not thinking of myself, but of—'

'I know, I know——' both Maitland and MacAlpin said in a breath; 'but there is no other way, and she is as wise and kind as she is bonny! Trust her,' MacAlpin continued, 'she may yet shew us how to meet emergencies, for the pure in heart see what we cannot see, and know by some strange sense above and beyond mere reason the hidden springs of life and character! God in Heaven!' he said, with intense earnestness, 'a woman is the greatest blessing or the greatest curse that can come into a man's life—and you have got the blessing, Glenmore; you have got the blessing! God Almighty make you worthy of it!

No home can fail of its true inspiration, no race can lose its vigour, no country can decline, while its women are true to the best and highest ideals. God help us when our women forget their power and their mission, and live for things of naught or worse than naught!

No one answered; there was about them at the moment an atmosphere of expectancy and deep emotion which imposed silence: no one dared to ask, hardly even to think, out of what background of bitterness and failure MacAlpin had spoken.

In the stillness a slight noise was heard outside, and all three men were on their feet in an instant. MacAlpin reached the window first, and hastily 'rawing the curtain back, looked out. It was well into the night, or rather it was toward that hour of intense murkness which precedes the dawn, a waning moon serving only to take the edge off the darkness.

There was nothing to be seen; no sign of life broke the stillness. MacAlpin moved as if to open the window that he might go out to investigate, when Maitland drew him gently back into the room and took his place. Presently a man muffled in a cloak, with a hat slouched over his face, stepped out from the shadow of the trees and approached cautiously. Maitland promptly opened the window, and received a sealed paper hastily thrust into his hand without a word.

The lawyer closed the sash carefully before he sat down to the scrutiny of the message he had received, but there was a look of satisfaction upon his face which puzzled his companions, particularly MacAlpin. Donald's mind, as we know, was of that open order which seldom takes account of bye-paths or convenient short cuts; in fact, he had a hearty contempt for those who dare not fight in the light of day but instead skulked in search of cover, afraid to face honest men. For himself, he preferred to march straight to the goal, with a dogged courage that never failed. And now it seemed to him as though the wise and understanding old lawyer was having dealings with the Evil One, and had called spirits from the vasty deep with scant ceremony.

Nevertheless, he concluded Maitland was a wise man and a loyal friend, even if he had fallen into unquestionably Italian ways.

Meanwhile Maitland read and re-read the paper which he had received so mysteriously before handing it to Glenmore. 'You see,' he said with keen satisfaction, 'Hardcastle is in Naples, and in sore difficulty of some sort, but so closely watched that Sherwin has neither been able to see him nor speak with him.'

'Sherwin!' Glenmore and MacAlpin echoed in the same breath; 'Sherwin here! What has he to do with it?'

Maitland smiled at their astonishment. 'Sherwin is doing us a little service,' he explained; 'I was fortunate in being able to attach him to our interests. He has many special points of ability for the work: for one thing, he speaks two or three languages, among them Italian. Did you recognise him just now?'

'Why no! Was that Sherwin?' both men asked.

'Yes, that was Sherwin got up for the occasion. You know he is a little bit of a play-actor; has written something or other for the stage—got a wiggling for it from his Bishop, it seems, and was an out-of-work parson when he turned up at Fosseway.'

MacAlpin looked a good deal mystified, and was really uneasy in his mind. 'I never heard of his being a parson,' he said slowly, 'but I thought he was Hardcastle's friend.'

'So he is,' the lawyer replied hastily, with the air of a man who knows the game and finds it necessary to instruct a novice; 'Of course he is Hardcastle's friend: in that lies his value to us, and it makes him, in fact, quite indispensable at this moment.'

MacAlpin shook his head. 'I hate spies,' he said with energy, 'they play the devil's own game with mercy. I hate them.'

'You are quite right for the most part, MacAlpin,' Maitland said thoughtfully. Glenmore had left the room and the two men were alone. 'You are quite right,' he repeated, 'but the case is different. We

need Sherwin, and we mean to use him for no unworthy end. I know that he is of that untempered metal which leaves him open to play any game his employers choose, but we are making no questionable demands on him. Hardcastle is in the hands of unscrupulous and dangerous men—*why*, we have not yet succeeded in unravelling. In short, we are quite at fault; we can only surmise, nothing more: it is difficult for any man to escape the result of evil ways, very difficult for a man like Hardcastle to get away from the penalty of his ill-doings in some shape. We are taking great pains not to bring him to justice as he deserves, and are following him in the hope of compelling him to do an act of the barest reparation to the living and the dead. We are doing this for a man who has never spared anyone—not even his own flesh and blood. Sherwin is not even aware, so far as I know, of his hideous crimes. He has made for himself enemies enough, MacAlpin, Heaven help him!—but we are not among them, although no doubt he thinks so. We had hoped that Sherwin would have been able to have made this clear to him, and you see from this how the case stands.'

MacAlpin read the letter carefully. 'I can make nothing of it,' he said as he laid it down. 'If Naples were like any other city in the world, it would not be so bad, but this ever-moving tide of humanity is hard to follow. It is like Hardcastle to pick out this infernal city to lose himself in!'

'But, MacAlpin,' Maitland said, 'it is not clear that he desires to lose himself—it would appear that he is under restraint. *Why*, or by whom, we cannot tell.'

'Eric Hardcastle under restraint!' MacAlpin replied scornfully; 'don't believe it for a moment! It would take a good deal more than a screed from that parson body to convince me that the Squire is not his own master—and the master of every mother's son about him! All the same, if he is above ground in this city, we must find him—certainly, we must find him!'

It was after sundown a few days later, and evening was closing in, when Glenmore and MacAlpin found

themselves in an unfrequented part of the city. At another time both men would have been full of the beauty of the scene; but to-night they were weary and discouraged, and having dismissed the carriage, they made their way on foot in silence.

The filthy streets, the dirty, noisy people, filled them with disgust, in the presence of scenes so fair. They had left the main thoroughfare, and threaded their way through a labyrinth of mean streets then to be found in the more ancient part of the city. They made their way as quickly as possible through the babble of noises, until they reached a quiet spot and could breathe freely without the constant clang of tongues, hammers, and shrill arguments about everything under the sun.

'Truly,' MacAlpin said, taking a long breath, 'Naples is a Paradise inhabited by devils—but we have secured a little quiet, anyway, for five minutes. To think that people can live in such a babble! It passes belief!'

'Live!' Glenmore replied, rather amused, 'why they not only live but thrive. They are the happiest creatures in existence! But where have we got to? I have not been here before, that I can remember.'

'Why, we are close to the Strada Ste. Lucia—don't you remember the fisherman's song which was once sung everywhere? I don't think I could recall it now to save my life! It was an easy matter to pick up such things in those days!'

He tried to whistle it softly, but stopped. Glenmore touched him, drawing his attention to a figure on the other side of the street, making his way slowly along the wall, groping as though blind.

'Let us go to him!' MacAlpin said with ready sympathy.

'By no means!' Glenmore replied, 'he is too well muffled to invite company,' and drawing his companion into the shelter of a dilapidated building close by, they kept the muffled figure in view.

The miserable creature moved at first slowly, then with more haste, until he turned a corner into a lane of the worst description, which appeared to lead no-

where. Neither of them had seen him leaving any of the houses, and where he came from was a matter of conjecture. They were about to move after him, if only to keep him in sight, when a window on the other side of the street, almost opposite their hiding-place, opened and a man thrust out head and shoulders, and scanned the street in every direction. When he withdrew he fortunately left the window open, and from what Glenmore and MacAlpin could hear, there were two or three men quarrelling and wrangling over the terms of some compact, and accusing one another of having spoilt plans of great consequence to them all.

It was clear there was some suspicion of treachery among them, and that no two were of the same mind or trusted each other.

Presently two burly fellows left the house, without seemingly coming to any definite understanding, and stood in eager debate a little way from the door. This was evidently too much for the man who claimed to be their employer. He followed them into the street, excited and angry, and demanded that they should search in opposite directions as their only chance. This they both absolutely refused to do, neither being willing to trust his fellow out of sight lest he should obtain some advantage over him. The third man was disgusted at this, and rated them soundly for their stupidity, cursing them bitterly, in bad French, for having ruined his plans and spoiled the game for good and all.

'Foreigners, all of them!' MacAlpin whispered.

For answer, Glenmore's grip tightened upon Donald's arm, while a cold perspiration chilled him with deadly apprehension. 'Oh that this brave fellow's discretion were equal to his valour and inches!' he thought to himself, as all three men on the other side of the street paused in evident doubt as to whether they were alone or not.

It was a moment of frightful suspense, their own breathing oppressing them as though it might be heard by the ruffians. Fortunately, it lasted but a short time; although to Glenmore it seemed hours.

The third man turned to re-enter the house, telling his companions with scorn that they were only a pair of fools. This was too much for them; their anger mastered their caution, and drawing weapons they drove him in with frightful threats, and took the key from the lock before they would allow him to close it.

'What for the key?' one of the men asked the other with some surprise.

'What for?' the man answered with an air of wisdom; 'why, to get in when we return, and settle with this fine fellow if he fails to settle with us for this week's work!' and both men smiled grimly. Which way they should go in search was still an unsettled question, and finally they tossed up to decide the point. The two watchers had the satisfaction of seeing them at last make off—in the wrong direction if the old man was their quarry—and soon disappear.

'Now is our time!' Glenmore said as he released MacAlpin, and both started at a brisk pace after the mysterious figure in which they had become interested.

The unfortunate creature had made good progress, notwithstanding the fact that he had to grope his way with manifest uncertainty along the wall.

For some reason or other, he tried to cross the lane, and showed signs of increasing nervousness and confusion; his step was slower, and the evidences of helplessness had increased, which made Glenmore and MacAlpin quicken their pace to reach him.

'What does that mean?' MacAlpin asked, pointing to another figure which appeared from nowhere that they could see. They slackened their walk for a moment to take in the situation.

The newcomer seemed a mere bundle of rags. He walked round the blind creature several times without a word—which added greatly to his confusion. Finally he stood in front of him, and holding out his hand for charity, asked help.

The sound of his voice seemed to startle the old man; he recoiled, with every symptom of terror, raising both hands above his head like a man protecting himself from a blow, and cried: 'Mercy! mercy!'

The cloak which he wore slipped from him, entangling his feet, and he staggered helplessly, in evident fear.

The effect upon the newcomer was extraordinary. He waved his arms in the air and shrieked in mockery, as though impelled by some strange impulse of demoniac mirth: 'Mercy! mercy!—hear him! He asks mercy!' and throwing back his head he laughed fiendishly, until the listeners' blood ran cold in amazed horror.

'A madman,' Glenmore said with a note of repulsion; 'what a strange thing that he should be abroad!'

The next instant the madman had sprung upon the old man, and before they could take in the situation a dagger gleamed and fell with a powerful stroke. The old man went down with the force of the blow: the dagger had broken, the pieces clattering on the pavement told their own tale.

'Ah!' the wretched assassin hissed through clenched teeth, boiling with baffled rage, 'armour—armour; I might have known it; but it cannot save you, Eric Hardcastle! All the devils in hell cannot save you!' and drawing a vicious-looking blade, he threw himself once more upon the helpless creature, and clutching him in devilish glee, deliberately forced back the old man's head, as a butcher might an animal for slaughter. It was a gruesome and terrible sight. The ragged wretch, in his frenzy of revenge and hate had ceased to be human; he was a fiend, impelled by the twin devils of greed and hate.

Such things are among the hidden and unrecorded tragedies of human lives; but here amidst the stillness and shadows of evening, in a corner of the most beautiful city in the world, the veil is for a moment lifted, and the seven-fold hell of two men's evil lives is made manifest in lurid colours.

Before the murderous stroke could fall, the hand which held the weapon was in the powerful grip of Glenmore, and MacAlpin was bending over the fallen man.

'Merciful God!' MacAlpin exclaimed, recoiling for

the moment with intense feeling, and horrified at the sight; 'it is Hardcastle and Kinkman!'

'Hardcastle and Kinkman!' the assassin echoed; 'that's what it is! Why should it be another? He is mine!' he shrieked, 'mine!—mine! He owes me every drop of his vile blood, and I'll have it—I'll have it, I say!'

So intent had he been upon his fell purpose that he had never noticed the two men following him. How he had lured his victim into his power was his own secret, and perished with him; but that he had one or more accomplices amongst the ruffians into whose hands Hardcastle had fallen, admitted of little doubt. He had bought his frightful opportunity with a great price, he had waited for it, longed for it, lived for it—if such an existence can be called life; and then, in the moment of supreme mastery and sweet revenge, to jail was more than the little glimmer of reason left him could sustain; under the shock of discovery, it guttered out like a foul wick, as he writhed and foamed in the grasp of Glenmore.

'Who are you?' Glenmore demanded in the excitement of the moment (for he had no personal knowledge of the man, of any sort).

'Who am I? ha, ha!' the creature shrieked; 'and it's Glenmore that asks! Who am I?—I am incarnate hell, I am—'

'Silence, profane wretch!' Glenmore thundered, shaking the creature in angry disgust; 'you are mad—you are a madman!'

'I am a madman, am I?' the creature snarled; 'no, no, you are wrong again, Glenmore: I am not mad, I am damned—doubly damned, do you hear! Let me go—let me go! My work is nearly finished, but I cannot go alone! I will not go alone! I have sworn to torment Eric Hardcastle to all eternity—I must keep my word. Let me go, Glenmore!' he pleaded, hoarse from sheer exhaustion, and consumed by his own burning passion.

'You are drunk or mad!' Glenmore said, more gently, as though hunting in his own mind for some excuse for the wretched creature he held.

'Drunk or mad!' he echoed. 'Yes, yes, drunk and mad—drunk with hate, and mad to send yon foul imbecile to where he belongs!—Let him go!' he muttered, for his strength was failing.

Glenmore let him go, his presence filled him with horror and loathing. The sound of hurrying feet had warned him also that they would not be alone in a few minutes. He kept his foot, however, upon the knife, which he had forced him to drop, fearful still of the mad creature's powers of mischief.

When released, he staggered almost as helplessly as the object of his hate; yet in spite of his exhaustion he had not abandoned his purpose, and began fumbling about his clothes for his weapon, forgetting that he had been disarmed. Even then, in his eagerness, he rushed toward the prostrate man he had felled so mercilessly; but it was only to discover MacAlpin, and at once a sudden shock of recollection smote him with the old terror with which Donald had always inspired him;—and turning, with a wild cry, which no one who heard it could ever forget, he fled with the swiftness of a fury until he had gained the cliffs, and then with a blood-curdling scream of mingled defiance and despair, he plunged into the bay beneath.

The tide was going out, and the unhappy man went with it to his doom.

CHAPTER XX

MERCY AND JUDGMENT

THE residence occupied by Glenmore was well-chosen for repose and beauty.

It was reached by a winding road which lead through scenes of surpassing loveliness, and from the broad terrace of the house the sea made an exquisite picture, seen through the pines and aloes, with wide stretches of vineyards on either hand, and the solemn majesty of the mountains in the distance.

Many ancient ruins, of mysterious and tragic history, were passed by the way in reaching where it nestled peacefully amidst the thickets of myrtles and coronillas, gorgeous in bloom. The villa, indeed, had been built into one of these castles the origin of which went back, some said, to far Roman times.

It was here, about ten days after the events related in the last chapter, that Eric Hardcastle lay in a spacious apartment tossing and moaning, more, the physician thought, in mental than in bodily anguish.

It was early morning, and the doors and windows were thrown open to let in air and sunshine. Later the shade would be grateful and refreshing, but now everyone courted the sight of sun and sea.

In had been an anxious night—all the nights had been anxious of late, for it seemed that after all their success and watchfulness, Eric Hardcastle would, in spite of them, slip into the unknown without a word or sign to anyone. Maitland was impatient to leave for England, calling at the French capital by the way, on urgent business,—and yet hesitated to go without some adjustment of the business which he considered so important in his clients' interests.

Just then the doctor drove up, and after a few words with the three anxious men upon the terrace, passed into the patient's room.

'He'll live! I trust him for that!' MacAlpin said, as the door closed.

'Well I hope so, for many reasons!' Maitland replied.

'Have you the gift of second-sight, MacAlpin?' Glenmore remarked, pausing in his walk and smiling as he looked the big fellow over, 'some Highlanders have, they say!'

'I believe there is such a thing,' MacAlpin said, gravely, with a keen, far-off look, 'there is something in us sometimes that reaches out into the future that we cannot measure nor understand. But I was not thinking of that just now. I have known Eric Hardcastle, or thought I knew him, for the best part of my life and I have never known him to let go, once he had man or beast by the throat,—"Silent and hold-fast" might have been his motto, for deadly as death has been his grip.'

'Yes,' Maitland rejoined, as he sat down with signs of unusual weariness, 'but that time is past; he is now a blind and broken old man, and yet it is not on account of his age,—he knows that he has failed and that his power is shattered,—and for all that he may not give way! That is what I fear.'

Just then the doctor appeared, with a look of cheery confidence they had not seen before.

'Better?' Glenmore queried.

'Oh yes, much better!—he is asking for Master Reginald, who is that? Can we find him? If we can content him in such little things it will materially aid. There has been some mental shock; but for that his physical ailments would matter little.'

There was silence for a space, and the doctor looked puzzled and somewhat disconcerted.

'Master Reginald is his son,' MacAlpin said gently, 'and he lies with other brave men, where he fell at Waterloo!'

'A thousand pardons, gentlemen,' the little man murmured. 'I might have guessed some such thing! And it is all so recent! I knew there was some shock. What you say accounts for much—it is all very sad, very sad indeed!'

'I knew Reginald,' MacAlpin said, 'and I will go to him,' and without waiting for permission, he passed into the sick-room, closing the door softly after him. He had acted upon the impulse of the moment, and was hardly prepared for the pitiful sight which met his gaze. And so this was the man, he mused, of whom he had been speaking as masterful and tenacious of purpose! What a change—what a collapse! No, he could not speak to him! It was too terrible a sight, and he drew back, almost overwhelmed by a great compassion.

Just then the sick man threw out his arms upon the coverlet; they were almost fleshless, and the once powerful hands, so full of purpose that had so well expressed the strong will and subtle brain were wasted and nerveless. Again he wailed, 'Reginald, my boy come! Will no one tell him his father wants him? no one, no one!'

MacAlpin drew near, very softly, and laid his hand upon the sick man's.

'Eric,' MacAlpin said, 'Reginald cannot come!'

The sick man started, and an eager, questioning look passed over the worn face. Recollection seemed to return, but very slowly, and with misgivings. He moved uneasily.

'Is it MacAlpin?' he asked.

'Yes, it's Donald, Eric. I am here to stay with you and help you.'

'Ah, that is good!' he said with a note of satisfaction, 'then cannot you call Reginald for me? I have been asking for him so long, and I am so tired, so very tired, Donald!'

'He is asleep,' MacAlpin said, falteringly, 'and cannot come. You must wait, Eric.'

'But I cannot,' he wailed, 'I cannot wait, I want my son—I have been wanting him for a long time; I fear he is not well, some accident, perhaps, and no one will tell me,—and it is so dark, I cannot see!—I thought you would find him for me, MacAlpin, you are big

and strong, and he is only a boy. You can bring him if you will!’

‘No, no, I cannot, Eric,’ MacAlpin said, heart-broken at the sight, ‘indeed I cannot,—it is best he should rest, I am sure it is his own wish, brave lad!’

‘Ah, indeed, he is brave, and Donald, listen, he is good! Yes, good, a far better man than his father,—far better! We quarrelled over that, yes, I quarrelled with my own boy, because he was a better man than his father! Is it not dreadful? But no one knows, MacAlpin, no one knows! Now you see why I want him,—you will bring him, will you not? You are my friend again, are you not? and you will do this for old times’ sake, will you not, MacAlpin?’

For answer, MacAlpin sunk upon his knees by the bedside and sobbed like a child.

‘Donald!’ Hardcastle said, wonderingly.

‘Wait, Eric,’ his friend said, ‘wait a moment. I want to bring you someone else!’

‘Some one else?’ the sick man repeated, with a touch of terror, ‘not Kink——’

‘No, no, not Kinkman, Kinkman is dead and gone!’

‘Kinkman dead and gone!’ the sick man repeated, with a note of satisfaction, ‘most wonderful! Kinkman dead and gone!’

‘Yes Eric, Kinkman is dead, but your daughter is living. I want to bring her to you.’

Hardcastle seemed to shrivel and sink into the couch at the sound of the words, while his breathing came short and hurried. MacAlpin was much alarmed and blamed himself for his rashness. He moistened his lips with a cordial of some sort, prepared for such an emergency, and waited anxiously.

In a little time Hardcastle, with a voice amazingly steady, considering his state and the circumstances, asked, ‘Did you say my daughter? Madeleine’s child?’

‘Yes, Madeleine’s child. Would you not like to see her? She is her mother’s image, and gentle and good as an angel!’

‘Oh, MacAlpin, how can you! I am not well—I am helpless, and it is so dark!’

'I am not mocking you,' MacAlpin answered with great gentleness, 'I am speaking in all sincerity. You have a living daughter, her mother's image and your own, and she will come to you if you wish it.'

'Oh, MacAlpin, MacAlpin,' he wailed, trembling miserably, 'Madeleine! Madeleine! mercy,—God have mercy, have mercy!'

MacAlpin kept still and silent, his eyes never moving from the sick man's face. It was a living tragedy which inspired awe. It seemed like a naked human soul, shivering in utter helplessness before a real though invisible tribunal, while the fierce light of long-delayed justice flashed suddenly into every recess of the man's nature, searching out and scorching with the fiery finger of righteousness the intricate purposes, plans and desires that had made up the sum total of a vicious and cruel career.

Something of the old masterful spirit glimmered for a moment as with a voice quivering, yet with a new indication of force and battle, he half rose as he demanded—

'What proof have you of this, MacAlpin?'

Donald pressed him gently back upon the pillow which he adjusted to receive him as tenderly as a woman might.

'I have full and perfect proof!' he said slowly. 'Listen Eric, your daughter not only lives, but she is the wife of the young Glenmore, under whose roof you are. Shall I bring her to you?'

There was no answer, the sick man lay a limp heap, with large tears coursing unchecked down his wasted cheeks. His eyes were indeed darkened but some inner light had made clear the tortuous paths of his wretched, scheming life; and the past, the hateful past, to bury which he had toiled and sinned, rose up, solid, undimmed, undeniable before his mental vision.

His superior craftiness, his power to control circumstances and impose his will upon others had come to naught.

To say that he was penitent in the true sense would

be beside the mark; he was beaten and helpless and in the hands of the man he had spent his life to rob of wealth and character. It was that which cut so deep. He had worshipped success; that his success was founded upon injustice and crime mattered not at all; and now he had to confess himself a failure and a wreck.

'Where is she?' he asked, in a whisper of longing and despair, 'Where is she? do you think she will come?'

'Yes, she will come, I am sure of that. To-morrow, perhaps, when you are stronger!'

'No, no,—now, MacAlpin, for God's sake, now!'

Oona had been prepared for such an interview for some days, as it was clear that such a meeting was inevitable, should Hardcastle rally from the stupor into which he had fallen; and now he wailed, like a frightened child, crying in the dark, and shrinking in nervous horror from he knew not what.

The sight wrung MacAlpin's heart with keen anguish; in all his imaginings he had never pictured to himself anything like this. He wondered what Graham would say to it, what Janet would say to it, what Maitland would say to it! In short, he was bewildered with the sudden turn of events, and unable to adjust himself, for the moment, to the new drift of things.

The panorama of the years passed before his mental vision. His trust in Eric Hardcastle had been utter and complete, and his faith died slowly. He had made excuses for his misdoings; called them by soft names and endeavoured to throw over them a kind of neutral tint of moral imperfectness, common to all men under temptation, until at last the full enormity of the man's villainy came home to him, shattering his confidence at a single blow, and plunging him into despair.

He had fancied that their friendship was of the very stuff of their lives. MacAlpin was ever ready to serve his friend to the effacement of himself. Why not, were they not friends of the true and enduring

sort? Then came the discovery that he had been used as a mere tool for the advancement of Eric Hardcastle's pleasures and interests. The discovery was bitter as gall and wormwood, and humiliating to the depths; for the astute rascal had contrived that some shadow of his own misdoings should rest upon the too-confiding MacAlpin.

When enlightenment came, it brought with it as we know, a revulsion of feeling that amazed and terrified the Squire for the first time in his scheming life, while it drove his unfortunate friend into wild and boisterous dissipation, which for many a day made his name a hissing and a bye-word.

And now Eric Hardcastle lies, blind, decrepit and helpless, in the house of Glenmore—and the child whose inconvenient existence the wretched man had laboured to destroy, is sobbing out the great word, 'Father,' upon the breast of the agitated old sinner!

MacAlpin hurried from the room and from the house. A roof had become oppressive; he craved for space and air. His own life had been stormy, in more sense than one. Things moved him for good or evil as they failed to move most men; his imagination touched with colour and longing and fired with intense energy much that others would take with philosophic calm. He had fought with beasts and devils in his own impetuous nature, many a time and oft; he had listened entranced to the music of the spheres, and had seen the angels ascending and descending whilst the Heavens were opened to his enraptured gaze. But what he had just witnessed seemed to move him in all these ways at once in a perfect hurricane of conflicting passions and emotions.

'The *murderer!*' he groaned and muttered through clenched teeth; as he thought of the sick man: 'the *Angel!*' he sobbed, as the graceful form by the couch rose before him.

He had vowed to befriend this double-dyed ruffian; he had promised, and he would keep his word, as he was a living man, but—but, in spite of himself, a sense of repugnance clung to him as he thought of the man's heartless crimes, and the too sweet compen-

sation granted him in the tender devotion of that 'fresh young life.

Her mother,—her mother,—no, he had never mentioned her, even to his own soul for long years. He had been loyal to his friend,—it was hard not to curse Eric Hardcastle when he thought of it! *How* hard it had been to play the man under the circumstances none but himself ever knew!

He had long since buried the past; he must bury it deeper still, in spite of all the devils in hell, or Eric Hardcastle, or another.

He walked on at a rapid pace, not caring where he went—until at last, calmness and self-mastery returned to him.

MacAlpin's absence was so prolonged that Glenmore and Maitland became anxious, and started out to find him. Their concern was not without cause, for brigandage flourished almost with impunity, and its ramifications were so extensive that strangers never knew but that their own servants might throw them into the hands of their compatriots, and pocket their share of the spoils with perfect sang-froid, praising the saints for their good fortune.

MacAlpin, however, had never even thought of the possibility of such an event. 'It would be awkward if such a thing should happen!' Maitland said, as he and Glenmore made their way in search of the absent man, 'uncommonly awkward!'

'Of course it would be very inconvenient,' Glenmore assented, 'but, listen! I hear him coming! Yes, it's Donald, whistling in quick time to his own step. It's an old habit of his, and used to mean, according to Graham, that he was either in a dangerous mood, or in high good humour.'

'Yes, I have heard some such thing,—and somehow, I dislike it! Why can't a man do his thinking quietly, without a home-made orchestra to help him! And what an extraordinary dirge he has got hold of now! Listen—I believe he makes it up, just for his own use.'

Glenmore smiled. 'I really think you are right, for I have noticed that what he hums or whistles is an

index to his mind or his mood, or whatever you call it.'

'His mood!' the lawyer said, scornfully.

'Yes, his mood,' Glenmore repeated. 'You do not quite know MacAlpin; he is made of very fine metal, and somehow it often rises to a white heat under the inspiration of his own quaint ditties. If he were a soldier he would lead the charge to the time of some such lilt, and woe betide the man that might stand in front of him!'

'Yes, yes,' Maitland replied impatiently, 'I suppose it must be so, or soldiers would not carry bands with them all over the world; but to my thinking, a man should keep his breath for his essential business, and put all his force into that.'

'Quite true,' Glenmore said, 'and yet the heat and temper needed for supreme action is often inspired by the charm of music, linked to fitting words—as for instance, the Marsellaise.'

'Very true!' Maitland said, 'and on the other hand, I have heard of music as seductive as the sirens, robbing men of their strength and bringing them into bondage to the worst, the very worst!--but then I suppose, even the highest gifts need much discrimination in their use, very much discrimination, don't you think so, Glenmore?'

'Ah,' MacAlpin said, greeting his friends, 'the view is better higher up. Shall we try it to-morrow?'

'To-morrow?—To-morrow, my dear sir, I shall be on my way to England!' Maitland replied briskly, 'the tangle is pretty well cleared up and the mystery solved. What more?'

The path was narrow, and the three men fell apart and made their way in silence.

They had almost reached the house when MacAlpin asked, 'What is to be done with Hardcastle when we leave here?'

'Ah,' Glenmore said, falling back a step and linking his arm in that of MacAlpin, 'that has given us all something to think about, and at last we have decided to take him to Fosseyway.'

'To Fosseyway!' Donald echoed, quite taken back.

'I have never once thought of the possibility of such a thing!'

'No, nor any of us,' Glenmore remarked quietly, 'until about an hour ago!'

'But I am sure he will not wish to go back to Fosseway,' MacAlpin said. 'What then?'

'He certainly was much distressed when I mentioned it,' Glenmore continued, 'and he trembled so violently that we all feared the consequences; but it has been explained to him that there is really no other way, except we leave him to fall back once more into the hands of desperate men; for, strange as it sounds, he is really a friendless man.'

Donald was silent.

'It was a hard matter to decide,' Glenmore observed, divining MacAlpin's thoughts. 'You feel about it very much as Maitland does, but Lady Glenmore urged it, and as she is in ignorance of much that we know, I had really no choice but to concur in her wishes, or tell her what I most sincerely hope she may never hear from anyone. Do you understand?' he asked, pressing his companion's arm.

'I'll go to-morrow, with Maitland,' MacAlpin said, by way of reply. 'It will be necessary to prepare the way somewhat, and there are other reasons which need not be mentioned.'

Madame Rey and her daughter had set their hearts on seeing Paris. They had not visited the French capital since the 'Terror' had swept over France; and now that Wellington was there, and Louis XVIII once more in possession, the situation was decidedly piquant.

And so it came about that the Glenmores were left alone at Naples with Hardcastle, while their friends left for England, by way of Paris.

Certainly, a visit to Paris just then was something to remember; chiefly, perhaps, because there was so much one wished to forget of those dark and tragic days; but then Europe had so long been the battleground of nations, and death, in all sorts of red and frightful forms had been so long present to men's

minds that the keen edge of horror had become blunted, and the very overwhelming nature of the piled-up agonies had worked its own cure. People's minds were absolutely jaded by the wearisome tale of bloodshed, and had become at last, mercifully callous, and unable to admit any more of that terrible, bleeding past.

Their stay was longer than Maitland had intended, as Wellington was absent on a hunting expedition, and it was necessary to wait his return; meanwhile, Madam had the facility of seeing much of special interest which need not be enumerated.

It was not without a shudder that Maitland led them across the Place de la Concorde, on their way to the Tuileries, for the memories of the guillotine still remained. The fountains were sending forth their crystal showers of cooling waters, but all the waves of the sea and all the torrents the Heavens might pour out could not wash away the ensanguined stains left by the slaughter of so many noble lives during that period of madness and blood.

Madame had a sigh for the past, which, however, in no way interfered with her appreciation of the present.

'One cannot always be thinking of graves and guillotines, can they, Frederic?' she said pleasantly to Maitland; 'one must think of pleasant things as much as one can, and really, one can think of pleasant things most of the time if they wish to!—Don't you think so, Frederic?' she asked, naively. 'Yes, just so!' Maitland said, rather doubtfully, for in truth he was only giving very slight attention to the bright chatter of his companion.

'I know what would be pleasure to me!' her daughter said with energy, 'it would be pleasure to punish those who were so heartless and cruel, and wrought so much misery!'

'Yes!' Madame answered, sighing, recalled to her own past, 'I put it away from me because I must, and search all I can for a better atmosphere in which to breathe; these terrible things are suffocating to the very soul,—oh! so very suffocating, don't you think

so?' Madame had it all her own way, as no one answered.

Their visit, brief as it was, fell out fortunately after all, for they were just in time for the Feast of Saint Louis. The Tuileries was a blaze of glory; the grand staircase leading to the banqueting-room was decorated by soldiers in gorgeous uniforms standing at attention on every second step, grand and still as statues; and all because the exiled king was pleased to dine in public, for the pleasure of his subjects.

Madame had made a great effort to enjoy the sight, and as a suitable gown for such high occasions had not been included in her travelling wardrobe, the want had to be supplied at the briefest notice. The costumier of the period, however, was equal to the occasion, and in four hours or so, the correct garment was forthcoming, and was pronounced a perfect wonder of elegance and beauty, a feminine confection, altogether charming.

And so Madame had the fecility of seeing the king dine in his own honour, with a large napkin tucked deftly under his chin, and eating profusely of every dish, as in duty bound, until he became almost black in the face, such pious zeal did the anniversary of his patron saint inspire!

Talleyrand, and his uncle the Archbishop of Paris, who looked as though they had been dug out of the grave for the occasion, stood, meanwhile, at his right hand.

It was considered a most edifying sight by such of the old nobility as had been fortunate enough to keep their heads upon their shoulders to witness it. Madame was highly gratified by the sight of a function so curious and entertaining and worthy of perpetual remembrance.

CHAPTER XXI

A BURYING AND A RESURRECTION

THE home-coming of the travellers was an event of great importance and as Fosseyway was still in the hands of the workmen, Woodlands had the honour of the bride for two whole months. 'Only for two months!' Munroe repeated dolefully, 'only for two months in two hundred years!' Still, the spell of disparagement was broken, and that was something to add to the history of the place, 'And who knows what sunny days may be in store for us? Ah, indeed, who knows!' It was indeed something to have given the faithful old retainer two months of unalloyed bliss.

Eric Hardcastle was ill at ease in his unaccustomed surroundings. He had coveted Woodlands in the days of his power, and had laid many schemes to acquire it. He knew that the young Glenmore was a poor man, and concluded that his agent could easily be tempted by a large sum to part with the old place, and he was surprised and piqued beyond measure to find his advances received with coldness and promptly declined.

Why he had been so eager to secure the place, no one seemed to know, except that Woodlands was older than Fosseyway by half a century or more, and that some jingling rhyme of unknown date linked the fate of the two places together, and predicted that the Lord of Fosseyway must also be the Lord of Woodlands, or die without a son to succeed him.

Strange as it seems, it was quite true that Hardcastle with all his many-sided equipments of craft, had a spice of superstition in his blood, not the less in evidence because he affected to despise such weakness in other men. And now he was a guest at Woodlands, under circumstances which made his presence

so strange and pathetic in the opinion of all who knew him, and so depressing to himself.

The improvements at the Hall which he had planned with such care were at length completed, but he could not see them; and the son, whose honour and stability he had in view when they were undertaken would never return, not even his dust would mingle with his native soil. So far as the spoken word was concerned, it was as though Reginald Hardcastle had never been born.

Only once, a groom in speaking of some changes in the stables said something about 'one of Master Reginald's horses' in the hearing of the old Squire, before Glenmore's warning glance could check him. Hardcastle's face flushed and paled and twitched painfully, while his lean, nervous fingers clutched his chair in a brave effort to hide his sufferings.

Whether he had succeeded in doing so or not, he could not tell; for alas! the windows of the mind were darkened, the sun and the moon and the stars had ceased to give their light, the once strong man was bowed down, and all the keepers of the house trembled. Yet it was not with age, measured by the years, but rather the outcome of the consuming fires of cunning and crime.

His mind, at times, seemed to have regained much of its old vigour, but his interest in life had died. He had become a siliest man, rarely even asking a question or showing any interest in the business or concerns of others. He moved silently about the halls and rooms of the old mansion, feeling his way with pitiful uncertainty, or led by the hand about the grounds in which he had once taken such pride, until the sight moved even strangers to pity, and at last won the compassion of even his enemies.

And so the years passed; it is needless at this distance of time to recount the full history of events.

The works flourished, and Glenmore's inheritance became bewilderingly extensive. So much is matter of common knowledge. A new village rose, as by magic, to take the place of the old; cottages beautiful

in structure, sanitary and full of comfort came into existence; schools and an hospital were built, also a home for worn-out workmen who had none to care for them of their own blood; and cottages for widows whose husbands had died in the service of the firm were erected. Orphan children of the workmen were considered wards of Lord and Lady Glenmore without forms of application or pressure of any sort, and so they grew up without bitterness or any sense of the inequalities of life, and developed naturally, according to their bent.

The young laird and his gentle lady became a tremendous force, because they were so human in their sympathies and pleasures, linking themselves in all things with the interests of the men who were the instruments of their wealth. The healthy natural craving of the people for enjoyment, for Nature, for freedom from the constant grind of daily toil was not barred and banned until men clutched at a little recreation as though it was something to be stolen at their peril, and not theirs of right.

The freedom of intercourse between employer and employed had a healthy influence upon both, and the village folk were encouraged to put forth their energies in any direction for which they had special aptitude, sure of sympathy and appreciation. Glenmore was proud of the men who had found their true mission in life while employed at the works, and had by their own perseverance acquired the means of advancing their intellectual and social status.

It was a new world to Hardcastle, and one into which he had no capacity for entering. Sometimes he seemed to catch a passing whiff of a fresh atmosphere, but only a confused sense of amazement and wonder remained with him when the moment had passed. Whatever process of transformation and re-adjustment was going forward in the deeper recesses of his own mind was never disclosed by any marked movement or spoken word; the surface of his life, to all appearance, remained the same, and no one wished to recall the past.

In course of time, a curly-headed little lad, answering to the name of Reginald, played about his chair, and climbed upon his knee, to be gathered snugly into the old man's embrace, and there, sometimes, held so tight that the little fellow wondered in his childish way and still more when warm drops fell upon his little face, upturned to grandpa's; and then with the quick transition of a child's fancy he would seize the golden opportunity of tracing the source of the moisture with a small finger, and drawing imaginary pictures with it upon the wasted cheek, until the old man hid his face upon the curly head in self-defence, and made talk about the things children love, to hide his joy and sorrow in having another Reginald in his arms!

Lady Glenmore often found her little son thus, and the old Squire would kiss the mother's hand as she lifted her little boy from her father's knee, and received his reward in a kiss pressed tenderly upon his own pale brow.

And then a day came when the flag floated once more at half-mast upon the great tower of Fosseway Hall, to tell all men that Eric Hardcastle's earthly troubles were over.

Besides the wealth which came of right to the young Glenmore, the deceased Squire had an ample fortune under his own control, thanks to his shrewdness and business sense, which nothing up to the final collapse of all his schemes seemed to impair.

When the time for reading his will came, it was found that MacAlpin, Graham and Janet were beneficiaries to a large amount. Donald was surprised, and greatly perturbed, and refused absolutely to receive anything, 'from a thread even to a shoe-latchet!' 'No, never!' he said under his breath, with a touch of his old vehemence, 'never!'

A special bequest of fifteen thousand pounds was made in favour of Alexander MacAlpin—as our friend Sandy, now a rising artist, was designated in this formal document, 'in consideration of important service rendered, and much suffering endured, which laid

the testator under abiding obligation, beyond money to repay.'

The balance was left to his little grandson, Reginald, whose style and title was set forth with minute care, the interest till his coming of age, to be at the disposal of 'his beloved daughter, the Lady Glenmore.'

His latter years at the Hall had been so quiet and uneventful, and the past had been so completely pushed into the background, that his death came as a surprise to everyone. His remarkable career was recalled for a time with some keenness, and well-nigh forgotten fragments of his life were commented on with amazement and wonder that so little of his once all-powerful personality and influence could be even imagined. In fact, Eric Hardcastle belonged to a bitter past of men's lives which people had learned to forget, and he had become, for all his wealth and forceful will a memory, even a faint memory, before he died.

Among those who stood by his grave on that early spring day, there are but two who need be mentioned, Lord Ruthven, and a lady, closely veiled, whom we have met before. Notwithstanding the place and the occasion, Ruthven's eyes wandered in spite of himself in the direction of the veiled mourner, with a look of curious and eager interest.

As the last word was spoken over the mortal remains of the erstwhile Master of Fosseyway, the lady moved away, almost hastily. One might imagine that her presence there was not owing to regret, however conventional, but to make sure that the once-terrible Squire was at last safely underground.

Lord Ruthven noticed the movement, and impelled by something stronger than his will, followed and with a low-spoken word, offered her his arm. Her hesitation was but for a moment. but to Ruthven it seemed a long time of racking suspense, into which was compressed the unspoken anguish of years. As he handed her into the carriage, he whispered falteringly, labouring under deep emotion, 'Miss Anstru-

ther—Nola!—should not the bitter tragedy of the past suffice for us both?’

Was there a slight movement of assent, and a faint pressure of the hand which rested so lightly upon his own? He thought so, and touched it reverently with his lips. A whole world of confused memories and rushing tenderness was awakened by that simple act. The past came back to both in a new light of wonder and regret, and the longing for companionship and oneness of life asserted itself, in despite of all barriers and long, fateful years. Eric Hardcastle's baleful shadow had fallen upon more lives than one. It is needless to say more.

And so it happened that a graveyard with its still inhabitants and sombre memories may yet be a place of resurrection and life; for there is much which should be buried besides the cast-off human tabernacle, and among the many events which have come to our knowledge in the course of this narrative, many of them sad and bitter enough—let us rejoice in the prospect of brighter days for two long-separated, loyal hearts.

Within less than a year a quiet wedding was celebrated in the old moss and ivy covered church, much to the delight of those who could recall certain events of the past. The reader must fill in for himself the gaps left in this very human history of long ago. Enough, that we are permitted to link our sympathies with those who were privileged to wish joy and length of days to Lord and Lady Ruthven of Ruthven Towers.

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