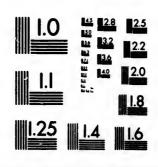


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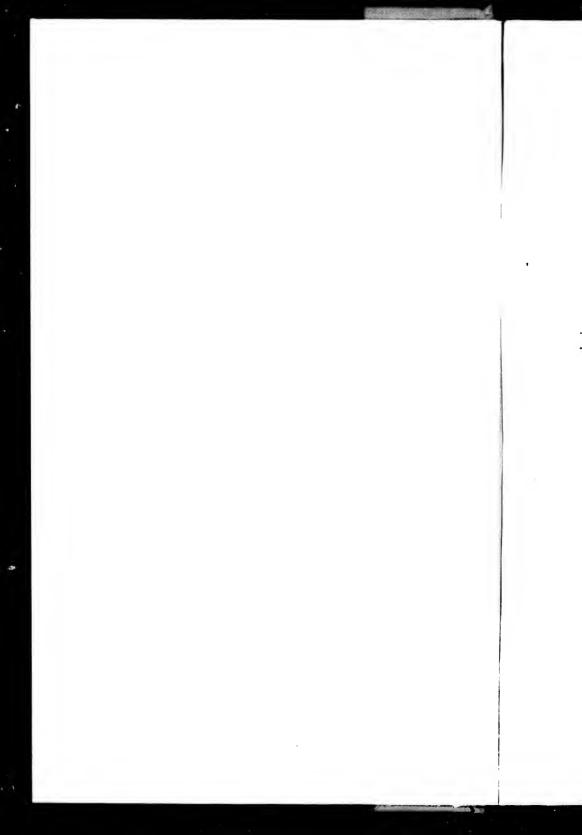
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DOROTHEA KIRKE.



DR. KIRKE'S DAUGHTERS .- Page 9.

DOROTHEA KIRKE

OR

Free to Serbe

BY

ANNIE S. SWAN

AUTHOR OF "ALDERSYDE;" "CARLOWRIE;" "GATES OF EDEN;"
"BRIAR AND PALM;" ETC. ETC.

NEW EDITION

TORONTO, CANADA
WILLIAM BRIGGS

EDINBURGH AND LONDON
OLIPHANT, ANDERSON & FERRIER
1889

Entered according to Act of the Parliament of Canada, in the year one thousand eight hundred and eighty-nine, by Wartam Briggs, Book Steward of the Methodist Book and Falling House, Toronto, at the Department of Agriculture.



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NOTE.

HE following tale originally appeared in the Christian Leader, under the title of "Free to Serve," the Author being then ignorant of the fact that a volume bearing that name had already been given to the world by another Writer.

Under a new title and in a compact form, it is now offered to the public in the hope that God may graciously use it as a humble instrument for good.

ANNIE S. SWAN.

March, 1884.

Briggs, House,

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DOROTHEA KIRKE.

CHAPTER I.

DOCTOR KIRKE'S DAUGHTERS.

"They were two daughters of one race."

R. KIRKE was a weary man.

He had ridden thirty miles across country by the most primitive of roads; and not being so young as he once was, he felt the effects of his uncomfortable ride when he alighted from his horse at his own gate in the grey light of a December afternoon.

"Anyone called for me, Roberts?" he said,

inquiringly, to his groom, who came out of the stable to take the horse's bridle.

"No, sir, nobody; I just asked the cook this minute."

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The Doctor gave a sigh of relief and proceeded towards the house, drawing off his gloves as he did so. He entered by the door of the surgery, which was detached from the house, but connected with it by a narrow corridor branching off the hall.

Laying aside hat and overcoat, Dr. Kirke pushed open the library door and peered in. The lamp was not lighted, but there was a figure sitting on a low stool by the hearth—a girl's figure—about which the red firelight played lovingly.

"Hilloa! who is it—Florrie or Dolly—eh?" he asked, as heartily as if there was not such a thing as weariness in the world.

"It is me, papa," said a girl's voice; and the figure rose, and, coming towards him, held up her face to be kissed.

You will look at this girl, if you please, for she is the heroine of these pages,—Dorothea Kirke, the Doctor's elder daughter, and his dearest. She was tall,—too tall, those said who wished to depreciate Miss Kirke's beauty,—but she carried

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her figure with such superb and womanly grace that you felt that her height became her well. She was very like her father; and he was Scotch. Her face was characteristically Scotch; dark of hue, somewhat strongly marked of feature, but a good, true, earnest face, trust-inspiring and pleasant to see. Her eyes were simply magnificent; grey, with a tinge of blue in their depths, and fringed by dark lashes to match the smooth brown hair which coiled so neatly and becomingly about the stately head. It was stately, though so womanly. Looking at Dorothea Kirke you felt that she was a woman whom it would take years to know.

She wore a merino dress something the colour of her eyes, plainly made but fitting to perfection; a linen collar and cuffs, and a scarlet geranium for ornament.

Dr. Kirke looked at her admiringly, as he often did. She was a daughter of whom any man might be proud.

"You are tired, papa?" she said, looking at

him keenly and affectionately.

"A little. How's mamma; and where's Florrie?"

"With mamma, I think. Her head has been very bad to-day, papa; but I think it is better now."

Mrs. Kirke was an invalid, and had been unable to be removed from her own apartments for months.

"Florrie's company is not the best when the head is bad," said the Doctor. "Mamma will never heed my instructions about keeping quiet."

"I do my best, papa," said Dorothea, quietly.

"My dear, I know you do. Without you, Dorothea, this house would go to ruin," said the Doctor, bluntly. "Well, have you forgotten we dine at The Court to-night?"

"No, papa; but I am sure you would rather

stay at home, you look so weary."

"Correct; but we must not neglect the claims of society," replied the Doctor, drily; "and it is not every day a country doctor and his daughters are asked to dine with the great folk."

Dorothea smiled.

"The country doctor privately thinks the loss is the great folks'," she said, mischievously; at which ber father laughed heartily.

"Her ladyship has got some lions at The Court,

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Sir Reginald tells me. Clement, the artist who painted the 'The Two Ways,' you know; Miss Fenwick the novelist; and Western, the writer of those exquisite essays in the *Monthly Review*."

Miss Kirke looked suddenly interested.

"I had no idea of this, papa. I am not bored any more at the prospect of this evening. It was kind of Lady Yorke to think of us when she has so many famous people staying with her."

"My private opinion, my dear, is that Lady Yorke wishes to show you off to one or other of the mystic three. You know she regards you in the light of that flower which is born to blush ——"

"Papa, you are too absurd," interrupted Miss Kirke. "There is mamma's bell; I fancy she has heard that you have come home."

"Probably," said the Doctor, and went off upstairs to his wife's room. On the landing he met his second daughter, to whom he stooped to speak a teasing word before he passed into her mother's room.

Florence Kirke was as utterly unlike her sister as it is possible for two mortals to be. She was

little, and slight, and fragile-looking, with a baby face pretty enough but void of character; a tangle of golden curls, and big blue eyes, which gave to her face the most innocent and childlike expression. But Florence Kirke was no child; at nineteen she was a woman, full of vain imaginings, puffed up with conceit of herself and her doll face; a poor, empty, silly thing, who had hands but did not know how to use them, and a heart as shallow as a wayside stream in summer time.

"I was coming for you, papa; mamma wants you," she said.

"All right, puss; Dorothea's downstairs. You'd better get her up and get into your gowns. We'll need to be up at six, you know," said the Doctor, and opened the door of his wife's room.

She was lying on a couch drawn near to the hearth, attired in a rich dressing-gown, and having a tiger-skin thrown over her, though the air of the room was oppressively hot.

"Well, my dear, how do you find yourself to-day?" said the Doctor, bending himself over her, and laying a kind, cool hand on her forehead. She pushed down the rug and turned her face to him—a poor, thin, worn face now, as

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"No better," she said, fretfully. "My head has been frightful all day. I really think, James, that if you studied my case you could give me something to cure my head; but, of course, I am nobody. The poorest old beggar in Hartfield is a more interesting patient than your wife."

The Doctor ran his fingers through his hair in a somewhat perplexed way. He ought to have been used to such speeches, but a year's experience of them, and twenty-five years' knowledge of his wife's nature, had not brought him any nearer the best way to deal with her. She was ill,—there was no doubt about it; but she made herself worse than she was,—took a delight in playing the rôle of martyr.

Many had wondered what the plain, solid, sensible Scotch doctor had seen in the girl he had married; but there they were, man and wife, and Dr. Kirke had never known real happiness since his marriage day. They were not suited; that was the beginning and the end. I need say

no more.

"This room is too hot, Florence; and that

chatterbox has wearied you with her tongue. Your head will never mend unless you keep quiet," said the Doctor. "I think I shall send her off to Janet's for a couple of months.

"Bury the child with an old maid in a Scotch village at Christmas time! I wonder at you, James," said Mrs. Kirke in the same fretful tone. "It would be most cruel to her, to say nothing Florrie is my only solace."

Her only one! Involuntarily the Doctor turned away biting his lip and thinking of Dorothea, who was the very pillar and guiding light of the house, whose unselfish care and forethought for others made all who knew her marvel. But he kept his thought unspoken, and it was better so.

"The girls are dressing, I suppose?" said Mrs. Kirke, presently. "There are strangers at The Court, Florrie tells me; who are they, do you know?"

Mrs. Kirke's interest in all the country gossip was as keen as it had been when she was the gay, party-loving Florence Warren of Hartfield Park.

"Some literary folk from London, whom I fancy Lady Yorke wants Dorothea to know," said the supp less only vour

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gossip he gay, Park. hom I the Doctor. "Well, I must go and dress, I suppose? If you would compose that restless brain of yours, Florence, and lie still, not only physically but mentally, you would find yourself infinitely better."

"It is easy for you to speak. No one knows what my trouble is except myself; but there will be rest soon enough, James—in the grave."

"Tut, tut!" said the Doctor, rather irritably, and abruptly left the room.

Not always could be bear with his wife, and to-night she seemed to be in a trying mood. He dressed leisurely, and when he came downstairs the carriage was at the door and his daughters were in the library. Flourie looked like a lose-bud in her flowing white drapery. She was so pretty that it was pleasant to look at her; nevertheless it was at his elder daughter that Dr. Kirke looked with approving eyes. She wore black, a marvellous combination of lace and satin, with sleeves loose and short enough to show the exquisite contour of her white arms. Delicate lace fell in graceful ruffles about her throat, and a few flowers culled and arranged by her own hands nestled in her breast and in her hair.

"Dorothea, my dear, you look very well. 1 shouldn't wonder, now, if one of the London lions stole my daughter."

Dorothea laughed; and turning to her sister, wrapped her shawl closely about her, with her usual thoughtful care.

Dr. Kirke spoke in jest; but there are times when Dame Fortune turns jest to earnest.



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CHAPTER II.

SOCIETY.

"A gilded show or rather shame,
A little pleasure, much of pain,
False words and smiles to hide the dart
Intended for our neighbour's heart—
All this we call society."

Yorke's drawing-room that night, doing their best to amuse each other and to pass that stupid and interminable half-hour which precedes dinner. The drawing-room at Dudley Court was characterised by her ladyship's admirers as a "love of a room," so æsthetic, and full of art. If a hideous blending of indescribable hues and incongruous designs make a harmonious and beautiful whole, then Lady Yorke's æsthetic drawing-room was very beautiful indeed. But

11

there were some who thought that the massive and soberly elegant furnishings which in the esgone had satisfied the souls of the ladies of the Court, were infinitely preferable to the artistic taste of Sir Reginald's wife.

Lady Yorke lived in the very fore-front of fashionable life, dipped in all its manias, followed all its frivolities, and was consequently never content. She was undeniably a handsome and attractive woman. Her bosom friend and confidante, the Hon. Mrs. Egerton, watching her as she stood talking to Mr. Western in one of the windows, was obliged to confess with inward chagrin that she carried her age well, and that she did not present such an appearance, though she was ten years her junior. But the Hon. Mrs. Egerton had cares of a sordid nature which never touched Lady Yorke, and she had lived to see five children buried, and these things will leave their mark behind them.

Turning from her scrutiny, presently, Mrs. Egerton crossed the room to the western window, where a lady sat with her head bent over an open book.

"Dear Miss Fenwick, do I intrude? I am in-

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sufferably bored by our well-meaning, but frightfully insipid, curate; have pity on me, and talk to me," she said in winning tones, and laying a jewelled hand carelessly on the lady's shoulder.

She started and drew back a little—a very little—as if she disliked the touch, and answered in a voice of exquisite sweetness, "I am afraid I shall continue the boring process, Mrs. Egerton, but I am quite willing to talk if you suggest a subject."

Mrs. Egerton showed her faultless teeth in a smile which was no smile after all.

"Just as usual, Miss Fenwick, brusque and to the point—the privilege of genius I suppose—eh?"

Miss Fenwick turned her head away, and her lip curled; perhaps it was just as well she kept unuttered the thought in her mind. She was a middle-aged woman evidently, for her hair was abundantly streaked with grey, and there were deeply-drawn lines on her broad forehead, which told either of years or suffering. Her face was a striking one; the features strongly marked to harshness; the eyes small, but keen and farseeing; the mouth too large for a woman's, and marked by masculine firmness and decision. In attire she was what feminine critics would call

dowdy; and her whole appearance was plain and unattractive in the extreme.

But that unlovely casket contained a soul as high above that of the woman by her side as the sky is above the earth; a soul in which there was no room for the miserable aims and petty weaknesses which occupied the minds and lives of so many of her sex; and a heart wide enough and deep enough to feel for all the woes of poor humanity. She was sought after by Lady Yorke and others of her class because it was fashionable to know the first novelist of the day; and because her society and conversation, with its delightful flavour of clever sarcaem, kept guests in a country house from being bored—that was all. Not one of them could sound the depths of that grand nature, nor read between the lines; but Mary Fenwick revealed herself to very few.

"Have Lady Yorke's guests not all arrived yet, Mrs. Egerton?" she asked presently, turning a serene face to the smiling dame beside her.

"No; we wait, I fancy, for Doctor Kirke and his daughters. It is in very bad taste for him to be late."

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that the Kirkes, standing a few steps lower on the ladder, showed great-presumption in keeping the higher lights a few minutes from their dinner.

"Oh, yes, I remember Lady Yorke spoke of them. She seems to have a great love for one of the young ladies."

"Yes, Dorothea, a very sweet girl; good style too, considering what she is. I say, Miss Fenwick, I think Mr. Clement just simply too charming. How clever he looks, and how artistically he dresses. One could easily know him to be something of a higher level."

Mrs. Egerton delivered herself of her enthusiastic speech with her eye-glass directed to the hearth-rug, where a slender individual, attired in a fantastic suit of claret-coloured velvet, was holding converse languidly with his host, whose countennee were an expression of hopeless stupidity.

"Poor Sir Reginald, he knows nothing, absolutely nothing, about art; could not tell a Titian from a Raphael, I believe; it is easy to see Mr. Clement has taken him out of his depth. Just too teasing of him, isn't it?"

"Mr. Clement thinks the world was made for him to paint in, and unfortunately other people don't agree with him," said Miss Fenwick, drily; whereat Mrs. Egerton laughed a shrill little laugh, and tapped the authoress approvingly on the shoulder.

"You hit hard, Miss Fenwick; it is quite refreshing to hear you. By-the-by, I quite forgot I came over purposely to tell you what a sweet book 'On the Heights' is. I was quite in love with it; but what a shame to make that poor Rachel Brand live unmarried till her death! How could you be so cruel?"

Miss Fenwick coloured slightly, and her lips tightened. Some of my readers will know what an agony it was to her to listen to such words about the book over which she had travailed, and wrestled, and prayed with unutterable yearnings that it might approach at least near to her ideal, and that it might purify, and elevate, and lead heavenward those who read it. And it was a "sweet book"—that was her reward!

"I am glad if it amused you, or wiled away an idle hour," she forced herself to say, in calm and pleasant tones.

"It did; but I don't mind telling you, Miss Fenwick—I know you like candid criticism—

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ou, Miss ticismthat I was disappointed in it. Of course it is very fine; it reminded me of some of Miss Braddon's best,—you have read 'Aurora Floyd'?"

Miss Fenwick rose.

"I do not like talking of my books, Mrs.

Egerton. Shall we change the subject?"

"By all means," said Mrs. Egerton, glibly, delighted that her little shaft had gone home, for she was wickedly envious of the woman's genius. "I say, I am frightfully disappointed in Mr. Western. He is quite commonplace in conversation. Not a bon mot or a remarkable saying one might carry away ever falls from his lips."

Miss Fenwick smiled, now, a broad and amused smile; and glanced in the direction of Robert Western with a changed softened look in her

flashing eyes.

"You are in a critical mood to-night, Mrs. Egerton," she said; and presently Mrs. Egerton moved away to inflict herself on Mr. Western. But he was too many for her, and in a moment was at Miss Fenwick's side.

"What has the woman been saying to you, Mary?" he asked, bending his honest grey eyes on her face.

"The old story, Robert. I write about the heights, but I am painfully conscious that I am very far from them myself. Hush! here are the late comers. Oh, how beautiful these girls are; especially the tall one!"

The servant announced Dr. Kirke and his daughters, and Lady Yorke moved forward all

smiles to greet them.

"You are late, naughty child," she whispered to Dorothea. "But never mind, I will be good, and send you downstairs on Mr. Western's arm—an honour every lady in the room, my dear, is coveting."

The next moment her ladyship had beckoned to Mr. Western, and he came forward, nothing loath.

"Allow me to introduce Mr. Western to you, Dorothea; though I think he needs no introduction," said her ladyship, bluntly. "Mr. Western, this is my darling child of whom I have so often spoken—Miss Dorothea Kirke.

Mr. Western uttered some commonplace expression of pleasure, and offered his arm. Dorothea laid her hand upon it, and looked at him as she did as

him as she did so.

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He was a man past his early youth, and bearing on his face the impress of hard study and deep thinking. It was a fine face; it might even be called handsome; and it was, moreover, the face of a truly good man.

"I am afraid you will find me a very indifferent cavalier, Miss Kirke; I am not accustomed to the society of ladies," he said, looking down into the fair, calm, womanly face, with a smile which made him look years younger. An answering smile stole to Dorothea's lips, and from that moment each was at home with the other.



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CHAPTER III.

MARY FENWICK.

"There is no sorrow I have thought more about than that—to love what is great and try to reach it, and yet to fail." --GEORGE ELIOT.

OST people were disappointed in Robert Western. He was not a brilliant conversationalist, and his manner was so reserved as to cause remark. Yet he was quietly attentive to Miss Kirke at Lady Yorke's dinner-

table; and though no sustained conversation was carried on between them, there was sufficient interchange of remarks to make the society of each pleasant to the other.

Miss Kirke was intensely amused listening to the lofty sentiments concerning literature and art being expressed by Mr. Clement, who sat opposite to lis

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to her, with Mrs Egerton by his side. That lady listened to his remarks with a rapt attention and undisguised admiration, which must have been highly gratifying to him.

"I suppose it is the privilege of acknowledged genius to talk such utter nonsense?" whispered Dorothea, unable any longer to restrain or conceal her amazement.

Mr. Western's eyes met hers, and then glanced across the table, while a peculiar smile touched his lips.

Miss Kirke fancied she would not like to be the object of that smile.

"Can I help you to some sherry?" he said, coming back presently to his duties of cavalier.

"No, thanks; I never drink wine," answered Miss Kirke.

"I am glad you do not; I have long since given up the use of stimulants," said Mr. Western.

"Indeed! I fancied it a necessity in the lives of literary people," Dorothea ventured to say.

Mr. Western shrugged his shoulders.

"It is a necessity if you make it one," he said drily, and glancing again in the direction of the

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painter, who was helping himself liberally from the decanter. "I have tried it, Miss Kirke, and found it harmful. It produces a certain amount of energy while its influence lasts. Afterwards the mental powers suffer from sluggishness and stagnation. So, in the language of the vulgar, it doesn't pay. For hard-working people an hour's brisk walking in fresh air is worth all the stimulants in the world."

"I think so," answered Dorothea. "What do you think of our neighbourhood—rather uninteresting, is it not?"

"To me no English landscape is uninteresting. It is my calling to find beauty in the commonest things, and I generally succeed. How does life flow for you in Hartfield?"

"Monotonously; but I have many duties and cares at home, and time never hangs heavily on my hands."

"I fancied looking at you that such was the case," said Mr. Western. "Will you excuse me if I say how very lovely your sister is? It is refreshing to see her."

Dorothea smiled, and glanced at Florrie's flushed face and sparkling eyes, which betrayed

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lorrie's etrayed that she found the curate much less insipid than Mrs. Egerton had pronounced him to be.

"Yes. They call her 'The Flower of Hartfield,'" she said. "I am glad you think my sister pretty."

Again Mr. Western's eyes rested very keenly on the beautiful refined face beside him. Dorothea did not dream what was his thought as he did so. Presently Lady Yorke rose, and the ladies followed her example.

"I hope for a few minutes' chat upstairs, Miss Kirke," said Mr. Western, as she passed him; and Dorothea answered with a smile, which betrayed that she re-echoed the hope.

In the drawing-room the ladies grouped themselves about the hearth, and fell to talking over feminine matters, in which the younger members appeared to have but a slight interest. Florence Kirke sat on a low chair, meditatively contemplating her dainty slippers, and looking excessively bored. Dorothea listened for a few minutes to Lady Yorke and Mrs. St. Clair, the rector's wife, talking of servants, and then moved away to a corner of the room where a tempting ottoman stood in the shelter of a draught-screen. As

she passed one of the tables she picked up a book, and seating herself, opened it rather indifferently. But her indifference vanished when she saw upon the title page the name of Mary Fenwick. In a moment she was engrossed, and became oblivious of everything, till a light hand touched her shoulders, and she looked up to see the authoress standing by her side looking down at her with a glance of deep interest in her pleasant eyes.

"May I intrude? I want to talk to you. I have been looking at you all the evening," she said, in the clearest sweetest tones of an exquisite voice. "Lady Yorke has not introduced us, but I heard your name—mine is Mary Fenwick."

"I know," said Miss Kirke, pointing to the book in her hand, and making room on the ottoman, as she spoke. "I have not seen 'On the Heights' before, Miss Fenwick."

"Have you not?" Miss Fenwick's hand closed over the book, and she gently removed it from Dorothea's knee. "Do you think me rude? I believe I am a fool about my books. I am forty years old, Miss Kirke, and I have been writing for twenty years, and I am as shy about the Don't not a yondo

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thing as any school-girl about her first love. Don't be vexed with me. Do let us talk. I am not afraid to say to you that the conversation yonder is a weariness to the flesh."

Dorothea smiled. The words were only the expression of her own thought. She was charmed with this woman; and now sitting near to her, watching the expression of her face, and the changeful light in her eyes, she marvelled that she should have thought her plain.

"I know all about you, Miss Kirke, from our hostess, who seems to love you very dearly. You probably know nothing about me."

"Only by name and through your books," answered Miss Kirke; "which have been to me a stimulus and incentive to all good; nay, I will say it—I owe you a debt of gratitude which I am glad to be able to acknowledge personally."

Mary Fenwick looked pleased.

"I accept that as it is offered, knowing its value, Miss Kirke," she said. "I am glad I have seen you; glad I shall be able to carry away from Hartfield a memory of your face and kind words."

"You have had a pleasant visit?" said Dorothea, inquiringly.

Mary Fenwick shrugged her shoulders slightly, and looked towards the group on the hearth, with a little sarcastic smile playing about her mouth.

"Well, yes—as pleasant as could be expected under the circumstances. Of course, you know, I am not here on the same footing, for instance, as the Bishop of York's daughter, or Lady Cecil Maine. I am asked to Dudley Court, and other stately habitations, because I am useful for entertaining the guests in a country house. They regard me as a kind of curiosity, something in the same way as children regard a performing bear. Yes, my dear; it is absolutely true," she added, laughing at Dorothea's blank amazement.

"Why do you come?" asked Miss Kirke.

The laughter died out of Mary Fenwick's eyes, and a somewhat bitter expression took its place.

"We daren't refuse; at least I can't afford to do so. It is people like these who buy and read my books; and besides, experience of all sorts and conditions of men is money to me; so I come,—despicable, isn't it?" times more, of mo all the every not the brain If we

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afford to and read all sorts ne; so I "It must be very unpleasant," said Miss Kirke.

"That is a mild word. It is agony to me at times. However, I extract as much, perhaps more, amusement out of them than they do out of me. I know you are shocked; but it is done all the world over, that and worse. Thank God every day of your life, Miss Kirke, that you have not to earn your bread by the sweat of your brain, to which that of the brow is child's play. If we have a larger gift we have a heavy price to pay."

"I have often envied you, Miss Fenwick, and pictured you a rich, and happy, and all-satisfied woman."

Miss Fenwick nodded.

"That is the common idea. I do not believe there is a happy literary woman in the world, though there are rich ones. I know I am not one. I have a home which swallows all my resources. Do not think I grudge it—God forbid that I should; on the contrary, it is my chief joy that I can provide for it, and I am more than repaid."

Miss Kirke sat silent a little, not knowing whether to pity or dislike this strange woman

who spoke with such bitter and passionate earnestness.

"You are very unlike your books," she said at last.

"Probably, but my whole soul is here," said Mary Fenwick, lightly touching the cover of "On the Heights." "But I question if after all it is wise to make one's soul public property. There are only a few, a very few, who are interested beyond the mere story part of a novel. I took five years to write this book, Miss Kirke, and it was finished and sent to press with a miserable consciousness that I had not attained the ideal for which I had struggled. It is good, they say, but it is not what I meant it to be. I suppose it will be thus to the end of lift; we are all striving after what we cannot attain. Thank God, all these longings, these indescribable cravings after something higher and fuller and Diviner than anything we have here, will have their satisfaction in heaven. It is that idea which makes it so desirable a place to me."

Dorothea sat very still drinking in the impassioned words, fearing to move lest she should break the spell cast over her.

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At that moment Miss Fenwick had forgotten her, and she knew it. "What have I been saying?" she asked quite suddenly, breaking the brief silence. "I beg your pardon, Miss Kirke; I fear you think me a harmless lunatic, do you? No. Well, let us talk of something else. My woman's tongue delights to wag sometimes. What a lovely child your sister is! She is younger than you, I fancy?"

"Two years," answered Dorothea, not sorry to change the subject. Miss Fenwick had already given her sufficient to think over for days.

"Is that all? You look older. Yes, she is pretty, but you are beautiful. I suppose you know it. It is a strange sensation for a plain woman like me just to look at you, and wonder what it must be to be so pleasant to the eyes."

A very slight colour rose in Dorothea's cheeks.

"Nobody ever called me beautiful except my father out of his love for me," she said, laughing a little. "You are very unlike all the women I have met."

"And therefore to be avoided, eh? No. I see I have not quite turned you against me.

Forget all I have said, or regard it as the wandering of an over-driven brain. Here are the gentlemen. Excuse me, Miss Kirke, but just look at the change on the pretty face of that sister of yours. Au revoir."



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CHAPTER IV.

THE BEGINNING.

"They want no guests: they needs must be Each other's own best company."—LONGFELLOW.

R. WESTERN glanced round the room when he entered it, and then made straight for the corner where Miss Kirke sat. But Lady Yorke intercepted him by the offer of a cup of tea, poured by her own fair hands into one of the marvels of the potter's art, which were the envy of all her friends. Mr. Western accepted it, stood chatting till it was cold, and then carried it across to Miss Kirke.

"Will you accept it?—this is my stimulant," he said; and Dorothea took it at once, with a word of thanks. She put her lips to it, and then set it down on the tiny table beside her.

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"Why, it is as cold as can be!" She laughed, whereat Mr. Western looked rather ashamed.

"Of course it must be; I stood talking to Lady Yorke after she gave it me. Let me get you some more. You see I spoke within bounds when I said I was an indifferent cavalier."

By-and-by he returned with the cup replenished; and while Miss Kirke sipped it leisurely, he lifted the book she had been reading when he interrupted her.

"I am going to ask Lady Yorke for a loan of that book, Mr. Western," she said. "It is Miss Fenwick's; of course you have read it."

Robert Western turned over the pages almost with tenderness, Dorothea thought; and then sprang into her mind a sudden idea that perhaps the two were more than friends.

"Yes; I have read it more than once. It is a splendid book, and its author is a splendid woman."

"A little odd, I think," said Dorothea; and Mr. Western looked at her suddenly and sharply to see whether the words implied more than they expressed; but her clear eyes met his truthfully, and he knew that she spoke simply and sincerely.

"Odd? Well—perhaps she is. I do not

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think so, but I have known her very long. Have you had some conversation with her?"

"Yes; quite a long talk. Is she very unhappy, Mr. Western?"

Robert Western laughed.

"No. She labours for others conscientiously, lovingly, and unselfishly; and, as she teaches in these pages, that is the secret of true happiness. Odd," you said; "well, perhaps she is," repeated Mr. Western, slowly; "but I would to God more women were odd in the same way!"

Dorothea sat still and said nothing. Shall I tell it? There was just a little impatience in her mind. I think that word best expresses her feeling; a kind of soreness that plain-faced, blunt-mannered Mary Fenwick should arouse such enthusiasm in the most brilliant essayist of his time. Again assisted by his keen perceptions, Mr. Western divined her unspoken thought.

"Let me tell you a little about her, Miss Kirke, in case you lay zeal without knowledge to my charge. I became acquainted first with Miss Fenwick twenty years ago, when she was fresh from a Parisian boarding school, and I was a lad at Harrow. There was no thought of book-writ-

ing in either of our minds at that time. father was a medical man in Surrey; and shortly after her return from Paris she became engaged to his assistant, one of your handsome men with little brains and less heart; nevertheless he won hers, and she was happy. I can remember yet the sunshine on her face when he was by. not seen it often these many years. The next summer her younger sister, who had been in Paris with her, came home also. She was the beauty of the family, and the assistant speedily transferred his affections from the elder to the younger. I need not enter into details; it is sufficient that they were married and went to settle near London, where Willis had secured a second-rate practice. Dr. Fenwick was so furiously angry that he never saw his daughter afterwards. She did not live very long, and her two motherless children she left in Mary's care. After his wife's death Willis went abroad, and has not been heard of since. If he is alive he has forgotten his children's existence evidently, for they live still with their Aunt Mary in London."

"She spoke as if she had a large household," said Miss Kirke.

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"Yes, there are other two—her widowed mother and an invalid brother; all these Miss Fenwick supports with her pen. By-the-by, she found her gift just when life was at its darkest; and it saved her,—for if ever a woman loved, truly and whole-heartedly, she loved Willis."

Dorothea's eyes were strangely tender, and she looked with a new interest at the face of the authoress. She knew the meaning of those lines on the broad forehead now.

"Thank you for telling me," she said softly.
"I do not wonder that you reverence her above women."

"It was a good thing for the world and for me that she did not marry Willis," said Mr. Western.

"Why for you?" asked Dorothea.

"Because without her I should have been nothing. I have not a feminine relation in the world, and she has been to me mother, sister, and friend all in one."

"How beautiful!" said Dorothea, involuntarily. "What a blessing such a friendship must be to you both!"

"It is. I fear I weary you, Miss Kirke," said

Robert Western; and somehow Dorothea could not meet the honest grey eyes quite so fearlessly.

"Oh, no; I am deeply interested. We in Hartfield have not many opportunities like this; our lives are necessarily monotonous: and except when The Court is occupied, there is literally nothing to disturb the tenor of our ways."

"Do you never go in search of pastures new?" asked Mr. Western.

The slightest possible shade of surprise crossed Dorothea's face.

"Oh, no; my mother is an invalid, you know, and I have to fill her place. Five years ago I went to Scotland to visit my father's sister. That is the extent of my travels. I have never been to London."

"It seems almost incredible," said Mr. Western.
"Well, there is a revelation in store for you. I have travelled much at home and abroad, but I never saw anything to equal London. A breath of pure air, and a change like this is very grateful to me; but I always return to the city glad that my lot is cast in it. It is a fountain which never runs dry, an ocean whose depths never can be sounded. Sometimes the intensity of life in

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London, and my utter inability even to comprehend or even to try to think it out, oppresses me like a nightmare. My heart is in London; it is my study, my——"

"So sorry to interrupt what appears to be so interesting a conversation," said Lady Yorke's smooth and well-modulated tones at Mr. Western's elbow. "But, Dorothea, my sweet child, I have promised that my guests shall hear you sing. Mr. Western, you must not be angry with me, but I must positively steal her away."

"I do not know how I can sing before so many people, Lady Yorke," said Miss Kirke; but she rose at once. There was no nonsense about her—she could sing, and never refused or required to be pressed to do so. Yet there was no affectation nor vanity, nor ostentatious display of her gift. It was given her for use, and she used it, that was all.

Miss Kirke crossed the room with quiet and graceful step, opened the piano, and began to play. Her touch was exquisite; but she was only seeking her melody; while singing, she scarcely touched the instrument.

I cannot describe Dorothea's singing to you.

I have heard it, and it brought tears to my eyes. There was intense silence when the tones of that full, clear, superbly sweet voice sounded through the room; even the most frivolous heart was stirred by its power, and those with deeper feelings were spell-bound. She sat quite still for a few seconds when she had finished, and then moved slowly over to her corner again, not seeming to hear the buzz of praise and flattering words being showered upon her.

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Dr. Kirke looked proud and pleased; but Florence was put out. There had not been sufficient attention paid to her that night; none but the curate and a disagreeable old baronet had spoken a pleasant word to her. By pleasant Florence meant complimentary, and compliments were the honey of her life.

Somehow after Miss Kirke's singing, conversation did not flow quite so glibly, and presently the guests began to exhibit symptoms of weariness. Dr. Kirke was the first to go. He had ample excuse, for there might be a dozen messages lying for him at home. Before he left the room with his daughters, Robert Western came to Dorothea's side.

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"May I say what a surprise and unspeakable joy it was to me to hear you sing? yours is the larger gift."

Dorothea smiled and shook her head.

"Your father has asked me to call, and I shall take the liberty of calling to-morrow morning, as I return to London later in the day. Have I your permission?"

"Surely," answered Dorothea; and somehow the common expressions of politeness would not come. She did not know what it meant, but she did know that a strange sweet sense of happiness, quite unlike anything she had felt before, had stolen into her heart during these few hours. And from that night the world was never the same any more to Dorothea Kirke.





CHAPTER V.

MORNING CALLS.

AD you a pleasant evening, and who took Florence in to dinner?"

These questions Mrs. Kirke asked Dorothea next morning when she brought up her breakfast tray. Although Florence was the favourite,

Mrs. Kirke preferred her elder daughter's ministrations by her couch. No hands but Dorothea's could adjust the pillows to rest so well, no other touch was so soothing and so gentle upon an aching head, no step so soft and noiseless in a sick room; therefore Dorothea must always be present when required.

"Yes, mamma dear, we had an exceedingly pleasant evening, and Sir George Wyville took Florrie in to dinner."

Mrs. Kirke nodded her head, well pleased.

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"Sir George is a very gentlemanly man, and Wyville Court is a splendid old place," she said musingly. "Was he very attentive to Florence?"

"Too much so, mamma," replied Dorothea; "and I don't like to see Florrie encourage him so openly. I saw Lady Yorke noting it last night."

"Indeed; and who took you in?"

"Mr. Western, mamma," Dorothea answered, and turned her face away, for it was a *little* conscious-looking. Just then, to her relief, her sister entered the room; looking a little pale and wearied-looking, as she always did after the slightest excitement.

"Well, my darling, had you a pleasant evening?" asked Mrs. Kirke, turning her eyes fondly

on her younger daughter's face.

Florence shrugged her shoulders. "I was bored, mamma, most insufferably. Lady Yorke's lions preferred Dorothea to me, and only Mr. Pengarth and old Sir George paid me the least civility."

"Old Sir George, dear," said Mrs. Kirke, reprovingly; "I am sure he is not more than forty-five."

"Sixty-five if he is a day, and dyes his hair,

mamma," laughed Florence. "Nevertheless, his possessions might tempt any needy young woman to forget his age."

Dorothea coloured. Such talk jarred upon her sorely. "Mamma, one of the lions actually fell in love with Dorothea; two of them, indeed, but one was a woman, Miss Fenwick,—such a fright and—."

The half bell rang, and Dorothea escaped. It was an early caller for Miss Florence Kirke,—her elderly admirer on horseback, when he looked his best. But he was old and grey, and unprepossessing enough, in spite of his great possessions. Hearing who it was, Dorothea did not go to the drawing-room, but returned to her mother's sitting-room to tell Florence. She looked bored, but Mrs. Kirke's vain heart beat high with pleasurable hope.

"Sir George asked for you, Florence. I need not accompany you to the drawing-room," said Dorothea.

"Very well, as you like; I can say you are busy with mamma," Florence answered carelessly, and flitted away to the drawing-room, humming a scrap of the latest opera. Before many minutes passed,

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another ring came to the hall bell of Hartfield House, and presently a maid appeared at the door of Mrs. Kirke's room.

"Mr. Western is in the library, Miss Kirke; he would not go to the drawing-room, but would like to see you for a few minutes, please, if you are not too busy," she said, and Dorothea kept her face away, for a flush had stolen up over it and dyed it red.

"Very well, Jane, I shall be down just now," she answered quietly; and when the maid withdrew she added to her mother, "Papa asked Mr. Western to call, mamma, and he leaves Hartfield in the afternoon; that is why he has come so early."

"Go downstairs, then, and say to Mr. Western that I shall be pleased to see him in my sitting-room; I am anxious to see Lady Yorke's famous lion."

"Very well, mamma," answered Dorothea, and went down at once.

Robert Western had thought her beautiful the previous night; this morning she seemed to him, in her faultless morning attire, the most perfect type of womanhood he had ever met. His greet-

ing was quiet but earnest, and, after a few minutes' talk, he acceded to her request to come upstairs. Robert Western was a keen observer, and during the few minutes he spent by Mrs. Kirke's sofa, he gauged her shallow nature to the very depths. He thought it hardly possible that they could be mother and daughter, the one was so exactly the antipodes of the other. Mrs. Kirke made good use of her opportunity, and before Mr. Western left she knew all there was to learn about his antecedents and domestic affairs. Distressed by her mother's unfeigned curiosity, Dorothea was not sorry when the visitor rose to go.

"You must excuse the poor entertainment I am able to offer, Mr. Western," said Mrs. Kirke; "time was when you would have fared better at Hartfield House. Ah, my dear sir, all your writing will never be able to make plain the mystery of God's dealing with such as I. I am not complaining; He knows I am resigned, only I do not care, sometimes, how soon the end comes. Well, good morning; and thanks for your visit."

Somehow, Robert Western could not utter any

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words of sympathy or condolence, and yet his heart overflowed with compassion for the woman before him. He shook hands in silence, and followed Dorothea out of the room.

"Will you not come into the drawing-room for a few minutes, Mr. Western?" she said when they reached the end of the corridor. "My sister will be sorry to have missed you."

He shook his head.

"I came to see your father and you," he answered with unmistakable emphasis; "you have many claims on your time and thought, so I will not detain you longer."

Dorothea smiled slightly, and led the way downstairs. In the hall below both stood still. Somehow words were difficult to come.

"Well, good-bye," Dorothea said at length, and held out her hand with the smile still trembling on her lips.

Western took the slim hand in both his own, and bent his eyes on the beautiful face till its colour slowly deepened.

"I will not say good-bye, only God bless and keep you till we meet again," he said, and went away.

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Dorothea went upstairs to her own room and sat down for a little, trying to realise what strange, new, unaccountable experience had crept into her life. She did not know yet that it was the dawn of love.

Sir George Wyville måde a lengthened stay, a fact which troubled Dorothea not a little. Knowing her sister thoroughly, since believed it more than probable that the rumours afloat in Hartfield regarding a probable mistress for Wyville Court were not altogether without foundation. When she heard her father come in to luncheon, she went down to meet him, and drew him into the library.

"We have had two callers to-day, papa," she said.

"Mr. Western I met on his way here," nodded the Doctor; "fine fellow, I like him. Who was the other?"

"Old Sir George."

"Old Sir Fiddlesticks; what brought him here?" said the Docter, testily.

"I am afraid Florence brought him, papa," answered Dorothea very gravely.

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in Hartfield may have foundation?" asked Doctor Kirke, a shadow gathering in his sunny eyes.

"Papa, I am afraid of it," sighed Dorothea.

"Florence is very fond of the good things of this life, and an offer of a title and such great possessions would be a great snare to her."

"I agree with you, my dear; therefore she must be removed from the snare. I shall write to Aunt Janet to-night and ask her to take Florence for a month or two."

Dorothea shook her head.

"She will rebel against it, papa. Sir George spoke of going to Algiers for the winter, so the danger may fly past."

"I know human nature better than you, my child, and am convinced that unless Florence be sent away at once there will be a Lady Wyville to travel to Algiers."

Dorothea smiled faintly.

"You do not covet a title for her, papa."

"No, thank God; I covet nothing for my daughters but the love of a true, honest Christian heart; and it is my daily prayer, Dorothea, that I may live to see them both in good keeping. I am very much concerned about this, and I am

glad we have discussed it together. Every trouble grows light when you take a share of it, my daughter."

A smile of rare and beautiful tenderness touched Dorothea's lips, and she laid her arm about her father's neck and rested her head a moment on his shoulder. I cannot tell you how these two loved each other, nor what unspeakable strength and comfort each ministered to the other amid the many cares and heartaches of their daily life.

"I can leave my bairns with the Good Father," said the Doctor, by-and-by, using one of the most beautiful words of his mother tongue. "As Aunt Janet says, 'It's puir love that canna lippen a wee'—so we'll not trouble about it, and when Florrie's out of sight she'll maybe be out of mind, and the old man will get rid of his foolish fancy."

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I am writing Dorothea's life, and it would not serve the purpose of my story to follow Florence in the path she chose. Suffice to say here that she refused to go to Scotland, and that before the east winds swept over Hartfield she had become Lady Wyville, and was on her way to Algiers.



CHAPTER VL

AUNT JANET.

Y the fire in her mother's bed-chamber sat Dorothea Kirke, leaning back in her chair, with her eyes shut and her hands folded on her lap. Her face was very pale, and worn a little too; for during the last few weeks she had been in almost constant attendance on her mother. It was no task to Dorothea to minister to the fretful invalid's many wants; she knew-they all knew—that the ministry would have an ending very soon. Outwardly there was not much change upon the face of Mrs. Kirke; but seen in the clear, still light of that peaceful September evening it had a strange, sharpened look, which we see on the faces of those coming near the end. She slept little, and during the past few days

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had been less troublesome than usual, and would lie for hours looking out upon the green hills and golden cornfields, which made one of the fairest English landscapes. Dorothea often wondered what were her thoughts. She also wondered whether her mother was in reality prepared for the coming change. In spite of the many pious speeches and expressions of resignation and hope which fell daily from her lips, there was a doubt in Dorothea's mind which would not be banished.

"Dorothea," said the sharp, shrill voice, "when was it that letter came from Florence; yesterday, was it?"

Dorothea awoke, and started up confusedly. "No, mamma, on Monday. I have been sleeping. Did you want anything?"

"Nothing. Didn't she say she was coming home? She should be on her way now."

"Yes, mamma, she should arrive in London this week."

"This week! I hope she will come down. Surely Sir George will not hinder her. I feel so oppressed and strange. I fear it will not be long now."

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your head or your back which troubles you? Can I make your pillows straight for you?"

"Never mind, it is all right. Read to me, Dorothea, something out of the Bible. When it comes to this nothing else will avail."

Dorothea lifted the Bible from the side-table, and began to read in clear, sweet, distinct tones the beautiful fourteenth chapter of St. John's Gospel. In the middle of her reading her mother fell asleep. Then she rose softly, laid down the book, and drawing the window curtain to subdue the red light of the sunset, stole out of the room.

"Has papa come in, Jane," she asked the maid she met on the stair. "I thought I heard him come."

"Yes, Miss Kirke, he has just come.

"Thanks. Step lightly as you pass mamma's door, Jane; she is asleep," said Dorothea, and passed downstairs. She found her father looking over his letters in the library. "Papa, I wish you would write to Aunt Janet and ask her to come to Hartfield for a few days," she said quite suddenly.

"Why, my dear?" he asked in surprise.

"Because you know mamma is not any better,

and I feel so alone and weary sometimes, and I am afraid I shall not be able to bear up to the very end," said Dorothea; and then, to her father's surprise, she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

Doctor Kirke was greatly surprised and distressed. It was so unlike Dorothea, but he guessed it was only the overflowing of a heart oppressed by sorrow and many cares.

"My daughter, we have been forgetting you this while," he said with infinite tenderness. "You have been too much alone. Yes, I will send for Aunt Janet at once."

"Thank you, papa," she said, gratefully. "She makes me feel so strong and brave always. She is so different from any one I have ever met. I feel as if all my cares were rolling away at the very thought of having Aunt Janet here."

Dr. Kirke wrote to his sister that night, and when her reply reached him two days later she was already on her way to Hartfield. Dorothea only heard the news of her coming when her father came home to luncheon at one, and by six o'clock Aunt Janet would be with them. A light like the shining of the sun stole into her face,

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and she went off with a glad heart, and willing happy hands, to make ready the room looking out upon the orchard, which had been her aunt's favourite during the only visit she had ever paid to Hartfield House. That done, Dorothea went to apprise her mother of the impending arrival.

The subject had to be broached gently; the slightest excitement now sent the invalid off into violent hysterics, which might be fatal in their results. So Dorothea came round to it very gently; but when her mother comprehended at length what she was telling her, she looked angry and annoyed.

"What's bringing Janet Kirke here just now? Is it to pry upon me?" she said sharply. "I don't make so much show of religion perhaps, but I'm just as prepared for another world as she is."

"Hush, mamma!" said Dorothea, laying her cool firm hand with infinite gentleness on the hot forehead. "Aunt Janet will be a great help and comfort to us all. She knows so much about trouble and sickness, and I sometimes fear I am not just so good a nurse as might be."

"You do well enough," said her mother, ungraciously. "But of course you've grown tired of

it—I can't complain. Consideration is not to be expected from young people, even for a mother in time of trouble."

Dorothea's lips twitched just a little, but there was added tenderness in her touch, increased gentleness in her voice, when she spoke.

"Dear mamma, you know anything I can do for you is an unspeakable joy to me, but I have not been so well of late—I am not well enough now to give you the attention you require. I knew you would not bear a stranger near you, so I asked papa to send for Aunt Janet."

"You look the picture of health, I'm sure," said Mrs. Kirke, petulantly; but the sudden falling of a tear upon her hand made her raise her eyes swiftly to her daughter's face.

"Never mind me, Dorothea; I just say anything. I sometimes think my senses are leaving me altogether," she said with sudden gentleness. "God knows where I would have been without you, my child; in my grave, probably, years ago."

Dorothea bent down, and kissed her mother; that rare caress meant a very great deal, and her mother knew it.

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mother; and her "Have you got a room ready for Aunt Janet, and have you ordered something nice for dinner?" asked Mrs. Kirke presently, with all the old fussiness which so often made Dorothea's life a burden to her in days gone past. She could not trust her daughter to do all that was necessary, but treated her as a child, or as one might treat an inexperienced and awkward servant-girl.

"Yes, mamma; everything is ready," said Dorothea, cheerfully. "And now I must go and change my dress for Aunt Janet. I shall not be

many minutes."

"Will you not?"

The sick woman cast her eyes up to her daughter's face with a strange wistful look, which Dorothea never forgot.

"Very well. Just open the window a little and let the wind blow in. There is wind, isn't there, to-day? I heard it among the trees. I feel so strange to-day, Dorothea, I can't tell you. When is Florence coming, did you say?"

"I did not say she was coming, mamma; she was here only on Tuesday. It is Aunt Janet who is coming to-night," Dorothea explained.

"Oh! yes, I forgot—yes, Janet Kirke. I never

got on well with her; I suppose because she is Scotch. But she is a good woman—so your father says. Well, well, run and dress; we must show her all respect, for your father's sake. I'm going to sleep, I think my eyes are heavy. Don't be long, Dorothea."

Dorothea left the room and rang the bell for the housemaid to remain in Mrs. Kirke's dressingroom, out of sight, in case she required anything. Then she made a hasty toilet, ran into Aunt Janet's room once more to see if there was nothing lacking, then down to the dining-room to see that the table was right, and finally came back to see her mother.

She was asleep. Looking at her face, a great and strange fear stole into the girl's heart. She had seen sufficient of death among her father's poorer patients to know his harbingers. As she stood there holding her hand to her heart to still its quick throbbing, she heard the opening of the hall-door and the bustle of an arrival downstairs, and stole from the room, closing the door gently, so that the noise below might not awaken her mother. Looking over the banisters she saw her Aunt standing by her trunk, looking expectantly

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"O Aunt Janet, dear auntie, I think my heart

will break!" she said, brokenly.

"Hush, my dear! just come in here," said Aunt Janet; and pushing open the library door, drew her niece in and shut it again behind her.

Then Dorothea stood up and looked at the dear face and figure with loving eyes. There was nothing striking about either of them. Janet Kirke was a very ordinary woman to look at. She was forty-five years old, and looked her age and more. Her hair was grey and curled all round her head, as it had done when she was bonny Janet Kirke of Elie, five and twenty years ago. Many changes these years had brought; and many tribulations had stolen the lustre from the bright grey eyes, and the bloom from the rounded cheek, and planted some big broad lines on her brow. was as like her brother as she could well be, therefore there was close resemblance between her and Dorothea. There was something more; there was a strong, deep, passionate love-such as does not often exist between women.

Looking at her, Dorothea felt an unutterable sense of peace and rest steal over her weary heart—she was so strong and self-reliant, and steadfast, and yet so tender, and womanly, and gentle; her very presence was a cup of strength at all times, but especially in hours of trouble.

"Now, bairn, that I get a look at you, I see it's time I was here," said Aunt Janet, presently, with her sweet Scotch accent. "How is your mother to-day?"

"Very ill, Aunt Janet. I think it will not be very long. I am so thankful you have come. I feel as if I could just sit down and fold my hands, and say to myself, All will be right now auntic has come."

A smile, very like Dorothea's own, stole to the elder woman's lips, but her eyes were very grave.

"Come then, Dorothea, take me upstairs; for if your mother is so ill, I must not waste any time. I know such a change on your father, lassie; he looks ten years older. You are changed too, and that foolish, misguided sister of yours has married an old man for his gear? Is she happy, think you?"

"No," replied Dorothea, with a sigh. "But I

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will tell you all about Florence again. I'll need to run up to mamma now, in case she awakes. You know the way to the orchard-room. It has been dear to me ever since you occupied it before —five years ago; how long it seems!"

"Ay, it is a long time never to see one's kith and kin; but there's a reason for everything," replied Aunt Janet; and they went upstairs together.

Dr. Kirke and his sister had to dine alone; for Mrs. Kirke, out of a sudden whim, would not allow Dorothea to leave her, even for half-an-hour. When the meal was over, Aunt Janet came upstairs and tapped softly at the sick-room door. Dorothea opened it, and admitted her; then stole downstairs to keep her father company while he enjoyed his after-dinner pipe—the only one he permitted himself daily.





CHAPTER VIL

ADRIFT.

To see a soul just set adrift
On that drear voyage, from whose night
The ominous shadows never lift."—LOWELL.

ANET KIRKE shut the door, and going over to the bed took her sister-in-law's thin hand in hers, and bent her brave compassionate eyes on her worn face.

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"Florence, it is a sore heart to me to see you like this."

"Is it? How are you, Janet? Sit down, will you? Is Dorothea away?"

"Yes; away down to her father for a little. I can do anything, or everything for you. For, remember, when you lived in the little house on the hill, and the children had scarlet fever, what a good nurse I was."

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Mrs. Kirke nodded.

Then Janet sat down, and a little silence ensued. Janet had no great love for her brother's wife, and his marriage with her had been a sore trial to her heart. She had only been twice to Hartfield, and Mrs. Kirke had travelled once to the quiet little town on the Fifeshire coast to see her sister-in-law, and that was all they had seen of each other. But Janet could be gentle with the weaknesses and failings of others; many sorrows had taught her that; and, besides, she was drawn to her brother's wife because she was Dorothea's mother.

Well, Janet, you are getting old. Your hair is greyer than mine. Am I much changed?" said Mrs. Kirke, presently.

"Yes; I would be deceiving you if I said you weren't changed, Florence."

"I don't want you to say I'm not," said Mrs. Kirke, in her querulous way; "I'll never be better again, I suppose. James will have told you my life cannot be prolonged many days now."

"I can see it," said Janet Kirke. Then she bent her head forward and looked straight into

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her sister-in-law's face with clear, earnest, questioning eyes: "Florence, how is it with you?"

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Her meaning was unmistakable; but the sick woman did not at once answer the direct question.

"May I ask you something, Janet?" she said.

"Assuredly; ask me anything," Janet answered—adding under her breath, "God guide my tongue to-night."

"Don't you think people who live good Christian lives, who go regularly to church, and read their Bibles, and who look after their homes, and bring up their children well, are sure to go to heaven when they die?"

"God help me to be faithful!" prayed Janet Kirke again, and then answered quietly but decidedly—

"There is but one way to heaven, Florence—by the Cross of Christ. The Bible says all our righteousness is as filthy rags; and that except through Christ no man can enter the kingdom. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." These are Bible words, Florence."

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performance of Christian duty will count for nothing, and that I, for instance, must get to heaven by the same means as perhaps some vile sinner who has spent a lifetime in the devil's service, and only repents at the end?"

"There is only one road, Florence. The simple act of faith, belief in Jesus Christ and acceptance of Him as a Saviour; one means of grace for saint and sinner alike. Do you believe it, Florence?"

"I can't see it; it is all dark, somehow. I hope I'll go to heaven, Janet. I have a right to hope. I have never been very wicked; I have never done any great wrong to anybody; and I have done a great deal in my time for the poor and for missions, and other good works."

"'Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God,'" said Janet Kirke, solemnly. "You must look away from self to Christ. No man or woman can be saved by works. Without faith works are dead."

"I don't know what you are talking about," said Mrs. Kirke, impatiently. "Do you think you would go to heaven if you were to die to-night?"

"I know would," replied Janet, her face kindling; "because I believe that Jesus died for me, and so I know that my Redeemer liveth and has prepared a place for me."

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Mrs. Kirke snook her head.

"That sounds like presumption. When you come to lie where I am to-night, your assurance will not be so perfect. I am just trusting in God's kindness. As a Father of love He will not be so cruel as to shut the gate of heaven against me just because I cannot grasp that one thing. I believe Jesus died for us all. The Bible says so; but it does not affect me individually."

"But, Florence, that is just it. The redemption ought to affect you as an individual. Christ died for you just as much as if there was not another sinner requiring salvation except yourself," said Janet, laying her hand on the transparent one on the coverlet to enforce her words. The sick woman shook her head.

"I don't understand. Is Dorothea there? I want her. I believe it will be all right, Janet; I have not much fear. No, I dont want to talk any more about it, for you can't help me, I see. Ring for Dorothea!"

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t, Janet; t, Janet; t to talk le, I see. Janet was obliged to obey her. The slightest resistance to her whim brought on hysterics. She had never been a woman of sound nervous temperament, and now it was wrecked entirely.

When Dorothea came, Janet escaped to her own room, and kneeling down there prayed as she had never prayed before, wrestling with God for the poor soul drifting out upon an unknown and terrible sea.

The household retired early to rest that night, because Aunt Janet was very weary. They were to watch by turns at Mrs. Kirke's bedside, the Doctor taking the first part of the night. She lay dozing quietly for more than an hour, while he sat near the bed watching her and pondering many things. His professional eye did not deceive him, and he knew the end was coming very near. He, too, was in uncertainty regarding her hope for eternity. An earnest, happyhearted Christian himself, he had yearned unspeakably to see his wife one with him in Christ; but neither his prayers nor his plain and faithful dealing with her had been blessed with success. He was no believer in the larger hope with which so many deceive themselves, but was convinced that only acceptance of the Saviour on earth can secure the inheritance of believers in heaven. It was of these things he was thinking when the clock struck twelve.

Then his wife sat up and spoke in a voice unlike her own.

"Is Dorothea there?"

"She will be in a proment," he replied; and touched the bell and turned up the gas. Then he saw that she was dying.

He stood perfectly still for a moment, great beads of prespiration standing on his brow.

"Florence, trust in the Saviour! Look up even yet, it is not too late," he whispered hoarsely.

She shook her head; and just then the opening of doors in the corridor, and footsteps approaching, told that the others were hurrying towards the sick room. But they were too late. Even as Dorothea's feet were on the threshold of the door her mother turned her head and looked full at her husband. He never forgot that look. It haunted him to the grave.

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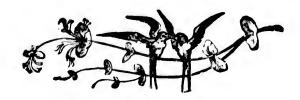
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"My God! James, this is death, and I am not ready!" she gasped, and her soul fled—whither?



CHAPTER VIII.

TWILIGHT TALK.

"Strength is born
In the deep silence of long-suffering hearts,
Not amidst joy."

swept in with a wild gust of north wind, presaging an early winter, and still Janet Kirke remained at Hartfield House. They would not let her go, and she was not sorry to stay. In spite of the love and companionship of many outside friends, her life in her far-off Scotch home was necessarily very desolate; therefore it was an unspeakable joy to her to be beside her brother, and his daughter, whom she loved next best on earth. It was well for Dorothea that she had such a friend during the weeks succeeding

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her mother's death. Few of us but have experienced that terrible sense of having nothing to do which comes when one who has long required our care is called away; and had Dorothea been left alone to realise that strange desolation, it is probable that she would have become ill herself. As it was, the sweet, glad, strong companionship of her aunt kept her from brooding over the inevitable, and from thinking too much of self.

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People said that the death of his wife had greatly changed Dr. Kirke; and pointing to his grey hairs and bent shoulders, the Hartfield gossips whispered how he had loved his wife. None knew that the burden of pain left by that midnight cry was almost greater than he could bear. He never spoke of it even to his sister; but it was the *hopelessness* of his sorrow which had aged and changed him so surely and rapidly.

In the subdued light of one of those grey October afternoons, Dorothea was sitting in the drawing-room with her aunt. They had just endured a visit of condolence from Lady Yorke, who had come from Scotland to the Court, bringing with her her usual train of guests.

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palpably now since Florence had become Lady Wyville. She had been compelled to receive them on equal ground. She was very effusive and tender, and sympathetic to the motherless girl; nevertheless Dorothea was not sorry to see her go.

"Oh, Aunt Janet, if people would only let us alone!" she cried, when the roll of Lady Yorke's carriage-wheels died away in the distance.

Miss Kirke the elder smiled and shook her head.

"People will not let us alone, my dear. In my youth, when many sorrows came upon me, I used to wish that as much as you do now; but by-and-by I got used to noisy sympathy, and even got some comfort out of it, after a while."

"Many sorrows, Aunt Janet?" repeated Dorothea, questioningly. "I thought grandpapa's and grandmammas deaths were all the sorrows you had had."

Janet Kirke laid down her sewing, and there came upon her face that strange far-off expression which we see only on the faces of those who live in memories of the past.

"Let me tell you, Dorothea. When I was a girl younger than you I had not a care in the world. We were living at Kincaid then, and

your father was at college in Edinburgh, coming home every week-end, generally with one or two class-mates with him, who made plenty of stir at the farm. Oh, what happy Sundays I've seen at Kincaid! My heart warms even yet thinking of them. We had a boat—it lay at you little creek just below the field where the cows fed—and on Saturday nights we used to go to the fishing in the Bonny Janet—Christopher Elder christened her. You've heard your father speak of Christopher Elder, Dorothea?"

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"Yes; often. Papa had a great love for him, surely. Didn't he die before papa came to Hartfield?"

"Yes. Your father and he lodged together in Edinburgh, and were like brothers. David and Jonathan, mother used to call them; she had a great work with Christopher."

There was a little silence after that, and Janet Kirke sat with her hand shading her face; perhaps she did not care that even Dorothea should see its expression just then.

"He died very suddenly from blood-poisoning, got in the dissecting-room. He was to have come with James one Saturday night; but James

came alone and told us Christopher was dead.

It was an awful shock to all at Kincaid. Perhaps you can guess what it was to me. I was to have been his wife in another year."

Dorothea sat very still, so surprised that she

Dorothea sat very still, so surprised that she could not speak. Her father had never even hinted at this.

"That was the first sorrow, and perhaps the greatest," said Janet Kirke, after a while. "Well, I do not know. It is a sorrow so different from all other kinds that one cannot speak of it or estimate it in quite the same way."

"How did you bear it, Aunt Janet?" asked

Dorothea, softly.

"Bear it? I did not bear it at all sometimes I used to run out of the house at nights across the links down to Earslferry Sands, and wander about like a wild thing, wondering whether it would not be better to hide my misery in the sea I had loved all my days. That is the way of youth, Dorothea. It is only years which bring strength not only to bear trials but to thank God for them. That was the beginning of the troubles. Soon after James came away here to practise, and that was a sore heart to father

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oisoning, to have it James and mother, and to me, for we had hoped to see him settle near us. But that was not God's plan. You see, Dorothea, it was His will for some good end that our small circle should be completely broken up. It was; for in three years your father was married, the old folks gone, and the farm in other hands. On the day I left Kincaid and went home to my cottage on the Elie shore I was only twenty-nine, and I looked as old then as I do now. O bairn, I pray you may never know the desolate feeling with which I lay down in my bed that night! I was indeed a lone woman, with nobody in the world I could call my own."

"And yet you are so bright, and brave, and cheerful now, Aunt Janet; I cannot understand it," said Dorothea.

"Well, you see, bairn, I had a life to live, and work to do, which it behoved me to look to and not sit down folding my hands and crying because death had stolen so many from me. Everybody was kind to me, and by-and-by folk began somehow to come to me in all kinds of troubles, and I had other folks' bairns to look after sometimes, and my bit house and garden to

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keep tidy—and so all the ravelled threads got together till there was a web for me to cling to; and then when God saw, I suppose, that I needed a little strengthening, He sent you to me that blessed summer, and I've been a different woman ever since."

"Am I so very much to you, Aunt Janet?" asked Dorothea, leaning forward in her chair and looking with wistful, earnest eyes into her aunt's face.

"I love you as dearly as a mother could, lassie," answered Aunt Janet, and rising took the fair, earnest, womanly face in her hands and kissed it once very fondly.

Just then there came a tap to the door, and the housemaid entered with a letter for her mistress. Dorothea looked at it curiously, the small, firm, neat handwriting was not familiar to her, and it bore the London post-mark. It could not be from Florence, who was already on her way to a warmer clime, with her fidgety and selfish husband. She broke the seal, and before reading the letter turned it over to see the signature. A bright smile touched her lips when she saw "Mary Fenwick." Thus it ran—

"23 ORMOND SQUARE, CRESSWELL ROAD, S.W., "14th October.

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"My DEAR MISS KIRKE, —I have been thinking of you very much since I read the announcement of your bereavement in the Times; but somehow not till to-day could my thoughts find expression. I will make no use of sympathetic words or phrases. You know that, little as I saw of you, it was sufficient to interest me as I have never been interested in any woman before, and that now my heart is sore for you. If you can trust me, and the nature of your domestic arrangements will permit, will you come to me for a little while? I am a plain woman, and my home is plain, but I will do my utmost to make you happy. I believe the change will benefit you physically, and in a great city one's own sorrows sink into insignificance. I have found it so very often.

"I shall wait your reply with some anxiety and a little impatience.

"Believe me, my dear Miss Kirke, yours truly,
"MARY FENWICK."

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"That is from Miss Fenwick, of whom I was telling you yesterday, Aunt Janet," Dorothea said, passing the epistle to her aunt, after she had read it twice.

"I like the style of it," was Aunt Janet's verdict when she had perused it. "Well, what, do you think; you have never been to London, Dorothea?"

"Never, but I could not leave papa just now."

"When I am here you could for a week or two. Couldn't you trust your house with me, you most prime and particular of housewives?"

"It isn't that, Aunt Janet," smiled Dorothea.

"It is very kind of Miss Fenwick, and I should like to go to see her again; but we will see what papa says. I wonder that you approve of an invitation offered after only one meeting. You don't uphold the characteristic caution of the Scotch."

"Sometimes I do, but I like that letter. A good woman wrote it, so I will advise your father to let you go to London, Dorothea. You need the change. I don't think he will be very ill to persuade."

Aunt Janet was right. Dr. Kirke read the

letter, and when he found that Dorothea was not averse to going, gave a hearty consent.

"It will do you all the good in life, Dorothea, and I have no fear of you with Miss Fenwick. Apart from my own estimate of her, she is the thing, depend upon it, or she would never have been received at Dudley Court."

So the matter was settled, and Dorothea wrote her reply, and made her preparations for her unexpected visit to London.

Did there come to her, I wonder, as she folded her dresses one by one into her trunk, any prevision of what great issues for time, ay, and for eternity, that visit was to hold for her? I do not know, but when her father returned from the station after seeing her away, he wandered restlessly round the rooms, as if there was something on his mind.

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"I hope it's all right, Janet, but the queer about it; there are more people in London than Miss Fenwick, and I have an idea that when Dorothea comes back she will not be exclusively our Dorothea any longer."

CHAPTER IX.

THE AUTHORESS AT HOME.

AM glad to see you!"

These words fell with pleasant warmth upon the ears of Dorothea Kirke that cold wet October evening, when she stepped upon the platform the great London stations. Accom-

of one of the great London stations. Accompanying the words, and breathing even a deeper welcome, was the close hand-pressure and the look in the eyes which Mary Fenwick bent upon the tired and sorrowful face under the mourning bonnet.

"Thank you," Dorothea replied; and the feeling of shyness which had come upon her when nearing her journey's end, at the thought that she was about to meet so many strangers, somehow vanished at once and for ever.

"Of course you are tired," said Miss Fenwick,

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queer n than when sively signing to a porter to take the lady's luggage. "We have a long way to go, but as we would need to wait for a train at the other station, we shall just drive all the way. Come!"

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She drew Dorothea's hand within her arm, and led her across to the cab-stance, and in a few minutes they were being whirled rapidly through the streets.

"It was so good of you to come, Miss Kirke—so unexpectedly good," said Mary Fenwick. "I scarcely dared hope for it; but I repeat it, I am very glad to see you. Had you no hesitation in trusting such a stranger?"

"None! nor had papa: yet he is Scotch," laughed Dorothea, feeling somehow as if she had left all care behind, and was to be at rest and happy for a time. "He trusted you at once, as I did."

A strange softening stole into Mary Fenwick's deep eyes, and she answered quietly—

"It shall be my care that neither you nor Dr. Kirke shall ever regret that trust. Well, do you feel any curiosity about the members of my household?"

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your roof-tree, but I have not thought much about them. It was in you all my hopes of London centred," answered Dorothea, smiling a little.

"We are a trio of women-folk at present, my nephew being at school. You will like my mother, and my niece will not trouble you much. She has but one interest in life, and that is Rosamund Willis's pretty face," said Miss Fenwick, drily. "I have one domestic, who has been with me since I set up housekeeping on my own account, and that is all. Do you feel nervous?"

"Not at all. How these lights gleam on the river, and what a noise there is!" said Dorothea. "Do you grow accustomed to that continuous din after a time?"

"Yes; but where we live it is as quiet as in Hartfield," replied Miss Fenwick. "You will see London in all its phases by day and night, but I am going to make you rest at home for a day or two."

"I shall be obedient," laughed Dorothea. "I have trusted you so far that I shall just let myself lie in your hands."

"Is it your nature to trust readily?" inquired Miss Fenwick.

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"As a rule, no. When I do, it is with my whole heart," answered Dorothea, and then there followed a long silence.

"Here we are?" exclaimed Miss Fenwick, when the cab turned into what appeared to Dorothea to be a very quiet and retired square. "Tea will be waiting, I fancy. We are very old-fashioned folk. We dire at two, and take tea at six. I do not readily accommodate myself to the ways of society when I am away from my own home."

In answer to the cabman's vigorous ring at the bell of No. 23, the door was thrown wide open, and Dorothea was ushered into a large, well-lighted lobby, tastefully furnished and spotlessly clean.

"Just come upstairs at once; there is a fire in your room, ma'am," said the domestic, pleasantly, while her mistress was dismissing the cabman; and taking Miss Kirke's wraps she preceded her upstairs, and ushered her into a large, pleasant bed-chamber, in which a bright fire burned cheerily, throwing a ruddy gleam on all the pretty appointments of the room.

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Dorothea approached the fire with a delicious feeling of rest stealing over her, and presently she was joined by her hostess.

She came close to her, laid a kind hand on her shoulder, and turned her face to the light.

"Let me see you now. Ay, the sorrow has left its traces," she said, with an infinity of tenderness which surprised Dorothea.

"Were the deeps very bitter, or was there strength given from above?"

"It was very bitter; but we can bear anything, I begin to think."

Dorothea answered evasively. She could not truly say strength had been given from above, for as yet Dorothea Kirke was a stranger to that close communion with God which imparts such strength and consolation in the very darkest hours of human life.

Miss Fenwick misunderstood her; thought she did not care for allusion to her sorrow, and changed the subject.

"Let me help you," she said, beginning to unfasten her guest's jacket. "Don't smile; I am really of some use other than writing books. Will you change your gown. You needn't, unless

you particularly desire it. We don't dress for meals in this unpretending abode."

"Very well; I shall be glad to be relieved. I have grown so indolent of late, especially since Aunt Janet came, I am sometimes quite ashamed."

While she was speaking, Dorothea had removed bonnet, and jacket, and boots, and after washing her face and hands, was ready to go downstairs. She was not nervous, but she felt odd when she was ushered into the pleasant dining-room, and saw the strange faces turned towards her curiously.

"Mother, this is Miss Kirke," was Miss Fenwick's introduction; and there rose from her corner in the sofa a lovely old lady, with a thin, bent figure and snowy hair, who took both Dorothea's hands, and bade her a motherly welcome to London.

"And this, Miss Kirke, is my niece, Rosamund Willis," added Miss Fenwick; and Dorothea turned to greet a pretty and stylish-looking girl of eighteen, who in these brief moments had taken in every item of the visitor's dress, and noted every detail of her appearance.

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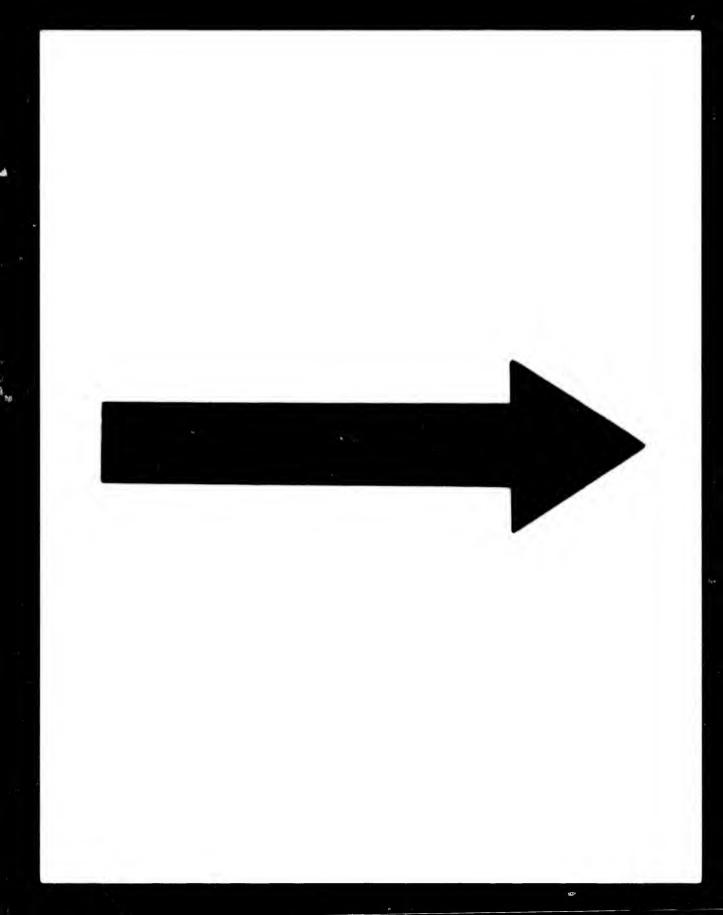
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amund prothea ng girl ts had ss, and Rosamund's face had a certain charm of feature and colouring, but it was insipid, characterless; and Dorothea was relieved to turn her eyes upon the plainer-looking, but intellectual and pleasant, countenance of Miss Fenwick.

Tea was an enjoyable meal, enlivened by the novelist's interesting that about persons, places, and things. Never in her life had Dorothea felt so completely at home in a strange house in so short a time. When it was over, Miss Fenwick bade her guest come upstairs, telling her, laughingly, she had a writer's den to show her, if she was not afraid to venture into such a chamber of horrors.

"It is a remarkably pleasant and inviting-looking den," was Miss Kirke's verdict when she entered the cosey little study, which was furnished in quaint carved oak and ruby velvet. A commodious writing-table stood in the wide window, and though piles of MSS. and unused paper told their tale, there was no litter or untidiness such as Dorothea had expected to behold in the sanctum of an author.

"I sweep and dust this place myself," said Miss Fenwick, shutting the door and applying



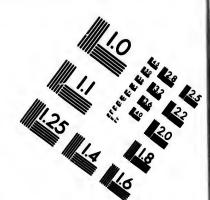
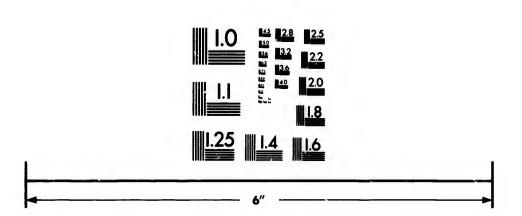


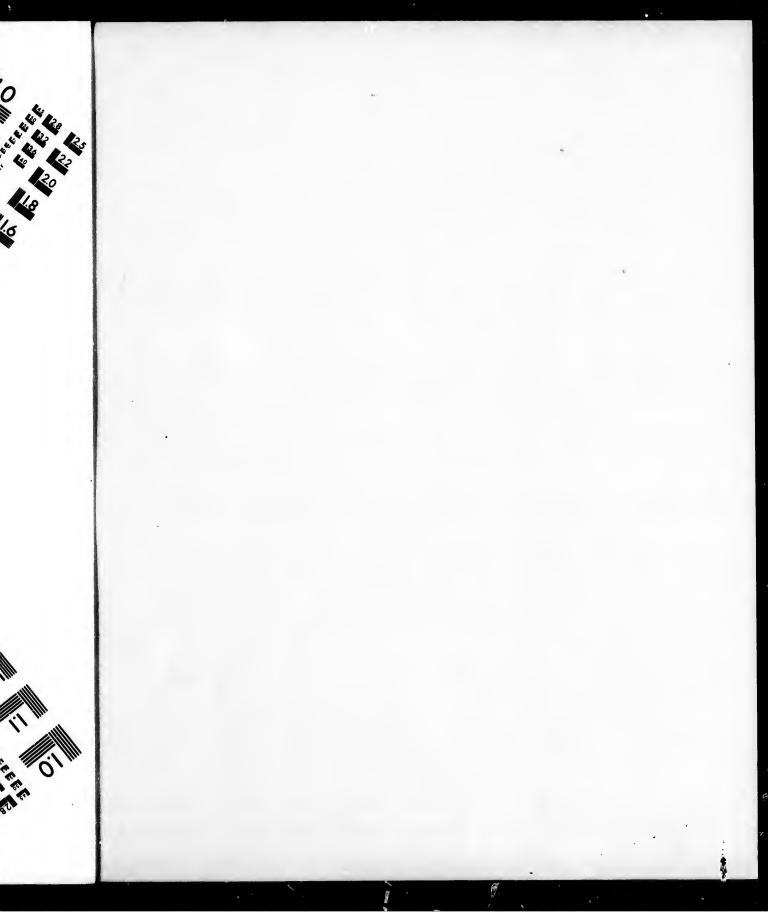
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the poker to the smouldering fire. "Nobody ever enters it except very particular individuals, and I know where to lay my finger on every book I want for reference. All my letters, see, are in this escritoire, numbered and dated. I am a woman of method, Miss Kirke; I divide my days methodically—so many hours writing, ditto study, ditto house-work. Are you highly amused?"

"No, but highly astonished," answered Dorothea. "I like this room. I shall sit here while you write. I shall not disturb you, I promise you."

"Oh! but I shall not write much while you are here. I am going to give myself up to enjoyment and sight-seeing," rejoined Miss Fenwick. "I am glad you like my study. I have spent many happy hours here, and many miserable ones, tortured by my utter inability to put my thoughts into words, and sometimes they thronged upon me till I felt as if there was a steam engine going in my head. You would not envy the life of a literary woman, I think?"

Dorothea shook her head.

"No; I have not an atom of literary ability.

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You will find me to be a very stupid and uninteresting kind of person, Miss Fenwick."

"Do you think so?" queried the authoress, drily. "I may be permitted to hold my own opinion, which differs considerably from yours. I don't want to talk any more now, only to stand here and look at you when you sit. The red firelight makes quite a picture of you in that quaint oak chair. I really think you are the most beautiful woman I ever saw."

Dorothea laughed and blushed slightly.

"I really must exact a promise that you will not talk such nonsense to me," she said deprecatingly.

"Very well, I will not repeat it. But tell me this: How do you feel when you look at yourself? Of course you know you are beautiful beyond the majority of women."

"Truly I think nothing at all on the subject," Dorothea answered simply and unaffectedly.

"How odd! That niece of mine downstairs makes an idol of her pretty face; but then she came of a bad stock, and is not altogether responsible. Poor thing! her father was the vainest man I have ever met."

"Was he?" asked Dorothea, and the story Mr. Western had told her rose up freshly in her memory.

"Yes; Rosamund is very like him in all ways. Some day, Miss Kirke, I shall tell you a story of a woman's misplaced affection, and of its result. I wish you would tell me what kind of books you like. These are my favourites on this shelf, see, just above the arm-chair, where I throw myself when I am very weary. I am very fond of poetry, though I cannot write it. Do you care——?"

A knock at the door and the entrance of the servant interrupted her.

"Mr. Western is in the drawing-room, ma'am, and would like to pay his respects to Miss Kirke, if she is not too tired."

Was it only the reflection of the firelight, or did a deeper crimson steal into Dorothea's cheeks as she heard the announcement? A peculiar smile touched for a moment Miss Fenwick's lips.

"Ah, I thought he would call to-night. I told him you were coming. Well, shall we go?"

And Dorothea rose without a word.

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CHAPTER X.

A BOLD REQUEST.

"A kind, true heart, a spirit high,
That would not fear and would not bow,
Were written in his manly eye,
And on his manly brow."—BURNS.

R. KIRKE was enjoying his afterdinner smoke in the dining-room at Hartfield House. His sister was sitting opposite to him, busy with her knitting. Since Dorothea went away

the two had used the dining-room as a sitting-room, and the drawing-room had been deserted. Nothing could be more to the Doctor's liking than the quiet routine of home life under his sister's supervision. It was like old Kincaid days come back, he told her sometimes, and would say it was a dream that he was on the shady side of fifty with two young women

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daughters, and a lifetime to look back upon. Old stories were told and re-told on these quiet evenings; bygone days lived again; hidden and sacred memories brought to light; fullest confidences exchanged; and the brother and sister, whom circumstances had parted so long, drew near in heart again, as they had been in the old Fifeshire home. Yet both missed Dorothea unspeakably, and hungered for her return. They had been talking of her that evening, were talking of her indeed, when the servant tapped at the door and said there was a gentleman in the library waiting to see the Doctor.

"A stranger, sir," she said in answer to her master's question. "I have never seen him before, and he did not give me his name."

Dr. Kirke laid his pipe on the mantel-shelf and proceeded to the library. On the threshold of that room he paused a moment, and somehow a sudden idea flashed upon him; therefore, when he entered, he was not surprised to see Robert Western standing upon the hearth-rug. He shut the door and came forward into the room, eyeing the stranger in rather a suspicious manner, and yet he was as well aware of his errand as if he

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eyeing er, and as if he had sent a herald before him to proclaim it. There are things which some unseen monitor whispers to us—inspirations for which it would be difficult to account.

"Good evening, Dr. Kirke," said Robert Western, in his grave and pleasant voice; "I hope I see you well?"

"Yes—thanks; very well," said the Doctor, somewhat drily. "Mr. Western, I think that is the name. Have you come down to The Court for Christmas this year again?"

"No; I came straight from London this evening, Dr. Kirke for the purpose of seeing you," said Robert Western, with just a shade of embarrassment in his tone, for Dr. Kirke's manner was very dry indeed.

"Straight from London? then, of course, you have not dined," said the Doctor. "Come to the dining-room. The cloth is removed, but I believe my sister will be able to set a bite before you."

"Thank you; but if you are not engaged I should like a few words with you now."

"All right; sit down," said the Doctor, bluntly.
"What do you want to say to me?"
Robert Western did not sit down; but facing

Dr. Kirke where he stood, said in grave earnest tones, such as a man uses when he is dealing with momentous questions—

"I do not know whether you have any idea of my errand, Dr. Kirke; nor do I know what you will say to me when I tell you. I have come to ask whether you will give me your daughter for my wife!"

Dr. Kirke turned his back upon Robert Western, and paced slowly to and fro between the hearth-rug and the door for about three minutes. Then he stood still, directly in front of him, and looked him straight in the face.

"You may well wonder what I will may to you. She is my one ewe-lamb, Mr. Western; and I am not inclined to give her up to the first who asks her. But of course you have settled it between you, and the old man's opinion is only asked in a formal way."

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"You misjudge me, sir," said Robert Western, warmly, with a somewhat heightened colour in his face. "I have not yet spoken to your daughter, and should not have dared to do so till I had laid my position and my intentions before you. I am an utter stranger to you; and my errand to-night

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is to show you upon what grounds I presume to ask your daughter from you."

"Not spoken to Dorothea! I like that," said the Doctor, slowly. "It is the way of young people now-a-days to settle up the thing all right, and then come along and tell the old folks they're going to be married. Yes, I like that, Mr. Western; it is about the best recommendation you could bring—that is, if you need any."

With the last words, Dr. Kirke looked into the fine manly face before him with an unmistakable twinkle in his eye.

Seeing it, a sunny smile stole to Western's lips.

"May I infer from that, Dr. Kirke, that you would think me not unworthy, if your daughter does not say me nay?"

"I say more than that; I say, God bless you! and Dorothea too; and I hope she will have you," said the Doctor, in a burst of genuine feeling, "for you are the most manly fellow I have met for many a day."

Then their hands met in a warm clasp, and the errand upon which Robert Western had come to Hartfield House was well accomplished.

"I should like to tell you, Dr. Kirke," said

Western, by-and-by, "that my income from all sources at the present time is about a thousand a-year; but in the course of time I am in hopes that I may double, even treble that—if my health does not fail me."

"That's it," said the Doctor, significantly. "Be content with the thousand; it is more than I have at present, and I can live very comfortably. Be miserly over that brain of yours. You look overworked now, and I may tell you that that night I saw you at Dudley Court there was a look in your face I did not like. Be careful of yourself—for Dorothea's sake. I would not like to see her early widowed."

"I will be careful. If Dorothea will trust herself with me, Dr. Kirke, need I say how I will care for her? Of my love for her I cannot speak. It has come to me somewhat late in life, and I believe is all the deeper and stronger on that account. I was thirty-five yesterday."

"Thirty-five! and Dorothea was twenty-six in the summer. You are well enough matched. It will not become me to praise my own, Western; but as she has been a perfect daughter, I believe she will be a good wife. There are not many and It lea

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such as her in the world. I am very glad a true and honest heart like yours has learned her worth. It will be an unspeakable satisfaction to me to leave her in such care."

"To leave her! you will be with us for many years yet, surely, unless appearances are unusually deceitful," exclaimed Robert Western.

"They are; you wouldn't imagine, would you, that I suffer from an affection of the heart which may cut me off at any minute? Dorothea doesn't know—don't tell her; but you can understand now my anxiety to see her settled in life."

Robert Western looked surprised and deeply concerned; but his words were very few.

"She will not be a penniless bride," said the Doctor, after a while, "and Hartfield House is hers. By-the-by, have you any idea what she will say to you when you ask her?"

"No; I have none. Sometimes of late when I have seen her at Miss Fenwick's I have been full of hope; at other times the reverse. I can but ask her an honest question, Dr. Kirke, believing she will give me a direct and honest answer."

"She will there's no nonsense about her;

and if she does care for you it will be with no ordinary love, for she is no ordinary girl. Write or come whenever it is settled, and if she is willing don't delay. Let the marriage be soon. I should feel more at rest. Well, you will stay all night? Of course. So now you had better come and make the acquaintance of my sister, who will console me when you steal my daughter; and I hope you are prepared for the scrutiny of the sharpest pair of feminine eyes you ever encountered in your life."



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CHAPTER XI.

THE NEW LIFE.

"Love took up the glass of Time
And turned it in his glowing hands."—Tennyson.

R. WESTERN remained over night at Hartfield House, and returned to London late on the following afternoon. From the station he went straight to Ormond Square, and asked for Miss Kirke. He was ushered up to the drawing-room, where, by a happy chance, he found her sitting alone in an easy chair on the hearth. There was no light in the room, save the deep red glow from the fire, which played tenderly upon her face, hiding and not revealing the deeper glow which sprang to her cheek when she heard the visitor's name. She rose, and

gave him her hand, however, without any sign of confusion, save that her eyes did not immediately meet his.

"Good evening! You have found me day-dreaming or castle-building," she said brightly. "Mrs. Fenwick has gone to lie down, Rosamund is out, and Mary is engaged with a caller in the study. The half-hour after the light fades is always an idle one with me—a kind of pause in the day before one takes up the work of evening. What became of you last night? Miss Fenwick looked for you."

"I was out of town," Robert Western answered briefly, and moving over to the hearth, stood with one arm on the mantel, looking straight at Dorothea, who had resumed her seat after the first greetings were over. Surely never had man's eyes looked upon a fairer picture of womanhood than Dorothea Kirke, and Robert Western's heart was so stirred within him by its mighty love and longing that he could scarcely repress the passionate words thronging to his lips, burning for utterance.

"Will you touch the bell, please, Mr. Western? we must have lights," said Dorothea, after a

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brief silence, growing nervous and uncomfortable under that deep, earnest gaze.

"Not yet," he pleaded. "Have you been out of doors to-day, Miss Kirke?"

"Yes. Mary and I were in the city taking afternoon tea with one of her famous contemporaries," Dorothea answered, with a little humorous smile. "Perhaps the arrangements of this perfect house have given me too high an ideal of literary women, but I learned to-day that all are not like our authoress."

Robert Western was quick to catch her meaning, and an answering smile stole to his lips; but he made no comment on her words, and again there ensued a silence which Dorothea felt, very embarrassing.

"Are you tired?" he asked suddenly; and Dorothea looked slightly surprised at the question.

"Not at all—we had no exertion; you know there are so many facilities for lazy folk in London."

"It is fine out of doors to-night; the air is as mild as in spring. Will you take a turn with me in the park?" he asked abruptly.

Dorothea lifted her lustrous eyes to his face in wonderment, but they dropped at once, and she rose somewhat suddenly.

"Shall I ask Miss Fenwick to accompany us?" she queried, a little confusedly. "Perhaps her visitor may be gone."

"Do not disturb her. You have trusted yourself with me alone before, and surely will again," said Robert Western; and the woman before him felt that there was a hidden meaning underlying the words.

"Well, I shall get a wrap, I suppose," she said, trying to speak lightly, though her heart was beating wildly. "I shall not detain you a minute."

She kept her word; and in a very short space of time re-entered the room with her bonnet on, and a great, thick, white shawl wrapped about her shoulders. Dorothea was not conscious of her own exceeding beauty—unconscious, too, that she had never looked so well as she did at that moment, with that faint and exquisite bloom in her cheek, and that deep and lovely light in her eyes.

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occupied," she said, as they went together down-stairs.

"I wonder what she will say when she finds the bird flown? Wait one moment till I get the key of the park gate; you see I am beginning to know the ways of the house," she added with a smile, and opened the drawer in the hall table.

As she did so her wrap fell from her shoulders, and in a moment Robert Western was at her side.

"I am no cavalier, as I reminded you once," he said. "But allow me; I think I can manage this."

"I think you can," she laughed, as his firm yet tender fingers fastened her wrap carefully about her throat.

She spoke with perfect self-possession; but the colour was deepening momentarily on her face, and every nerve was tingling at his touch, and she was glad to step out of doors and feel the clear, cool night air play about her.

The dwellers in Ormond Square liked highsounding titles, for the park was only a little green enclosure intersected by trim gravelled paths, and planted with beech trees which in the summer time made a cool and pleasant shelter from the burning sun. It was pleasant even in winter, for the turf was green and refreshing to the eyes, and very soon after the year turned there would be tiny pink-eyed daisies and sturdy snowdrops peeping out long before people began to watch for them elsewhere.

Dorothea was very fond of the park, and the neighbours were accustomed seeing Miss Fenwick's guest walking there in the early mornings, and were pleased with her appreciation of their pet resort.

Miss Kirke handed the key to her companion, and he unlocked the gate and held it open for her to enter in. Then he shut it again, put the key in his pocket, and offered her his arm. She laid her hand upon it, and they turned down one of the winding paths together, Dorothea feeling strangely nervous, as if there was some great crisis of her life at hand.

The moon was high in the heavens, and the beams shone through the swaying beech boughs and fell aslant across their path. For a time neither spoke.

"I was at Hartfield yesterday," said Robert Western at last.

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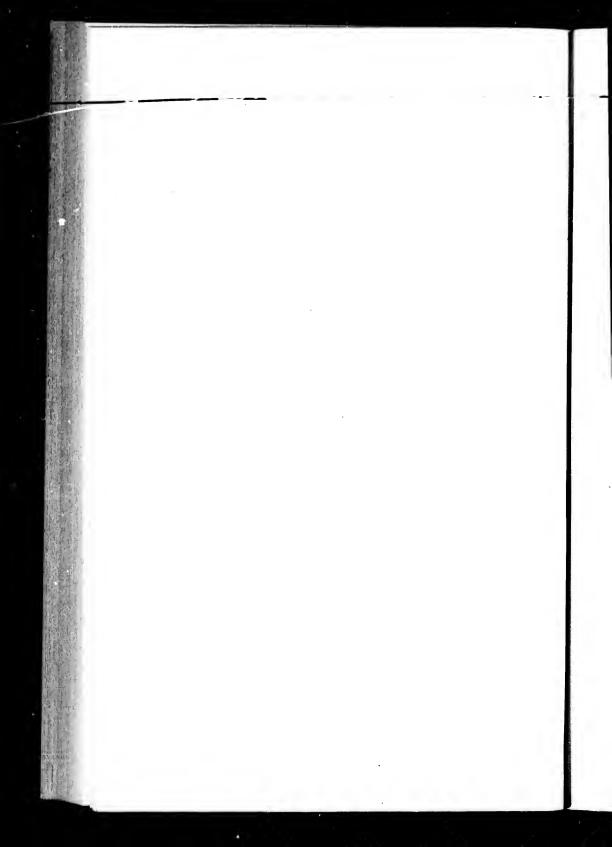
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WESTERN AND DOROTHEA,



Dorothea started, and he felt the light fingers tremble on his arm.

"Lady Yorke is at Dudley Court at present, I think," she said at random.

"I do not know; I went straight to Hartfield House and remained there until this afternoon."

Dorothea withdrew her hand, and involuntarily both stood still. The full light of the moon fell upon them where they stood, and showed the exceeding paleness of Dorothea's face. She was white to the very lips, and the fingers holding her wraps together were trembling sorely. For the life of her she could not utter a word.

"You can guess my errand, Dorothea," said Robert Western, her beautiful name falling naturally from his lips as if he had conned it long.

Still she did not speak, and Western began to fear that the lovely hopes which had blossomed in his heart were without foundation.

"What did papa say?" she asked at last, almost in a whisper; and her eyes met his in a look which told that her whole being was stirred.

The question was characteristic of the woman. There was no affectation of ignorance or unconsciousness of the man's meaning. She knew that this was a vital matter to them both, and she acted accordingly.

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Western's heart leaped at her words, and he took a step nearer to her. The fulfilment of the highest and sweetest dream of his manhood was coming very near now.

"You are very dear to him; but he is willing to trust you with me if you are willing."

Dorothea turned from him slightly, and he saw her lip quiver.

"I am all he has now," he heard her say, more to herself than to him.

"Dorothea, your father knows that I would not take you from him; that if you become my wife he has not lost a daughter, but only gained a son, who, though perhaps unworthy, will strive to be to him all a son should be. We talked it over together, and he sent me to you to-day with an earnest blessing. Shall I tell you his words?"

Dorothea bowed her head.

"They were: 'Say to Dorothea that it is my heart's desire that you should bring her home next week, and that when she comes I may be able to say, God bless my daughter, and my son too.'"

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t is my r home may be my son Swiftly the tears rose to Dorothea's eyes, but they did not overflow, only trembled on the lashes.

"Dorothea, this may seem strange wooing; I verily believe it is. You must know how I love you, for as I live I cannot speak about it. It almost unmans me. You know a little about me now; is it enough to make you trust me for a lifetime?"

There was a moment of intense silence. Then Dorothea turned to him and he saw her face. That gesture, that look, were sufficient.

And so a new life, full of grandest possibilities, loveliest hopes, and sweetest human cares, began for these two.





CHAPTER XIL

ON THE THRESHOLD.

"No heart,
Though loving well and loving worthily,
Can be content with any human love."—HOLLAND.

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the end of March all arrangements and settlements were made. Aunt Janet had given up her cottage on the Elie shore, and April saw Dorothea busy with her own preparations for the event which was to take place in the last week of the month. Robert Western, now a frequent visitor to Hartfield House, endeared himself unspeakably to its inmates, and became like a son of the house. None could come in close contact with that grand nature without being brought nearer heaven. There

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was not an alloy of self about him; and even while he knew that the world waited for his words as they might wait for those of a prophet, he was the same gentle, humble, childlike mangenerous and compassionate towards all humanity. He had many gifts, but, in the words of holy writ, the greatest of these was charity. Dorothea's love for him I cannot write. It was without alloy; a boundless and perfect trust; unspeakable reverence and devoted, tenderest She did not say much about it, nor did Western; but between two such hearts what words are needful? The soul of each is sufficient, one to the other. They were to live part of the year in London, and in accordance with Dorothea's desire Western rented a house in Ormond Square, a few doors removed from Miss Fenwick's. But Dr. Kirke had stipulated that in the summer months Hartfield House should be their home, and Western had readily agreed.

So, amid such busy preparations, the spring were away, until snowdrop and primrose in the Hartfield woods gave place to the many-hued blossoms of the summer time.

The wedding was to take place in the parish

HOLLAND.

yed. By ingements de. Aunt r cottage April saw own pretake place t Western, ld House, nates, and one could nd nature n. There

church at Hartfield, in the presence of a very few guests. Sir George and Lady Wyville returned to Wyville two months before the usual time, and Lady Yorke, down at Dudley Court for Easter, intimated her intention of being present, because she said the match had originated in her drawing-room. Miss Kirke was willing to humour her ladyship, and the invitation was duly sent and accepted.

Western came down to Hartfield the day before the wedding, accompanied by Mary Fenwick, and that evening there was a quiet dinner-party in the doctor's home, consisting of the home circle and Florence and her fidgety husband. There was a great change in Florence. She was aged and worn before her time, and her face bore the unmistakable impress of her She affected a good-natured miserable life. contempt for Dorothea's marriage, and said a few sarcastic things to her which did not at all ruffle her composure. The elder sister was building her house upon a sure foundation, and not the fiercest storms of life would ever undermine it. The dinner was a wonderfully pleasant meal, for Miss Fenwick kept the conversation go vi Si lit

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the day y Mary s a quiet sisting of r fidgety Florence. , and her of her l-natured d said a ot at all ster was tion, and er underpleasant versation going, and highly amused Dorothea by her vigorous cross-questioning and contradiction of Sir George. But Dorothea was absent-minded a little, as was natural, and was glad to escape byand-by from the circle in the drawing-room and seek the quiet of the library. There Western joined her very speedily. There were still fires in the rooms in the evenings, for Janet Kirke had old-fashioned notions about the propensities of spring air for administering sore throats and other ailments to people; and when evening came, nobody felt inclined to quarrel with her for the ruddy gleam of a cheerful hearth. Dorothea was sitting in her father's chair by the fire, and when Western entered she turned her head with a smile, but he saw that her eyes were wet.

"What are these tears for, my dearest?" he asked lightly. "What kind of an omen are they for to-morrow?"

"No omen at all; only I am to give up a great deal to-morrow, Robert, and my heart is over-charged," she answered simply.

"Scarcely giving up, Dorothea. To morrow's ceremony will only be the forging of a new tie

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to link with the oid," he said, looking down upon her with eyes full of unutterable love. "I shall not be selfish with my darling, nor grudge her to those who loved her long before I did."

Dorothea smiled.

"You talk me out of every little worry, Robert; you are just the very shining of the sun to my heart. I wonder is there in all the world to-night a woman so unspeakably blest as I?"

Very seldom indeed had Dorothea uttered so freely the innermost feelings of her heart; it was additional proof to Robert Western, if he needed any, that her love was all his.

"How strange I have felt of late, Dorothea!" said he, by-and-by, in a half dreamy way. "Thinking of the home that is to be I can scarcely realise that after to-morrow I, who have been homeless so long, shall be so no more. It is an unspeakably precious thought to me, my dearest."

"You know, Robert, that I shall do what one woman can to make that home what it should be," she said timidly, and lifted her half-veiled eyes to his. "Only I feel afraid sometimes lest, because I may not be able to enter into all your

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work, you may by-and-by perhaps regret that you had not married a more intellectual wife."

Robert Western laughed; so did Dorothea.

"I was not aware before that you were not intellectual, Dorothea. Well, I shall not begin to-night to tell you all you are in my eyes. At this moment it is sufficient for me that I love you, and that to-morrow you will be my wife," he said, and drawing a chair close to hers he bent over her tenderly. "My wife! the sweetest words in the English tongue."

Dorothea did not speak, but hid her face on his arm.

"I suppose love must be deeper and stronger when it comes to a man late in life?" he continued by-and-by. "Or perhaps it is my nature to love thus intensely. I have had no opportunity of testing my capacity before. It is four-and-twenty years since my mother died, and she was the last. Since I knew you, my dearest, it seems as if my mother's memory had blossomed greenly in my heart again, though it had grown dim. Do you ever wonder, Dorothea, what our kindred in heaven think of our actions on earth?"

"I have never thought of these things at all, Robert," she answered with perfect truth.

"I am surprised to hear it. I would fancy that and kindred subjects would be of intense interest to you."

Dorothea shook her head.

"I never trouble myself. Trying to unravel these mysteries only casts one adrift on a sea of uncertainty."

"What mysteries, Dorothea?"

"Religious questions, if you like it better," answered Dorothea. "When I was a girl of tifteen I got myself into a perfect agony of doubt and fear over these things. Now they never trouble me at all. I hear music from the drawing-room," she broke off suddenly; "it is Florence singing."

Robert Western made no remark. Dorothea's speech had struck him oddly, and it occurred to him for the first time to wonder what were her religious beliefs. They had talked of many things during the few months of their engagement, but Dorothea had avoided that subject, and when it was broached skilfully turned the conversation into another groove, just as she did to-night.

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"I think I shall go upstairs, Robert," she said presently. "I am very weary, and I want to be strong to-morrow. Will you make my apologies to those in the drawing-room?"

"Certainly. Good-night, my darling; this is the last parting, remember," he said. "I thank God that to-morrow will give me so dear and precious a wife."

Dorothea lingered a little over the good-night words.

"In spite of the fact that to-morrow I shall be with you never to leave you again, I feel a strange sinking of heart at times, a prevision of sorrow. Surely nothing can come between us now!" she said passionately.

"Surely nothing, my dearest. You look worn and tired, and your nerves are overstrung. If you only remember that we are objects of God's tenderest interest and care, my Dorothea, such foreboding thoughts will flee like shadows before the sun."

Dorothea answered nothing, and in a few minutes stole away upstairs to her own room and shut the door. In the dressing-room beyond she saw the shimmer of the satin robe she was to

wear upon the morrow, and on the table beside it the chaste and beautiful ornaments which had been Western's wedding gifts to his wife. She was happy; surely never had woman looked forward to the new life with such implicit and unquestioning trust? and yet, when she knelt down at the window sill and looked out upon the peaceful landscape smiling under April moon and stars, her heart sank and her eyes filled with tears. She was not content. There was something lacking. The chalice of her need was not yet filled, the innermost yearnings of her heart were still unsatisfied. Earthly love was much, yet not enough.

"Only the Divine can satisfy the human. God has willed it so."





CHAPTER XIII.

WITHIN THE GATES.

"It is not weariness of life That makes us wish to die; But we are drawn by cords which come From out eternity."-FABER.

OBERT WESTERN took his wife abroad, and for two months they wandered about from one sunny spot to another, sowing a golden harvest of memories to be reaped in days to come. They were happy with

that happiness that comes but once in life, which cannot be repeated. But the holiday drew to its close; the work he had left behind called Western back to the reality of life, and the beginning of July saw them settled in Ormond Square. there began for Dorothea a new existence, altogether different from the monotonous round of life

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er heart as much, in Hartfield. Her husband had of necessity a long list of acquaintances; but there was an inner circle which had closed about him in his bachelor days, and which had resented his marriage, fearing lest the new tie should snap the old. But it was not so; they came to Ormond Square, saw their friend's beautiful and gifted wife, felt the spell of her sweet, pure, womanly influence, tasted of her frank and gracious hospitality, and went away full of envy. Henceforth "Western's luck" was a common subject of talk among There was a Bohemian freedom and lack of ceremony among these brothers of the pen which rather surprised Mrs. Western's stiff old world ideas of propriety; but in time that wore off, and she entered very heartily into the pleasant untrammelled talk, which was always in a critical vein, and soon became versed in the ways of littérateurs. Western kept an open door, and Dorothea's gracious courtesy and womanly frankness added the last touch to the home, which Mary Fenwick pronounced to be quite perfect. Before they had been many weeks at home, clamourings for their presence came from Hartfield House. But the visit had to be postponed

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for a little; and the corn was golden on the uplands, and the reapers busy on the lowlands, before Dorothea returned to the old home.

Dr. Kirke did not welcome his children home in words: a long handclasp to Western, one kiss and a close embrace to Dorothea, told all that stirred the father's heart. But looking upon Dorothea's face, which shone with the light of her unutterable happiness, seeing hour by hour and day by day Western's tender care for her, deep peace, unspeakable thankfulness found an abiding place in the old man's heart. His last earthly wish was fulfilled, his last care removed, and only himself, who heard the whisperings from beyond, knew what these things meant for him. It seemed to Dorothea that never had her father been so hearty and happy, so full of life and spirits, so like himself. She spoke of it to her aunt one day, and wondered that she did not readily respond.

"Yes; he seems well," she answered at last. "And his spirits are marvellous to see. I tell him sometimes he is daft Jamie Kirke of Kincaid yet, as the Ferry laddies used to call him. I am glad you and Robert have been able to come just

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n Hartstponed now: it is such a joy to him. He just said to me this morning, 'Janet, I can't let them away again. Why shouldn't they stay always here?'"

Dorothea laughed, and a tear trembled on her eyelash. How true had her husband's words proved themselves to be, that this marriage would only give a son to Hartfield House instead of stealing away a daughter.

It was the middle of September before the Doctor would listen to talk about their return home.

"Home!" he exclaimed, with extreme energy, "I'd like to know what better a home than this you'd like? Bide awee. Is Hartfield air not as conducive to good literary work as London's smoke and fogs? Let me hear no more of it."

But in spite of all these protestations, Robert Western was obliged to return to London, and could not go without his wife. So, very reluctantly, those who loved them allowed trunks to be packed, the day and hour fixed for their departure, and tried to reconcile themselves to the idea of life without them.

On the last night, Dr. Kirke and his son-in-law were enjoying a cigar together in the garden.

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n-in-law garden. It was growing late; the village clock had chimed eleven; but the doctor seemed careless of the flight of time. He had been discussing many things with his daughter's husband; chiefly family matters relating to Florence and her husband, and also to Janet Kirke, and what provision he had made for her in a will he had had drawn up in the summer.

"The Lord only knows how unspeakable a joy it is to me to see Dorothea your wife," he said. "She has ever been my dearest, Robert—there is no use to hide it; and I could not have contemplated death so serenely had I thought I was leaving her alone in the world. I could have desired no more beautiful a life for her than you have given her."

"You speak warmly, Dr. Kirke. What have I given to Dorothea that can compare with what she has given to me—a precious wife, a lovely home, all that a man holds dearest and best on earth?" said Western with emotion.

"I like to hear you speak," said the Doctor, dreamily. "You have a noble heart, Robert, and you live a noble life, in which there is not one misspent hour. When you come as near as I to

the portals of the infinite there will be in your heart a deep well-spring of satisfaction, born of the thought that you have done what you could."

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A strange feeling of awe and wonderment crept into Western's heart as he listened to the old man's words and saw the rapt expression on his face, which was at the moment uplifted to the starry sky.

"Why do you speak in that strain, sir?" he asked, earnestly. "Do you feel not so well as usual? From outward appearance I would pronounce you to be in the best of health."

"The outward is deceptive, the inner only true; but, yes, I am well—never was better," said the Doctor, recovering himself and bringing his eyes back to his companion's face. "But I am convinced, Robert, that I shall not live to see the year out. When you go home I wish you would try and prepare your wife for what must come; or it may otherwise be a terrible shock to her."

Western was unable to speak, and after a brief pause the Doctor resumed—

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I am not sorry that the struggle is wearing to a close. As we grow older, Robert, I think life grows less attractive; heaven nearer and dearer to those whose treasure is there. There is nothing here, even the most dear and sacred of human ties, sufficient for all our needs. None but Christ can satisfy."

Still Western stood in silence, not caring, not able, indeed, to utter a tithe of what was in his heart. Then suddenly the old man turned and looked full into his face with affectionate eyes.

"Robert, promise me that your care and love for Dorothea will never relax, and that for her sake you will be miserly of yourself. She will bear separation from me when she has you, but who could comfort her for your loss?"

"I promise," said Western, solemnly.

"God bless you, my son, and her!" said the Doctor, as solemnly. "Hark, there is midnight ringing! Let us go in."

When they entered the drawing-room, Dorothea turned her head with a smile and a teasing word about their long absence; and Western, looking into her happy unconscious face, felt this thought

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lying upon his heart as heavy as lead: With what words would he prepare her, how comfort her for the loss of such a father as hers? For the evening lesson the Doctor read Revelation xxii., and Western was quick to note how he lingered on the verse, "Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life and may enter in through the gates into the city."

He paused there, closed the book, and after a few words of earnest prayer bade them all goodnight.

A little later, as Dorothea was passing up to her own chamber, he opened his dressing-room door and bade her good-night again.

The unusual earnestness—solemnity almost—in his manner, struck her, and she spoke of it to her husband. He said very little; he could not tell her yet.

At the breakfast table next morning they waited in vain for the master of the house. He had been called at the usual hour, and had never been known to be late before. At length, growing somewhat anxious, Aunt Janet stole away upstairs. A few minutes later a woman's shrill

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cry rang through the house, and the others hurriedly ran to learn its cause.

The beloved physician was asleep, to wake no more on earth. The dawn had found him with the blessed, of whom he had been reading a few hours before, within the gates of the city.





CHAPTER XIV.

NEAR THE DAWN.

"True is it that death's face seems stern and cold When he is sent to summon those we love. But all God's angels come to us disguised."—LOWELL.

NE less tie to break on earth, another link to heaven."

So said Mary Fenwick to Mrs. Western, when they met in London after all was over, and the Westerns

were again at home.

They were alone together in the beautiful drawing-room of No. 36 Ormond Square, Mr. Western being in the city on publishing business. Dorothea was standing at the mantel, looking down into the dancing flames, and there was a hard, cold expression on her face, which the woman who loved her did not like to see.



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"There is no use talking to me like that, Mary," she said, impatiently. "What are links in heaven to a heart hungering for a dear, living presence on earth? A mere sentiment, which can neither console nor satisfy."

"God has laid his hand very neavily upon you, Dorothea; and none knows better than He the aching void in your heart. But it is well with your beloved father, my friend; and the parting is only for a little while."

"I do not understand all this talk. My husband says, 'God is good'; Aunt Janet says, 'Thy will be done,' apparently from the heart. They cannot have loved him as I did."

"A little less selfishly, I think," said Miss Fenwick, drily, "seeing they do not grudge him his inheritance. When it gets beyond a certain point, grief is apt to become a form of selfishness, Dorothea."

"I need not say you have never been bereaved, Mary; but I do say that I marvel at your words," said Dorothea, impatiently.

"Out of heart-agonies such as you have never felt, and never will, I have learned to be grateful for dear ones asleep in the peace and hope of the

Gospel," said Mary Fenwick, very quietly, though the upheaving of the breast told of inward agitation.

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Dorothea was silenced, not convinced; and presently began to pace restlessly to and fro the room with her hands tightly clasped before her. Her face was deadly pale, and great black shadows about the eyes and mouth told of sleepless nights and weary days. It was no marvel that Western greatly feared for his wife, and was full of anxious hope that Mary Fenwick's faithful, healthful companionship would do what all his earnest, tender talking had failed to accomplish. The sudden shock of her father's death seemed to have changed Dorothea's very nature, or revealed a side of it hitherto undreamed of by those who loved her.

"Mary," she said, suddenly, pausing in front of her friend, and looking into her face with eyes full of intense questioning, if there is a God such as Robert and Aunt Janet and you believe in, if He be a Father of love, as Robert tells me He is, why are things so? Why was papa cut off in the prime of usefulness and love just when—"

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"The Lord had need of him," interrupted Mary Fenwick, slowly.

"We had greater need," answered Dorothea, rebelliously. "Here is Aunt Janet left practically without a home. She is the most saintly woman I have ever met, and her life has just been one long night of sorrow; what is the meaning of that? Why is God so cruel to the most faithful of his servants?"

"'Whom He loveth He chasteneth'; and, again, who are they who are arrayed in white robes? Are these not they who came out of great tribulation?" said Miss Fenwick; but Dorothea did not appear to hear.

"If Florence's husband had been taken instead of papa I could have said God is not only good but wise, for that old man is nothing but a cumberer of the ground, an embitterer of the lives of others."

A strange sad smile touched for a moment the lips of Mary Fenwick.

"That is just it. There is a deal of human nature about you, Dorothea. We mortals are so wise and penetrating; if we held destiny in our power we would kill and keep alive to please ourselves. We would remove every objectionable obstacle from our path and make it smooth and sunny to the end. That is the bent of humanity; it would pamper itself up, and dwell at ease, and surround itself with love and happiness and prosperity, and keep away all dark and unpleasant and bitter things, until it became a mass of selfishness, indulgence, and useless weakness. Thanks be to God, we are in His hands and not in our own, and so in the erucible of pain we are purified and made vessels meet for His glory."

Dorothea Western was arrested by the words and the solemnity of the tone in which they were uttered.

"Mary, do you suppose this fearful sorrow was sent as a lesson to me?" she said, abruptly.

"You are very dear to me, Dorothea, dearer than any on earth save my mother, and because you are so unspeakably dear to me I have studied you, and thought of all the possibilities and probabilities contained in a nature like yours. Your capabilities for loving, your unselfish devotion and untiring care for those you love, have often recalled to me that poem

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of Miss Havergal's, which, in my mind, somehow is inseparably associated with you. You remember how it runs—

Be sure He will not cross out one sweet word,
But to inscribe a greater—but to grave
One that shall shine for ever to His praise,
And thus fulfil our deepest heart desire.
The tearful eye at first may read the line,
"Bondage to grief!" but He shall wipe away
The tears, and clear the vision, till it read,
In ever-brightening letters, "Free to Serve!"

That is my answer, Dorothea."

"I do not understand you, Mary."

"You will, by-and-by. The Lord had need of your father, Dorothea; He may have need of you in another way, and this is the discipline of school—very hard and cruel, but necessary and kind in the end," said Mary Fenwick, and rose as she spoke. "There is your husband coming in. No; I shall not wait. God bless you, my friend; you are coming very near the light."

Then, without pausing to explain her words or wait for an answer, she kissed Dorothea and left the room. In the hall below she encountered Western on his way to the drawing-room.

"You are leaving early, Mary," he said in surprise. "How is Dorothea?"

"I have said enough; I do not want to answer any more questions to-night, Robert. I have set her thinking. Poor Dorothea! seeing her, I am carried back to the days when I rebelled and demanded the wherefore of all God's derlings with me. There are many battles to be fought before these human hearts of ours are vanquished—till we are willing and glad just to lie in God's hand."

Western was silent, and passed his hand across his brow, shading his face for a moment.

"I wish my prayers for my wife were answered, Mary. I wish she could see the divinest end of sorrow, because this will not be the last."

The words, the tone in which they were uttered, were too significant to pass unnoticed.

"Is the head troubling you again, Robert?" asked Mary Fenwick, in a low voice.

He nodded.

"It was not publishing business alone which took me to the city to-night; I called on Dr. Laurence."

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" Well ?"

Mary Fenwick's heart almost stood still as she asked the question.

Suddenly Western turned and took in a grasp of iron the hand of the woman who had been his friend since boyhood. She never forgot that look, that strange, indescribable commingling of pain, and love, and yearning unutterable.

"Pray for me, Mary, and for her," he said, "that whatever the end may be, we may be able truly to say, 'Living or dying, we are the Lord's.'"





CHAPTER XV.

FINIS.

"At length the *last* page lay beneath the light,
From wavering erasures free, and wrought
Too perfectly for any after-thought."—F. R. H.

OBERT WESTERN'S prayers were answered. By slow degrees Dorothea was led, as Mary Fenwick expressed it, into the light; and there came a day when she could look away from the grave—away from buried love and buried hope—to the immortal love and hope of eternity. It is not my intention to tell how this came about. What words, after all, are adequate to describe the inner workings of the human heart; the communings with self, the dumb yearnings of the soul after its Creator—in a word, the mysterious process whereby the love

of God is kindled upon the altar of a human heart? Let it rest. Before the year was out, Dorothea was able to go again to Hartfield and to stand by a green mound in that quiet and lovely spot, with a heart full of serene and tranquil happiness. Then it was that Western repeated to her the conversation he had had with Dr. Kirke on the last night of his life.

Dorothea listened with eyes full of tears, blessed heaven-given drops, full of healing—the very balm of Gilead to the over-charged heart.

The last barrier to perfect communion of soul between husband and wife was thus swept away, and they were indeed one in the Lord. It was perfect happiness. How miserly Robert Western was over these days I cannot tell—because he knew they could last but a little while. He had not yet breathed to his wife a whisper even of the physician's verdict. She knew he was overworked, and that his strength was often far spent; but it only increased her care, her devotion, her wifely love, but did not touch her heart with fear.

And so the days wore on till spring came

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again, and the first year of their married life was over.

Western was an indefatigable worker. rose early, and gave the best part of the day to literary work; and sometimes the dwellers in Ormond Square, returning from an assembly or a dinner long after midnight, would see the light burning in the writer's study. He was busy with a new book to be published in the autumn —his life-work, he told Dorothea sometimes—and would laughingly add that it was to make the name of Western immortal. In spite of the certainty that in all human probability there was a limit set to his life, even those who loved Robert Western best, and who observed him most keenly, failed to note any change in him. He was serene, tranquil, sunny-hearted as of yore; only Mary Fenwick, who knew, felt the deeper earnestness, the holiness almost, which grew upon him every day. And the summer went by and still Dorothea, though watching and anxious for her husband's health, remained in ignorance that there was anything seriously wrong.

They remained in town long after the majority of their friends had left—until, indeed, Dorothea

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najority Oorothea took the law into her own hands, locked up his papers, and said he must write no more till he had rested a month at Hartfield House, where Aunt Janet was still.

Western did not demur, and August was spent in the country; but the first week of September saw them at home again, Western busy with his book, about which he seemed restless and uneasy.

"Let me finish it, Dorothea," he said, in answer to one of her many expostulations. "It will be the last, I promise you."

"It is because I don't want it to be the last that I would have you rest just now," she said, smiling a little, but looking anxious too. "You do not look well, Robert, and what is more; I know you are *not* well."

"You are right, Dorothea, I am not well; but another week will finish it. Just leave me at it, dearest, and then it will be off both our minds, and we can go holiday-making to our hearts' content."

So for another week Western shut himself up in his study, writing with a pen which seemed to be dipped in burning ink, so eloquent and heartstirring were the words which followed it. They were his last and his best!

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One evening Dorothea came stealing into his study and found him still bending over his work. She came close to him and, laying her arm about his neck, stooped and touched his brow with her lips. She was not lavish with her caresses; it was only when the love in her heart overflowed that it thus sought expression. Her husband knew it well.

"Robert, do stop! I am growing more than anxious. I have not seen you scarcely, nor heard you speak, for a week. It is a very unsatisfactory kind of thing to be an author's wife."

Western paused in his writing, but did not at the moment lift his head. He was so weary, so utterly spent, it was an effort even to speak. He did not care just then that his wife should see his face; for its expression must have told better than any words the settled conviction in his mind. One of Dr. Kirke's last utterances, made memorable by many things, rang its changes in his ears: "Who could comfort her for your loss?"

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"What is it, Robert? Why do you not speak? Have I interrupted your thoughts?" asked Dorothea, anxiously. "I am very sorry; but I felt so depressed, so nervous about you upstairs, that I could not stay."

"You never interrupt me, dearest," he answered, lightly. "See, Dorothea! these are the last words of 'Discords.' How do they look? I just wrote them as you came in."

"Is it really done, Robert; and will you write no more for a long time?"

"It is really done, my darling; and I will write no more," he answered. And afterwards Dorothea remembered how he had not repeated the latter part of the sentence.

She bent over him and read the words: "But beyond, these discords shall be melted into divinest harmonies, and every clamouring of poor yearning humanity shall be stilled upon the bosom of the Infinite, who Himself is peace."

For a brief space neither spoke, then Western lifted his pen again and wrote *Finis* on the blank space left on the page.

As his wife watched him write that word, there

fell suddenly upon her heart a drear foreboding, a chill prevision that it was prophetic of another finis close at hand.

And so it was; for that word was the last penned by the hand of Robert Western.



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CHAPTER XVI.

BREAKING IT.

"'Tis a great and mysterious gift this clinging of the heart, whereby it hath often seemed to me that even in the very moment of suffering our souls have the keenest foretaste of neaven."—GEORGE ELIOT.

HE short November day was closing in. The air was chill and murky, the sky grey and cheerless, save in the west, where a weird red sunset lit the gloom. It was very still in Mrs. Western's drawing-room; only the falling of the ashes from the grate and the ticking of the clock sent their quiet echoes through the deep shadows. The blinds were not yet drawn, and upon a couch in the wide oriel window lay the master of the house, with his hands folded above his head and his eyes turned upon the 139

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wintry sky. The red firelight, mingling with the redder sunset rays, played upon his face, and showed it very worn and weary, and sad to see; and yet its expression was perfect peace—the battle had been fought and won, the human hid in the shadow of the Divine, earth given up for heaven; but one more heart trial remained.

He had been alone a long time, his wife being engaged with a caller in the study. But presently he heard the shutting of the hall door, and then the light footfall on the stair, and at the opening of the door he turned his head. It was his wife; dearer to him than anything on earth, for whom he would willingly lay down his life—ay, even to save her a moment's pain; and yet he was powerless to avert, to soften even, the blow which must fall upon her heart ere long.

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She did not know—what had been plain to others for weeks—that her husband's work on earth was laid aside for ever. She stole across the room with light, noiseless steps, bent over the couch with a smile, and laid her cool, soft hand on his brow.

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nen! there that which followed the touch of the Master when He went about continually doing good!

"That was Mary, dear," she said, pleasantly; "I thought you were asleep and told her so, or she would have been up to see you."

"And is Mary well to-day?" asked Western,

with an answering smile.

"Yes, but I felt uncomfortable. To-day, while I was talking to her, she looked at me so oddly, I thought. Mary is a very odd woman, sometimes, Robert."

"Do you remember saying something similar about her on a certain evening in Lady Yorke's drawing - room?" asked Western, the smile broadening on his face.

"Yes, and I remember your answer. I believe I was jealous of Mary that night, Robert; we women are all odd, I think," said Dorothea, with a light laugh. "Well, sir, shall I ring for lights and read to you?"

"No; sing to me, if you please," he answered;

"you never sing now."

"Do I not? and yet my heart is just full of song all the time," she said, still lightly, but with shining wet eyes. "When you are well again, Robert, that song will be heard. What would you like to-night?"

"Anything, my dearest; you know what I like," he answered, and followed her with yearning eyes as she crossed the room and sat down at the piano. Oh, were she only less unconscious, less hopeful, his task would be easier than it was! Once more Dr. Kirke's words. "Who will comfort her for your loss?" rang their changes in his ears; but presently Dorothea's grand voice, softened into exquisite sweetness, banished everything from his mind save intense delight in her singing. She chose a quaint old ballad, with a very melodious accompaniment, which had been a favourite in the old Hartfield days. When her song ended, there was a brief Then, without a word, Dorothea rose again and knelt down by her husband's couch. The light was growing very dim, and the fire was burning low in the grate, but she could see his face quite well. She could not understand that look. It was not love alone, but something deeper, more full of meaning, and slowly about her heart there gathered a strange dread.

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d. nat?" she asked, almost wildly. "Are you in pain, my dearest? let me send for Dr. Lawrence at once."

He smiled slightly, but shook his head.

"What could Lawrence do for me, Dorothea? I have a better Physician, who is with me always—ay, even unto the end of the world."

He uttered the last words half dreamily, and his eyes left his wife's face and looked through the window westward, to the fading tints of the setting sun. When he turned his head again and saw his wife's face, he knew that the first glimmering of the truth had dawned upon her.

"Robert, it cannot be?" she said in a strange, dry tone. "You are only tired, worn out with study and writing; rest will restore you."

"My darling---!"

Only these two words did Western speak, and he put one arm about his wife and drew her very close to him.

"Though He slay us we must trust in Him," he said, after a little.

Then Dorothea drew a long, sobbing breath, and laid her head down upon his breast. She lay thus motionless for many minutes.

Her nature was still, intense, self-contained;

and even in childish days, her grief had not been of that type which seeks and finds relief in tears and sobs and a multitude of words. It was that hidden pain which robs the eye of its lustre, the cheek of its bloom, the step of its buoyancy, and which cannot make a moan to the world. There was a long silence. Her husband knew well that no word of consolation nor of heavenly hope would avail yet. But, by-and-by, he began to talk in a low, quiet, unruffled voice, as if he were discussing one of the common things of life.

"I have known it for a long time, and so, I suppose, have grown accustomed to the idea," he said. "What is familiar ceases to be dreadful. It was a great pain to me, my dearest, to appear so heedless of your entreaties, but I knew I was engaged upon my last work, and I did not want to leave it unfinished to the world. Thanks be to God, my work is done, strength was given to complete the last task He set for me to do; for I do believe, Dorothea, that God has a purpose in the gift of every writer, although we so often pass it by and devote our talents to baser uses."

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He paused a moment, but the face remained hidden, the bowed figure never stirred. At length a slight shiver shook her frame, and instinctively Western laid his hand on her head as if to still the rising of the storm.

"Dorothea, the better Physician is also the widow's God," he whispered. "Let me see your face, my darling, I am——"

Suddenly and swiftly Dorothea rose, and pressing one hand to her head, passed the other across her brow, like a person awakening from a dream.

That brief agony had done its work. The fair, smooth, delicately-tinted face was wan and grey, and all lines and seams; so changed, indeed, that familiar eyes could scarcely have known it.

"Will God forgive me, Robert, if I say I cannot bear it—that I cannot live my life alone?" she said piteously. "He knows all about us women, how we love, and suffer, and——"

"Endure and triumph even over great tribulations," supplemented Western. "Kneel down beside me again, my dearest, and let us pray."

The sunset tints faded into darkness, and the

moon rose struggling through the mists. Its light crept into that shadowed room and touched with tenderness the tranquil face of Robert Western, and lingered most lovingly upon Dorothea's head, bowed meekly on her hands. The worst was over now. Even in that hour of keenest pain there had stolen into her heart a foretaste of that heaven which ere long must be to her a dearer place than earth, because of those whom she had given into the keeping of the King.



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CHAPTER XVII.

THE LARGER ROOM.

"It lies about us like a cloud,—
A world we do not see;
Yet the sweet closing of an eye
May bring us there to be."—H. B. Stows.

ONTRARY to his own expectation, and to that of his friends, Robert Western lived to see the year out. Then a wild and stormy January tried him to the utmost The early days of the new year were very dark for the inmates of No. 35 Ormond Square. Aunt Janet had come up from Hartfield to help with the nursing, which she divided with Dorothea, and thus no strange hands were allowed to touch the dear sufferer.

It mattered little to him. In the intervals

between his intense pain, his brain was mournfully clouded, and he did not know one from the other—a terrible trial to Dorothea, harder even to bear than witnessing his pain. Ay, that wifely and womanly heart was sorely riven, yet not too sorely, for God never tries His children beyond their strength.

Just when she had given him up, faced the worst, and prepared for the last farewell, there was a great and unlooked-for change.

February was ushered in with all the mild and pleasant gentleness of spring; north wind and frost, east wind and fog, vanished and were forgotten in the soft fresh breezes and genial sunshine of the new year's spring. Then the sufferer rallied, and so strange were the fluctuations of his disease, by the end of the month he was again in the drawing-room, able to sit up and even to walk about a little.

None of them were deceived, himse'c least of all. He knew his life work was finished, his abiding recompense at hand.

To Mary Fenwick and the few others admitted into the inner circle, that sanctified home seemed the very gate of heaven. There was no discord,

nor repining, nor rebellious grief; only quiet gladness that the last days had been prolonged that the severing of the precious earthly bond was not to be accomplished with rude suddenness; calm and patient waiting for the end, the ineffable peace of faith and assured hope. Those who were privileged to spend an hour in Mrs. Western's drawing-room now found it indeed good to be there, and long afterwards Dorothea saw the goodly fruit of the seed which her husband had dropped from his lips after his pen was laid aside for ever.

The mild weather continued, and the beginning of March saw the trees in the park delicately, freshly green, and the snowdrops and daisies all in flower.

Then there came upon Robert Western a great yearning to rest his eyes upon the wider, broader, more plentiful loveliness of the country—a great desire to see once more his "other home," as he sometimes called the house at Hartfield. The physician was consulted, granted permission to his patient to travel, and Aunt Janet went off at once to prepare for the guests whom she had so little expected to welcome again to Hartfield

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dmitted seemed discord, So that dear home was to be hallowed by yet another sacred and undying memory.

Nothing could be more exquisitely beautiful than the prospect seen from the wide window of the "orchard-room," which was set apart for the invalid's use during the day. The fruit trees in the orchard were pink and white with bloom, and lilac and laburnum were in flower. Beyond that wealth of beauty and promise there stretched miles and miles of well-wooded fertile country, diversified by undulating slopes and pleasant valleys, among which the eye never lost sight of the broad and sunny river which flowed by many a lordly heritage and cosy homestead on its way to the distant sea.

In the far-away distance there was a long unbroken range of low purple hills, which seemed almost like the boundary line between a fair earth and a fairer region on the other side of this sunny English landscape.

Robert Western's eyes never tired; it was full of interest and joy and unspeakable richness to him. Every curving slope, and field and meadow, every winding of the silver river, every cloudlet sailing through the summer sky, had its by yet

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was full hness to eld and er, every , had its message for him, its whispering of the Father's goodness, and mercy and love. He seemed to grow a child again in his delight in these things; a freshly culled flower with the dew upon it brought such a smile upon his face, that his wife looking on, marvelled. He had fought life's battle, manfully done his work, and now, having laid aside his armour and his weapons, he seemed to cling to the simplest evidences of God's goodness and love. He was now entirely free from pain, which to him, and to those who loved him, was a never-ending cause for thankfulness.

"There is but one thing more to speak of, and then I think every earthly concern is settled," he said one evening when they were alone together in the sweet summer dusk. "It is this: I have disposed of the copyright of my last book, and the sum, a goodly one, is deposited in your name. I thought it the best arrangement, the one which would cause you least anxiety or care. All the settlements about the home in Ormond Square are finished and correct; it is an unspeakable relief to me to know I am leaving you so well provided for. Neither poverty nor monetary care can possibly touch you while you live."

Dorothea turned away her face for one brief moment, for its peace was ruffled—what did it matter to her just then whether she should be rich or poor? there was room in her heart for but one thought, and that was her husband. But she did not say so; only answered, by-and-by, very quietly, though her voice shook slightly, "Robert, your unceasing care and thought for others to me is marvellous."

He smiled, and his thin hand rested for a moment most tenderly upon the dark head beside him. There was seldom any talk of love between these two, but it found expression in many indefinable ways.

"When is the book to be ready, Robert?" she asked, by-and-by.

"Not till September; there has been a great deal of delay, which, had I been in health, would not have occurred." b

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"You may see its publication, and read, perhaps reply to, some of the reviews," said Dorothea, half playfully. "Hartfield air was papa's cure for everything, you remember; perhaps it is going to warrant his faith in your case."

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Western smiled also, but shook his head. "In this blessed exemption from pain it is not always easy to believe that I cannot live. But surely you, my darling, are not deceiving yourself with this peace?"

"At times hope will spring in my heart," she faltered. "You look so much better, dearest, it is no marvel."

"No, no, my dearest; the candle is burnt to its socket, and the feeble light will be quenched one of these days. We have much to be thankful for—many dear and precious hours which we did not at one time expect."

"I know it," said Dorothea, gently. "I think God saw just how much I could bear during those awful weeks at home in London. Looking back, they seem like a hideous dream, Robert."

"Dorothea!" said Western, suddenly, "I have been a great care and trouble to you, my dearest. Sometimes I am tempted to wish for your sake that I had never crossed your path."

"Oh, my husband, don't," said Dorothea, in tones full of pain. "What have you been and given to me? New life in many ways. If with you I have tasted some of the bitters, I have also tasted the very sweets of life. And you forget you guided me in the narrow way when I was nearly lost," she added, her voice sinking almost to a whisper.

After that there was a long silence, and the light faded in the room. Py-and-by, Aunt Janet stole in, and, touching Dorothea on the shoulder, bade her remember it was time to bring the invalid his customary refreshment. She rose at once and left the room, then Aunt Janet bent over the couch and laid her hand on Robert Western's head. He turned to her with one of his rare smiles.

"Surely never was mortal ministered unto by two such nurses, Aunt Janet," he said, and she laughed a little, but turned to draw up the blind so that he might not see the tear on her eyelash.

"You will need to be moving into the other room in a little while, Robert," she said. "It is nearly half-past nine."

"Yes; I have been thinking I would like to watch a sunrise from this window, Aunt Janet. I have seen many a sunset, but never a sunrise, since I came down; and I am so comfortable here, I am loath to move."

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"We will see what Dorothea says," replied Aunt Janet, and stood still in the window, looking out with full heart and eyes upon the still and wondrous beauty of the summer night.

- "Aunt Janet?"
- "Ay, laddie."
- "Come here, till I impress something on your mind."

She moved over to the couch again, and stood expectantly, waiting for his next words.

"You will never leave Dorothea, Aunt Janet. You will go back to London with her when she goes, and never let her be alone—promise me."

"I thought that was understood, Robert; but I do promise faithfully she shall be to me as my own. I have not that many friends that I can let Dorothea do without me."

"That is well," replied Robert Western, and just then Dorothea re-entered the room. His wish to remain over-night just where he was, was granted, the fire was built up, and the two anxious nurses watched by turns in the quiet room. He slept in the early part of the night as sweetly and peacefully as a child, but just at the dawning, when the roseate flush of the new day

was creeping over the distant hills, he awoke and turned his head. His wife in her easy chair on the hearth had fallen asleep, and he did not disturb her. About half-an-hour afterwards Aunt Janet stole into the room in her dressinggown, and after one look at the invalid's face visibly started. He held up a warning finger and glanced at Dorothea. Aunt Janet crept over to the couch and bent low over him.

"Robert, what is this? There is a great change."

He nodded.

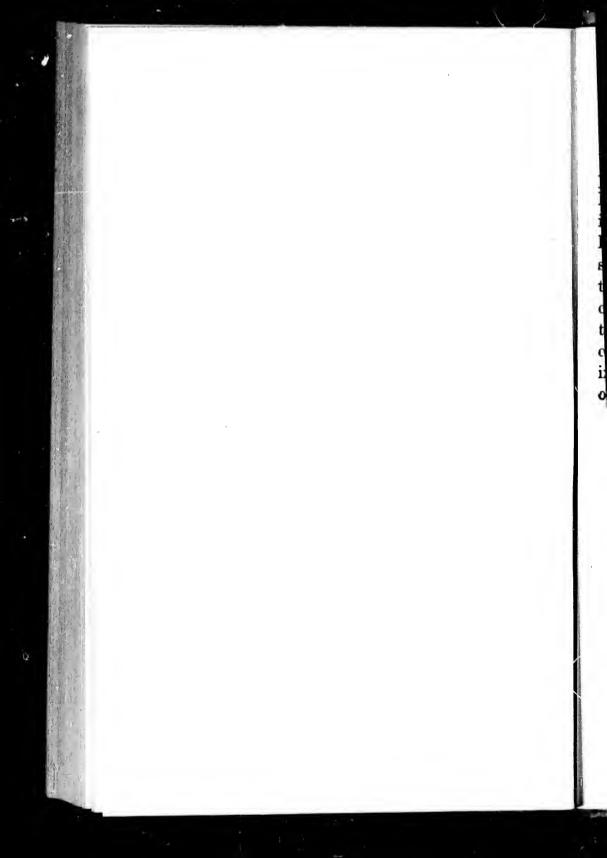
"I am about to be moved into a larger room," he answered, and made a motion with his hand towards the ever-deepening glory in the east. At that moment Dorothea awoke, and sprang to the side of the couch. She, too, saw the change on her husband's face and divined its meaning. She never spoke, only knelt down and hid her face on the pillow beside his head. And thus they watched and waited for the sunrise. He did not appear to be suffering, save from great oppression about the heart, which caused his breathing to be laboured, and almost painful to hear. But, by-and-by, that too passed away, and

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respiration again became easy, but weak, very weak; the heaving of the breast being scarcely perceptible. Aunt Janet burst into tears, then he opened his eyes and looked at her in questioning wonderment. At that moment the sun burst his golden chains, and a glorious flood of light shone in. Western smiled, tried to turn his head towards the east, but was unable, and gently closed his eyes. The new day had dawned and the sunrise made glad once more the habitations of the earth; but Robert Western had moved into "a large room," in a city which had no need of the sun.





CHAPTER XVIII.

"UNTO THE PARAGET DAY."

. . "She filled

The empty chalices of other lives, And time and thought were henceforth spent for Him Who loved her with His everlasting love.—F. R. H.

> NCE again Mary Fenwick and Dorothea Western sat together in the red fire-light discussing the mystery of life.

It was the month of November now, and Robert Western's widow had but newly come up from Hartfield; for there were many precious ties to bind her to the place. Aunt Janet had returned to London also, and Hartfield House was left in the care of the two tried and faithful servants who had seen so many changes during the ten years they had been with the Kirkes.

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It was very still in the house—painfully still, Mary Fenwick thought, remembering the gay and happy evenings she had spent with other friends in Mrs. Western's drawing-room. Dorothea did not seem to feel it. She was leaning back in her chair, with her hands folded on her lap, her face showing very fair against the sombre hue of her mourning gown; and yet there was no oppressive trappings of woe about her attire. It was simplicity itself, and exquisitely relieved by soft white frilling at her throat and wrists. Although much thinner and older-looking, Mary Fenwick thought that in all the years she had known and loved that face, it had never been so beautiful as now, The stamp of the King's beauty was upon it—the light of that peace which passeth understanding.

"It is oppressively still in the house, Dorothea," said Mary, presently. "Was it not an unspeakable trial to you to come home yesterday?"

"In one way, yes. The emptiness went to my heart," said Dorothea, very quietly. "It was only after I had gone through every room, and stayed a little in the study, that I grew calm. I thought I was brave; I found I was wofully

weak after all. I am thankful because I know that God not only permits our tears, but treasures them up; and yet I have met some who think it a sin to indulge in natural regret in bereavement."

"Poor, barren, unlovely kind of Christians these," said Mary Fenwick. "I wonder what they make of the Bethany home, and the grave of Lazarus?"

"They make themselves needlessly unhappy," said Dorothea, musingly, "All to-day, Mary, I have been contrasting my present state of mind with what it was after papa's death. You remember that dark rebelling, and how you tried to lead me into the light—to show me the wherefore of God's dealing? I thought what you said merely words; but now I know it to be most blessed reality. I see it all now. So long as I had sufficient of human love I wanted nothing else, or thought I was content. God saw that the dearest ties must be snapped before I would yield myself completely. I know now why you associated 'Free to Serve' with me."

Mary Fenwick smiled slightly, but did not speak—she was too deeply moved.

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"While we are alone, Mary, let me tell you comething of my plans for my future. You are aware, I suppose, that I need have no auxiety about temporal affairs? My husband has left me what to many would seem a great fortune; which, with my father's bequest, makes me a rich woman. I am very thankful, because I shall have the more to spend for Him."

"A glorious privilege, my friend, to spend and be spent for Him," said Mary Fenwick, with kindling face.

"Aunt Janet is one with me in all my plans, Mary. She has no near kindred or other ties, so she will henceforth make her home with me, and, please God, we will do what two women can for the furtherance of the Kingdom."

"Tell me how you mean to work?" queried Miss Fenwick, in intense interest.

"Oh! I can hardly specify. There is so much to do, so many needing ones at our very doors," said Dorothea, passionately. "If one sat down to contemplate the magnitude of the work, one's heart would fail. But we shall stay in London; my husband loved this city with a great love, and here his work was done. Here also mine

must lie. Why, over in St. Stephen's Hospital at this moment there is need of me. If I could speak or sing for Jesus there, so that even one might be led to see His beauty, wouldn't that be a great work, Mary? Oh, yes! there is plenty to do, more than ever will be done; but the command is, Do what you can."

After a brief pause she continued, a sunny smile breaking over her face, "And then in the spring, Aunt Janet and I will go down to Hartfield and make ready for our summer visitors. If in our daily work we can come upon any tired citymissionary with a wife and children, for whom Hartfield air would be as the very breath of heaven, we shall get some one to fill his place, and send them down all together for a month or two to forget all about London smoke and fogs. Or if we meet any poor shop-girl or seamstress who has no place to go for the holidays, and no money to take her, even if she knew of a place (and there are mary such), we'll send her down to see the lilacs in bloom, and to wonder at the blueness of the sky and the clearness of our beautiful river. And even in St. Stephen's there might be a patient well enough to leave the Hospital
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Mary Fenwick rose suddenly, and, bending down, kissed with reverent lips the white forehead of the woman whom she loved and honoured above any on earth. It was enough. It told all that was in her heart; all the countless emotions which made speech difficult to come.

Presently Dorothea rose, and, moving over to the window, drew aside the curtain and looked out upon the vast expanse of twinkling lights shining under the cloudy sky.

"The city Robert loved, Mary! I never look out upon these lights without remembering how he used to speak of London; there was no other place on earth like it in his eyes."

"These things will come back to you, Dorothea. You have many sweet memories to keep those loved ones with you still."

"Memories? Yes. My life is full of them. thank God! No woman had ever so rich a storehouse to make the waiting easy," she said, her face shining with a strange deep gladness born of the light within; then after a pause she added, dreamily, "And that is not all, for—

"'They often come from glorious light to me; I cannot feel their touch, their faces see, Yet my soul whispers they do come to me; Heaven is not far away."

THE END.

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