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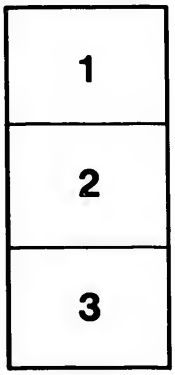

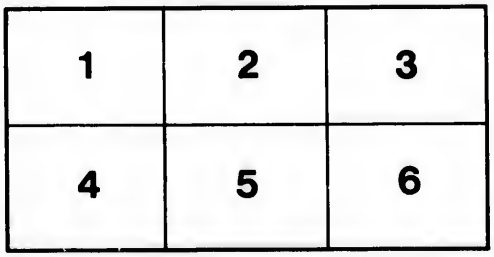

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HAZELL & SONS.

Frontispiece.—Page 166.

HAZELL & SONS

BREWERS

BY

ANNIE S. SWAN

AUTHOR OF

'MISS BAXTER'S BEQUEST,' 'THE SECRET PANEL,' 'ALDERSYDE,'
'GATES OF EDEN,' 'BRIAR AND PALM,' ETC. ETC.

NEW EDITION

TORONTO, CANADA

WILLIAM BRIGGS

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1889

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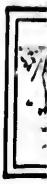

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HAZELL & SONS.

CHAPTER I.

DISCORDS.

A CLOUD had marred the enjoyment at the breakfast-table. The June sunshine, peeping in through the half-closed venetians, made long lines of light in the pretty room. One bright ray sparkled on the silver urn, and touched with a golden glory the sweet face of the lady who sat behind it. She was quite young; looking at the three persons at the table, it was difficult to determine in what relationship she stood towards them. On the right sat an elderly gentleman of a fine commanding presence, with a splendid head, and a face in which benevolence and power were pleasantly commingled. Opposite to him sat a younger man, so much resembling him that it was easy to guess that they were father and son. At the foot of the table sat one still younger, a

handsome, fair-haired lad, not long out of his teens. It was a family party evidently, but family harmony did not seem to prevail. A look of anxiety, of distress, even, was visible on the lady's face, and she nervously toyed with the toast on her plate. She had eaten nothing, the coffee was cold in her cup, the atmosphere at the table had banished any appetite she might have had. The elderly gentleman's brows were knit, his firm mouth set in a determined curve, the son opposite to him looked grave and concerned also; only on the face of the lad at the foot of the table there sat a reckless, defiant look, and he seemed to be partaking of a hearty meal with relish.

'You are eating nothing, Mrs. Hazell,' said Robert Hazell, turning kindly to his father's wife. 'Let me get you something from the sideboard, a slice of ham or a morsel of chicken.'

'No, thank you, Robert, I could not eat it.'

'Yes, Eleanor, get something. Never mind the foolish lad,' said Mr. Hazell, unbending his brows a little, as he looked towards his wife. 'He is not worth spoiling one's breakfast for. But the sooner he learns to mend his ways, the better it will be for himself,' he added, looking frowningly towards the foot of the table.

'Much obliged,' was the lad's cool retort, as he emptied his third cup of coffee. He seemed perfectly indifferent, in reality he was furiously angry.

Herbert Hazell was a self-willed, hot-headed youth, who hated to be meddled with, or given a word of reproof. He had not been behaving well of late. He

had come in during the small hours of the morning for the third time within a week, and declined to give any explanation of, or apology for, his conduct. His father, no doubt, was perfectly justified in administering a sharp rebuke, which he had done when they met at the table.

'You will please to remember, my lad, that, if you have no respect for yourself, I require you to respect my wife and myself,' continued Mr. Hazell rather haughtily. 'If you cannot conform to the rules of the house, you must leave it—that's all. You should take an example by your brother, sir, who is an honour to all connected with him.'

'Oh, of course, pile it on!' sneered Herbert, with a curious gleam in his eye. 'Bob always was a saint, and a sneak as well.'

Mr. Hazell's temper rose again, but Robert Hazell only smiled. He did not at all mind anything Herbert said, but regarded him rather as a spoiled child than anything else.

'Never mind him, father,' he said in that quiet, pleasant way of his. 'I daresay Herbert will be sorry when he thinks over it, and will do differently in future. Mrs. Hazell, I saw some roses at Clieveden yesterday finer than yours.'

'Did you? Tell me about them,' said Mrs. Hazell, lifting a quick, grateful glance to his face. He had a fine tact, and often changed the subject when it grew distasteful. He knew that the jars between his father and his younger brother were disliked and dreaded by his father's wife. It was now twelve months since she

had come to Hazelwood, and but for these jars, which were increasing instead of diminishing, she would have been supremely happy.

'Are they Lucy's training?' she asked, with a little humorous smile. 'If they are, I give up the contest.'

Robert Hazell laughed.

'No, they are only Guy's,' he answered. 'Mrs. Meredith says he is neglecting his business for his flowers. His Marshal Neils are simply beyond description.'

'I must go over and see them. More coffee, Herbert?'

'No.'

With which rude refusal Mr. Herbert pushed back his chair, and without apology left the room.

'I must be going too,' said Robert, making a motion to rise, perhaps to cover his brother's rudeness. 'Are you coming down just now, father?'

'I will follow you shortly. See that Gregory's order is attended to this morning, will you?'

'Yes. Good morning, Mrs. Hazell.' So saying, Robert Hazell also left the room.

'This cannot go on, Eleanor,' said Mr. Hazell sternly, the moment the door closed on them. 'The boy's insolence is insufferable. I think I must set him out into the world to stand on his own responsibility. Things are much too easy for him here. He has too much time on his hands, and too much money in his pockets.'

'But to send him away just now would be a mistake,

I think,' said his wife gently. 'It's not the best thing to turn our backs on the erring, is it, Robert?'

'Well, perhaps not; but you know I have tried all ways with him, Eleanor, and you know with what results,' said Mr. Hazell irritably. 'He is not worth his salt at the brewery, and there is the evil of his example besides. It is not a pleasant thing to have one's sons drinking and gambling with one's employees in Medlington, and I won't have it—in that I am determined.'

Eleanor Hazell sighed. They were discussing a vexed question, which had often, often made dispeace in Hazelwood. She had her own thoughts on the subject, but she was by nature and habit timid and reserved. It was very seldom she ventured an opinion, especially one opposed to that expressed by her husband.

'I am in hopes that Mary will be able to do something with him when she comes home,' said Mr. Hazell presently. 'They were always chums, and she had a great influence over him. By the by, she'll be home in a day or two now. Isn't it to-morrow Robert goes off to Bonn to fetch her?'

'Yes, to-morrow.'

'Why that sigh, Eleanor? Are you dreading Mary's home-coming?'

'Oh, no, not dreading, but I feel anxious, naturally anxious. I have supplanted her, Robert.'

'Oh, don't talk nonsense,' said Mr. Hazell in his quick way. 'Supplanted indeed! Mary is my daughter, no doubt, but this is my house, and surely I am

master of my own actions. I hope and expect that she will do her duty. She is a sensible girl; I am sure you will like her. Her brothers adore her.'

'I know they do. I shall try to do my duty by her, Robert. I hope we shall be happy together.'

'It was in order that you might grow accustomed to Hazelwood, and feel at home with us all first, that I sent Mary abroad for a year. She was very sensible about it. I am sure, if you are worrying yourself at all, it is needlessly, Eleanor.'

'I am not worrying, but it is impossible for me not to be anxious until the meeting is over. Perhaps I am a little afraid of Mary. If she is at all like her brothers, she must be a clever and noble woman, Robert.'

'Mary clever? Oh yes, she is a splendid linguist and musician, as she might be, considering the money I have spent on her education. She is a trifle high-flown and sentimental, like all schoolgirls. But she'll marry soon, I fancy, and, I expect, become a practical wife and mother.'

'I hope she will not marry for a long time, Robert. I should like her to be happy in her father's house for a while before she marries. If she improves Herbert, it will be delightful.'

'If she doesn't, he must go, that is all,' said Mr. Hazell curtly. 'Well, I must go too, Eleanor. Good-bye, and don't worry. I declare these children are a greater care now than when they were in the nursery.'

'Only Herbert. Robert is a comfort to you—to us all.'

'Oh yes, Robert is as good as gold. A trifle slow, and with a few antiquated notions perhaps, but trust-

worthy and conscientious — a great matter in these degenerate days,' said Mr. Hazell, as he went out of the room.

When she was left alone, Eleanor Hazell sat still a long time at the table, pondering certain things on her mind. She was a sensitive woman, and even small cares lay heavy on her heart. She was seriously troubled about her husband's younger son. They did not get on well together, nay, there were constant feuds between them. Herbert, no doubt, was indolent and careless; but Mr. Hazell was hasty and harsh in rebuke, and had no mercy where any deviation from the straight line of duty was involved. Herbert was hot-tempered; but his father was sometimes unjust. He was blamed often without cause; any mistake or confusion in the counting-house was sure to be visited on the ne'er-do-weel, often without any investigation being made. Even Robert Hazell, steady, diligent, conscientious as he was, found it hard at times to get on with his father. They differed on a hundred points of opinion; but there was this difference between the two sons: the elder held his peace, and never forgot to be respectful, whereas Herbert spoke up, whatever occurred to him, whether it was becoming or not. Mr. Hazell was a self-made man, a man of great business power, and possessing many admirable qualities, but he had an overweening pride, a domineering and assertive manner, and a quick, arrogant temper; he was not, therefore, greatly beloved as a master. He was a very rich man,—the Hazell brewery was a concern well worth possessing,—but he was hard in money matters, and, curiously enough, less generous

to his own boys than to the strangers in his employ. They certainly had board at Hazelwood, but their salary was fixed accordingly. Although Robert Hazell was worth his weight in gold, and through his tact and pleasant way with the men kept the thing going smoothly and profitably, he received from his father only a hundred a year, and he was twenty-eight years old. He had accepted his position meekly for a long time, but the time was coming for him to speak.

Herbert Hazell left the house that morning, as he often did, in a violent temper. The delicious breeze sweeping up from the river, which watered the spacious grounds surrounding the brewer's fine residence, scarcely cooled the angry colour in the young man's cheeks. He was oblivious of the beauty of the summer morning, careless of the magnificent view stretching out before him; he walked with his eyes moodily bent on the ground, angrily switching the heads off the daisies with his cane as he passed. Robert, leaving the house a few minutes after him, overtook him at the lodge gates.

'You're in a hurry, Bertie,' he said pleasantly. 'Take it easy; the breakfast hour is not nearly over.'

An ominous grunt was Herbert's only answer.

'A fine morning, isn't it? Glorious weather for a holiday! I say, Bertie, you might go to Bonn for Molly instead of me; it would be a fine change for you?'

'The gov. would cut my head off if I ventured to suggest it might be my turn to have a holiday. No, the German trips are only for the good little boys.'

Robert laughed.

'You're awfully cross this morning, Bertie.'

'So would you if you were treated as I am. I haven't the liberty of a cat. I won't be dictated to and scolded before Mrs. Hazell as I was to-day,' said Herbert savagely. 'She rather enjoys it, I know, though she looks so mighty soft.'

'You are not just to her, Bertie. Besides, she has nothing to do with the matter; it is between father and you. I don't wonder he is angry. It is not a very nice thing for you to spend your earnings at the "Base-Ball" every night. *Is* it now, Bertie?'

'Oh, well, there's some freedom and fun there anyway,' said the lad moodily.

'Yes, but there's something else. I am anxious about you, Bertie; so will Molly be when she comes home.'

'Oh yes, they'll tell her a lot of lies about me, and then she'll turn against me, and I won't care what becomes of me. She believes in me yet, anyway. There's no difference in her letters,' said the lad, with a strange mixture of indignation and tenderness. Robert had touched a very soft place in his heart.

'I'll tell you what, Bert, you'll go to Bonn to-morrow instead of me. I'll make it all right with father.'

'I'd like to, but he said I wasn't fit to have the care of my sister. By Jove, I won't forget that in a hurry! Not fit to take care of Molly, when she's my chum!'

'Oh, he only spoke hastily, and did not mean anything by it. Don't brood on it; you'll enjoy the trip immensely.'

'But it's yours by right; you've worked so jolly hard all summer. You're a good sort, Bob!'

'So are you, Bert, when you are yourself,' said the elder brother affectionately, and their hands met in a warm, brotherly grip. There was great good in Herbert Hazell; but he was just on the brink, and needed wise and loving guiding to establish him in the upright path.

CHAPTER II.

MARY HAZELL.

ON a fine summer morning two girls were sitting in the pleasant garden of a commodious chateau in the Coblenzer Strasse at Bonn. The chateau pertained to Madame Gebhardt, and, though the establishment was a school where the tuition was good and the discipline firmly maintained, it was likewise a home to all the pupils. They were chiefly English girls, for Madame Gebhardt had made a reputation abroad. She was a large-hearted, motherly woman, and no better proof of her merits was to be found than in the fact that every holiday time brought one or two former pupils back to pay a visit to their old quarters in the Coblenzer Strasse. No lovelier situation could be found than that on which the Chateau Gebhardt stood. It was on the face of a hill, and commanded a view of picturesque Bonn, the winding, beautiful river beyond, and the vine-clad slopes of the hills on the opposite bank. On a clear morning—and it is nearly always clear in that sunny land—the seven mountains at Königswinter could be seen, with the

picturesque Castle of the Drachenfels standing on its commanding height.

The two companions, sitting together on the terrace, under the grateful shadow of a chestnut tree, were watching for the steamboat coming up the river from Cologne. They had just observed it gliding round the curve at Königswinter, and had laid their glasses on an empty chair beside them. They were both young, just on the threshold of womanhood, and they were close and dear friends, though there was, outwardly at least, little in common between them. Mary Hazell was the taller of the two—a handsome, graceful girl, with a clear and beautiful complexion, bright brown hair, and a pair of large, calm, grey eyes. There was a dignity and repose in her whole bearing which might have belonged to one twice her years. Her movements were quiet, but graceful and ladylike; she looked like one who had had a large experience of life—but she was only a schoolgirl, in her twenty-first year.

Her companion was of small, insignificant stature, and her figure was not in any way enhanced by the shabby black dress she wore. Her face was sallow and large-featured; her black hair coiled low at her neck gave the appearance of too much weight to the head.

But the undoubted plainness of her features was redeemed by the beauty of her eyes, which was remarkable. I cannot describe it—because it was the beauty of expression rather than of form or colour, though those were in keeping. A soul looked out from these eyes—the soul of a woman who had suffered, but had retained the highest ideal of life. She was Madeline

or Lena Rayne, only an English governess at the Chateau Gebhardt, but the friend of Mary Hazell, the sweet English girl, who was the greatest favourite in the school.

'I cannot really believe that it is at an end, and that I have no more lessons to learn, Lena,' said Mary Hazell, leaning her soft white hand against her cheek.

'Except the lessons of life, in comparison with which school-tasks are only play,' Lena Rayne answered, more to herself than to her friend.

'Perhaps you are right. I shall be sorry to leave dear Bonn,' said Mary, and her eyes filled. 'But I feel that I can learn nothing more here, and that it is time I led a more active life. I have great plans for the future, Lena.'

'Yes. Tell me what they are,' said the governess, with a slight, sweet smile, as she folded her hands in her lap. She had ceased to plan, and now lived in the life of others. There were times when she told herself that her life-work seemed to be done—if, indeed, any had ever been ordered for her. She was quiescent in her present state, but not happy.

'Oh, there are so many it would take days to tell them. Some of them are quixotic, but all of them point in the right way. I mean to do some good in Medlington, Lena.'

'Yes. Tell me how.'

'Oh, I can hardly specify; I shall find ways and means. I have heard you say often that we find the way when the heart is willing. You have not gone back on that old teaching, have you?' asked Mary, with a smile.

'No. It is true. I hope *your* way will be sunny and untroubled all ye days, Mary,' said the governess, with evident emotio.

'I wonder if that is a good hope, Lena,' said Mary Hazell, and her sweet face grew earnest and grave. 'Do you not think we need other things than sunshine to develop our characters? I sometimes think we are just like the flowers, to whom the "useful trouble of the rain" is absolutely essential.'

'That is a beautiful thought, and a true one, Mary; but one cannot help wishing the very best for those one loves.'

'*You* cannot, Lena, you are so unselfish,' said Mary Hazell involuntarily, and she laid her hand on that of her friend as she spoke. 'I wonder when your turn for the sunshine is to come?'

'In God's time; and, if never, then that will be best,' said the governess simply, and as if the words were but the expression of a heart's conviction. 'I should like to hear something definite about your plans, Mary, so that I, working here, may be able to picture you working yonder—both, I trust, for the same end. We have pledged ourselves, have we not, to do what we can earnestly, and, as we have opportunity, to make our own lives noble, and those of others as happy as our influence can make them?'

'Yes,' answered Mary Hazell, as her eyes watched the flashing of the sunlight on the swift-flowing Rhine, —'yes, we have.'

Perhaps as she spoke a vague premonition that she was about to begin the ascent of the Hill of Difficulty

touched her heart. 'I cannot be very definite until I go home, Lena. I fancy it will depend entirely upon my position in my father's house as to the exact nature of the work I may undertake. I have to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Hazell on the very threshold of my new life.'

'Yes, but I think she will be a help to you, and you to her. Is it among the poor of the town you intend to work?'

'Yes; there are a great many poor people in Medlington, and a great many miserable and hopeless lives. It is over-populated, and the depression in trade has painfully affected it. Some of the works have been closed for months.'

'Ah, then, you will find enough to do. I do not want to bring our conversation to an end, Mary, but had you not better go down to the pier now? See, the steamer has passed Rheinberg.'

'Oh yes, I must go. Where is the glass? I believe I can distinguish Herbert on the deck. I shall delight to introduce my brother to you. He is a handsome fellow.'

'He must be, if he is like you,' said the governess, with a smile. The compliment was sincere. She thought Mary Hazell one of the loveliest girls she had ever seen.

'Such sweet words won't fit me for the stern battle of life, Lena,' Mary said merrily. 'Come, get your hat, Lena, and let us go down together. Herbert and I will have plenty of time to talk family matters on the way home. I cannot understand why he should have come instead of Robert. I hope there is nothing wrong with *him*.'

The holiday season had begun, and even Lena Rayne was free to dispose of the greater part of her time as she pleased. She had a few duties to perform for Madame in return for her board during the recess, for the English governess had no home and no friends with whom to spend the time to which her pupils looked forward so joyously. Perhaps she had grown accustomed to the loneliness of her life, to the lack of the close, sweet human relationships and interests her nature could so dearly have prized; but there were occasional moments when her heart failed her, when she felt that the days were a burden and a weariness, and that there was no soul on earth so desolate as she. The friendship of Mary Hazell had been like a heaven-sent gift to the governess, and she dreaded the year to come when the Chateau Gebhardt would be rid of that bright presence. Though Mary Hazell was a thoughtful girl, she was neither dull nor morbid. Her mind was perfectly healthy—she had a keen sense of humour and a happy disposition, and she was neither frivolous nor flippant. She had early begun to study the problems of existence, and had a high ideal of life. It is a great thing to have a noble ideal; even though we may never reach it, there is much that beautifies and ennobles in the very striving. It is always glorious to look up. I would have every young heart take *Excelsior* for a watchword.

The two friends, arm in arm, went down the shady walk through the pleasant gardens, and reached the pier just as the steamer touched it. It was crowded with passengers, the season having commenced propitiously,

but in a moment Mary's quick eye detected her brother's handsome figure among the crowd. Lena Rayne drew back when he stepped on the gangway, and turned away her head, not wishing to intrude on their meeting. Then she began to move slowly on again towards the garden gate, leaving them to follow.

'Hollon, Molly, you are looking AI,' said Herbert Hazell in his off-hand way, as he took his sister on his arm. 'And how are you?'

'Oh, delightfully well, as everybody is here. Isn't Bonn lovely? But why did you sail up from Cologne, you stupid boy? Confess you saw nothing.'

'Saw! I've been perfectly savage. How dare they perpetrate such a fraud on the public. It should be exposed.'

'But all the Rhine worth seeing is between Bonn and Mayence. You should have come here by train. But never mind. How are they all, and why did you come instead of Bob?'

'Oh, Bob sent me. The governor and I have not been sailing in the same boat lately, and there's a dryness, to put it mildly,' said Herbert.

'What about? I am afraid it must be your fault, Bertie; papa is so good.'

'He used to be when we were kids. He forgets that we have grown just a trifle beyond his authority. I don't think I'm going to stay at home after this summer,' said Herbert, with a lofty indifference.

'Not stay at home!' echoed Mary blankly. This was bad news to meet her at the outset. 'Why, where would you go?'

'Colonies,' answered Herbert briefly.

'Oh, Bertie Hazell, you'll never do such a thing!'

'Won't I? I'm not going to be treated like a child. Besides, what do we get at home? There's Bob, as sweet as he can be on Lucy Meredith, and can't say a word because he hasn't a sixpence to bless himself with.'

'Lucy Meredith! Oh, how nice! She is a dear girl,' said Mary, with all a girl's ready interest in a love affair. 'I cannot imagine Bob; he's so quiet and staid.'

'Not like me—falling in love with every pretty face,' laughed Herbert in his careless way. 'Say, who's this old party hanging about before us? Not your school-marm, is it?

'Oh no; that is Lena Rayne.'

'That the paragon you've been raving about this long time? Well, my dear, she may be good, but, even by stretching the imagination, she could not be called beautiful.'

'Hush; she will hear you. You will think her lovely when you know her. Before we get to her, Bert, do you think I could take it upon me to invite her to Hazelwood?'

'Why should not you?'

'Oh, you know, would Mrs. Hazell like it?'

'Oh, I think she would; she's hospitable enough; but I can't say I admire your taste in friends, Mary. What a dowdy!'

Mary's cheeks were naturally a little red when presently she was called upon to introduce a friend to

her brother. At that moment it seemed to Mary's vexed spirit Lena Rayne showed to the least possible advantage. Her manner was stiff and constrained—her very expression seemed dull and uninterested.

Altogether, Herbert had succeeded in a very few minutes in putting his sister thoroughly out of sorts. Herbert Hazell paid very little attention to Lena Rayne that morning at Bonn. I do not suppose one of the three had the faintest prevision what influence she was to exert on his future life. There came a time, however, when Herbert Hazell blessed the day he had first seen Madeline Rayne.

'I am afraid things are not just quite harmonious at home, Lena,' said Mary Hazell an hour later, when she was gathering the last of her belongings together in the little room on the balcony, where many a night they had watched the Rhine by moonlight, and discussed life in all its bearings. 'I have a feeling as if I were going home to a great deal of worry.'

'If so, don't anticipate it. Time enough to face it when you cannot help it,' said Lena cheerfully. 'You have decided to go straight home; you are disappointed in your trip up to Mayence?'

'Yes. It is most unaccountable of papa not to have sent any money; I can't understand it. Bertie and he have been quarrelling, I fear. Isn't it horrid?'

'Perhaps you will smooth all unpleasantness away, as you have so often done here,' said the governess. 'You will not forget me, Mary?'

'How dare you ask such a question?' asked Mary Hazell quickly, and her bright eyes grew dim. 'Now,

Lena, promise me that if I say come, you will come. Of course I do not know how things will be at home; but I hope, and I think, everything will be right. Hazelwood used to be a very hospitable house.'

'When you send for me, I will come, Mary. Good-bye. God bless you,' said Madeline, and for a moment emotion overcame her.

'Good-bye. God bless you for all you have been and done for me, Madeline Rayne. You have made me a better woman. Anything worthy I may be, or do, my darling, I shall owe to you.'

CHAPTER III.

THE SHADOW ON THE HEARTH.

THE supper tray had just been brought into the drawing-room. As the maid set it on the table and withdrew, the timepiece chimed the half-hour after ten. Mr. Hazell threw aside the magazine he had been reading, and sat up in his chair.

'Shut the piano, Mary, and let us have a mouthful of supper and get to bed,' he said in his quick way. 'Eleanor, what will you take?'

'Milk, if Kitty has brought it. Is there any there, Mary?'

'Yes, mamma; here it is.'

Mary rose, set a glass of milk on a small salver, and carried it to Mrs. Hazell's sofa. She was not strong, and of late had been obliged to spend the greater part of the day on the sofa. She was a sweet, uncomplaining invalid, who gave as little trouble as possible, and was grateful for every small attention.

'Thank you, my love,' she said, as she took the glass from Mary's hand. Their eyes met in a smile of

mutual love. Between these two women there was an absolute understanding and an absolute trust. Mary Hazell had found in her father's wife an abiding and precious friend.

'A biscuit, mamma? Here are some of cook's famous cocoa chips. Do have one?'

'No, thank you. What is Robert busy with?'

'The dissipation of a novel, I think,' returned Mary, glancing at the corner where Robert sat, apparently engrossed in the book he held in his hand,—only apparently; in reality he was thinking of something more serious than an imaginary love-story.

'I didn't want anything, thank you,' he said quietly, and, rising from his chair, looked out of the window. 'It is a wet night,' he added; 'that southerly wind will blow a gale before morning.'

'No fear of it. We haven't many gales in September,' said Mr. Hazell, as he finished his stout. 'A little sherry, Mary?'

'Oh no, thank you, papa,' answered the girl quickly, and the colour rose slightly in her cheek.

'You are all very abstemious,' he said. 'Eleanor, there is nothing in that weak draught to refresh you. You ought to have some rum in it. Let me ring for some.'

'No, thank you, Robert. I like it as it is,' returned his wife.

'If everybody followed the example of my household, we might shut up shop, eh, Bob? Well, if you have all done, we'd better go. Lock the door, Robert, as you go down.'

'But, papa, Bertie has not come in,' Mary said quickly.

'Put the bolts in as well,' added Mr. Hazell, ignoring her protest. 'Are you ready to go up-stairs, Eleanor?'

'Yes, but the door must not be locked till Herbert comes in, dear. There is no use troubling the servants.'

'They will not be troubled,' answered Mr. Hazell grimly. 'They have had their orders. Wait till eleven, Robert, and then do as I have told you. Good-night, Mary.'

Mary Hazell's face was wet with tears as she received her father's good-night kiss.

'Oh, papa, don't lock him out!' she pleaded. 'Let me sit up for him.'

'My patience is quite exhausted. I have warned him in vain, and I must show my authority in some fashion,' was Mr. Hazell's curt rejoinder. 'Remember the bolts, Robert.'

'Very well. Good-night,' Robert answered. 'Good-night, Mrs. Hazell.'

Mary threw herself into a low rocking-chair, and her tears flowed in earnest. Her brother came to the hearth, and stood leaning against the mantelshelf with his arms folded across his chest. His brows were knit, his fine eyes troubled in their depths.

'Don't distress yourself so, Molly,' he said kindly. 'Let us talk over this unhappy business. What is to be done now?'

'I don't know, Bob. Papa is so dreadfully hard on Bertie. I believe it makes him worse.'

'He is a little hard, but he has grave reason to be

displeased. I am afraid the lad is completely led away. Nothing seems to influence him,' said the elder brother sadly.

Both were silent for a moment. Curiously, or, perhaps, naturally enough, the thoughts of each had run into one groove.

'Bob, is it for Bertie's sake you take nothing? I have noticed of late that you do not even taste wine at dinner.'

'Yes, that is my reason. I wish papa could see that it would be better not to have it in the house.'

'Have you ever spoken of it to him?'

'Never. He would resent it, I am sure.'

Mary Hazell said no more for a few moments. By slow degrees various convictions were coming home to her. She had begun of late to study cause and effect, with the result that she was discontented and miserable. She had begun to have grave doubts about the business which bore her father's name. In her endeavours to be loyal to him, she had tried to banish these doubts, but they were often uppermost in her mind.

'I should be afraid to interfere. Papa is very different from what he used to be,' she said presently. 'But I could ask mamma to speak about it to him. She is on our side, I know.'

'Mrs. Hazell is not without cares,' said Robert, with a slight smile. 'Those who blamed her for marrying for money and position need not envy her. But she is a sweet woman. I have the highest admiration and respect for her.'

'I love her,' said Mary warmly. 'Do you know

what I have thought, sometimes, Bob? that if Bertie would fall in love with some nice girl it would steady him.'

'I believe it would; but he does not seem to have met that nice girl yet. I wish some influence would work with him. I am afraid, Molly, that as long as he remains here he has no chance. He has not the courage, even if he had the desire, to break with his bad companions, and then father is entirely out of sympathy with him. He will not even give him the credit for the slightest leaning towards anything good. A man soon loses his own self-respect when he sees himself contemptible in the eyes of others.'

'That is true. I cannot understand papa, Bob. He is so very different: he is not like the same man. Hasn't he grown irritable and changeable, and so hard of heart? What do you suppose has so changed him?'

Robert Hazell shook his head. He knew the reason very well, but one care lay heavily enough on his sister's heart. No need to add another to it.

'Bob, is there any truth in what Bertie told me at Bonn in June, that you admire Lucy Meredith?' asked Mary, with a smile and slightly heightened colour. 'If we had not been away at Sandgate these two months, I should have found out for myself by this time. Do tell me.'

'Yes, I admire Lucy Meredith, Mary. If I were in a position, I should ask her to-morrow to be my wife.'

'But you can be in a position if you like, Robert. Papa will make you a partner, I am sure. He is very

rich, is he not? and the brewery can easily support two establishments.'

'There is plenty of money in the concern certainly, Mary; but I don't think I could or would take a partnership in it.'

'Why not?'

She spoke eagerly, almost dreading to hear from him a confirmation of her own fear. If Robert, who was always right in his judgments, had arrived at the conclusion that the business in which their father had made his money was a doubtful concern, she would feel as if the foundation of things were being shaken. It would involve so many vexed questions, for which it would be difficult to find an answer.

'I don't know whether it is Herbert's frailty, Mary; but I do know I have had some curious thoughts of late. If I could have chosen my career, it would have been different.'

'But you could never leave the brewery now, Bob. Papa is getting an old man, and Bertie so unsteady. It would not be right to leave him.'

'That is just the point I cannot decide, Mary.'

'It is the Merediths who have given you these ideas,' she said quickly, forgetting her own qualms in her anxiety to set her brother right regarding his duty to his father. 'Aren't they teetotallers?'

'Yes, but I have never had any trouble with them on the subject,' returned Robert quietly. 'No, it is nothing any one has said, Mary. It is a settled conviction which has made me a very unhappy man of late.'

Mary sighed.

'How full of care life is, Robert! I sometimes wish I had never grown up. I came home anxious to do some good in the world, but there seem to be hindrances on every side.'

'Don't be so doleful, Molly; you do a great deal of good. Why, you are the sunshine of this house.'

'Am I? I don't feel very like it. Are you going to sit up for Bertie?'

'Of course.'

'And let him in?'

'Yes; why not?'

'But I thought papa very peremptory.'

'Oh, he would be the first to regret his harshness in the morning if it were carried out,' said Robert lightly. 'Go you to bed, Mary; you look very tired.'

'Yes, I am going,' she said, rising reluctantly to her feet. 'Bob, what is it Bertie does when he is out so late? Where does he spend his time?'

'Between the "Base-Ball" and a billiard club in Sandford Street. Chiefly at the latter place, I fancy. He is a lucky player, evidently, though I have never spoken to him on the subject. He must win, however, or they would not keep him there. He could not pay up his losses.'

'And who are his companions?'

'Don't ask me, Molly; it would not make you any happier. Run off to bed. Good-night.'

'Good-night, Bob. What a comfort you are!' she said affectionately, as she laid her hands on his shoulders to bid him good-night. Then she went

slowly up-stairs to her own room, and sat down at the window, leaned her arm on the sill, and looked out into the night. A harvest moon had risen gloriously in the clear sky. Every object, even for miles round, was clearly discernible. She could have counted the steeples in Medlington, and could almost distinguish the hour on the town-hall clock. She admired the prospect in a half-hearted way, for her thoughts were with the prodigal who was causing such anxiety and dispeace in the house. We may take a peep at his occupation and surroundings.

The streets of Medlington were almost empty. The policemen and the night wanderers had the town to themselves. The public-houses, however, were not yet closed, and when their frequenters were turned out the scene no doubt would be livelier. The 'Base-Ball' was the favourite place of refreshment in Medlington, and was largely frequented by young men. It was considered a most respectable house, and never was the scene of any disorderly proceedings. But the harm done by that select and decorous establishment was a thousand times more insidious than in the lower class shops. It had been the ruin of many members of the youth of Medlington. It was situated in a quiet street, within a stone's throw of the Hazell brewery. That gigantic structure, which occupied nearly half an acre of ground in the most thickly-populated part of the town, loomed like a vast shadow over the place. It was a great industry of its kind, and gave employment to more than a thousand hands.

At half-past ten on the night when Mr. Hazell had given peremptory orders that Herbert should be locked

out, that young man was enjoying himself in his own fashion in a certain upper chamber not very far from the 'Base-Ball.' It was the billiard-room, or, more properly speaking, the gambling club alluded to by Robert Hazell. Although not generally known, this club was a part of the 'Base-Ball' concern, and all belonged to a widow lady who had a reputation for piety and good works. She did not come much into the vicinity of the 'Base-Ball' or the club-rooms, her only connection with these institutions being that she drew in the handsome revenues accruing from them. These she spent lavishly, not only on her tasteful and beautiful home in the suburbs, but on charitable and religious objects. The Church knew her as a munificent benefactress, and worshipped her accordingly; she lived in an odour of sanctity and honour; none of the vile odours or questionable attributes of the twin establishments in Sandford Street were permitted to touch her She had a manager who did all unpleasant things for her, and if he feathered his own nest in the process well, perhaps it was excusable. The profits left a margin considerable enough to allow even Miles Gregory to help himself.

The club-room was approached by an unpretending doorway judiciously darkened, so as not to attract attention.

The door was locked, and only opened in response to a familiar signal, known only to those who frequented the place. Within this door there was a narrow stair, dimly lighted by a shaded oil lamp, hung from the roof. On the landing at the head of the stair there were three

doors. From the chinks of the one in the middle brilliant streams of light revealed that within it was brilliantly illuminated. It was a small place, and, if it was a billiard-room, it belied its name. The only visible means of amusement was a baccarat table in the middle of the floor, round which ten or a dozen young men were gathered, intent on watching the game.

At the fireplace, with his hands complacently placed behind his back, stood an elderly gentleman of apparently respectable appearance, benignly watching the successes of the bank. Mr. Miles Gregory had an interest in the game, but he had an admirable command of his features. He could lose, and smile all the time.

The players, with one or two exceptions, were gentlemanly young fellows, and some of them mere lads. An unhealthy excitement glittered in their eyes, and more than one hand was unsteady with the effects of the liquor, which was to be had in abundance.

'Hurry up, gentlemen,' said Mr. Gregory, smiling placidly. 'Ten minutes to eleven. Come; you'll need to be going immediately.'

'I'm cleaned out, Gregory—I must have another chance, and I will, though I should stop here till midnight,' said Herbert Hazell. 'I've nothing to bet but my watch—ten pounds on it, Gregory? It's a gold repeater.'

'Oh, well, ten pounds be it,' said that worthy complacently.

'Don't go it, Hazell,' whispered a round-faced, red-cheeked lad in Herbert's ear. 'Come on out. You're drunk; you're not fit to play. I say, Gregory, he doesn't know what he's doing.'

'Oh, nonsense! see his steady hand. Gentlemen, I appeal to you to uphold me when I say Mr. Hazell is quite sober.'

'Of course I'm quite sober! Here goes,' said Hazell excitedly, as he watched the dealing of the cards.

The bank had been winning steadily. In about half an hour, when eleven o'clock struck, the gold repeater was among its gains.

'I'll keep it safe till you pay up, Mr. Hazell,' said Gregory smoothly, as he slipped the valuable article into his capacious breast-pocket. 'Now, gentlemen, good-night. Hoskins, put out the gases.'

'I haven't a cent to bless myself with, Tommy,' groaned Herbert Hazell as he staggered down-stairs after the lad who had warned him, 'and I'm ten pounds in debt. If I don't turn up to-morrow night and clean out that Gregory! He's the biggest scoundrel in existence. They cheat in the shuffling, don't you think?'

Tommy made no reply. He was a clergyman's son, and he was wondering how he should slip into the Rectory without his father's knowledge; also where he was to get the wherewithal to pay certain sums he owed to Mr. Miles Gregory and his colleagues.

CHAPTER IV.

NIGHT AND MORNING.

THE two companions parted at the corner of the street, but Herbert Hazell did not turn towards his home. To reach Hazelwood he had to cross the bridge over the Med, and walk up the opposite bank of the river for some distance. The brewer's residence was quite in the outskirts of the town. Herbert Hazell's head was perfectly dazed—he did not know what he was about. He fancied himself on the way home; in reality he was walking as fast as his unsteady gait would allow him quite in the opposite direction. He kept close by the bank of the river; the swift-flowing stream had for him a curious fascination. Once or twice he stood still, and watched its rapid flow, and his form even swayed towards it. A special providence beyond a doubt saved his life that night. And yet he did not premeditate self-destruction, only he had lost control over his own actions. He felt dazed, stupid, and miserable; the cold, clear night wind blowing on his fevered temples did not seem to have the power to sweep the mists from his brain; he had a vague idea that he

had lost everything, and that he felt ashamed to go home. He grew weary at length, and wondered why the way home seemed so unnaturally long. He stood still, and, looking around him, failed to recognise any familiar landmark. There was not a house in sight, he seemed to be quite in the country, and his surroundings were entirely new to him. Involuntarily he put his hand to his breast-pocket to see what o'clock it was. Of course his watch was gone. It was bitterly cold, as it so often is betwixt darkness and dawn. It was nearly two o'clock in the morning. The young man could not reason out the mysteries of his surroundings; he felt stupified and drowsy, and at length, succumbing to that feeling, lay down under a tree, and fell asleep, with the hard ground for a pillow and the night dews for a covering.

Meanwhile Robert Hazell still kept his vigil at home, and Mary sat by her uncurtained window straining her eyes for the wanderer who never came. About two o'clock she was startled by the opening of a window or door on the lower flat. She threw up the sash of her own window, and looked out. Just then Robert emerged from the library window, which opened down to the ground in two halves, like a folding door.

'Is that you, Robert? Where are you going?' she asked in a quick whisper.

'Are you not in bed yet?' he asked in surprise. 'I'm going to look for Bertie. I'm getting anxious about him. He has never been so late.'

'Where can he be? Can anything have happened to him?'

'I don't think so. Go to bed, like a good girl, and try to sleep.'

'Sleep! Oh, Bob, I couldn't! I am in misery. Will you wait for me, and I'll come too?'

'No, you must not. Go and lie down. I'll only go the length of the club. I have heard they sometimes play there after midnight. Don't distress yourself.'

'I keep thinking of the river,' she said, with a shiver. 'The parapet is so low at the bridge, and the bank so steep all the way along to our gates. Do let me come!'

'You would rouse the house. and I don't want papa to know of this at all, if it can be avoided. Do what I tell you, Mary. I assure you I am advising you for the best.'

So saying, he walked quickly away. Mary shut the window again, wrapped a shawl round her, and sat down to wait.

The thought about the river had also occurred to Robert Hazell, and, though he tried to banish it, he found himself unconsciously watching it as he made his way to the town. The misery of his anxiety made him angry with his brother, who was not only his own enemy, but a source of unspeakable care to all connected with him.

Robert Hazell tried to be gentle with the weakness he could scarcely understand. The temptations which overcame his brother had not the slightest influence on him, but he was not self-righteous. He had a fine nature—generous, sympathetic, and full of compassion for the erring. Perhaps the harshness of his father's

judgments had taught him a lesson. But for Robert Hazell there had not been such harmony at the brewery. There was not a man within its gates who would not serve the young master with a cheerful alacrity, while to the old master they gave no more than his pound of flesh. Robert Hazell reached the club-house in Sandford Street without meeting a living soul. As he stood before the dark, deserted-looking house he could hear the measured tread of the policeman on his beat further up the street. It ended, he knew, just at the brewery gates. There was no sign of light or occupation in the club-rooms; if there were still players within, they had taken every precaution to conceal their presence. He waited a few moments, and then went up the street towards the policeman. That worthy came forward quickly at sight of a man approaching, but, recognising him, he stopped in amazement and touched his hat. It was not a common sight to see Mr. Robert Hazell in such a locality in the small hours of the morning.

'You are surprised to see me, Crockett. Do you think it possible there can be any one in Gregory's billiard-rooms at this time?'

'Quite possible, sir. I've known it happen afore, but there ain't any one to-night, becos I watched Gregory lock up myself after eleven, and I saw some gentlemen leave then.'

'My brother among them, Crockett?'

'Yes, sir; him and Young went up the street together. Excuse me sayin' it, sir, but Mr. Hazell seemed to have had more than was good for him. He couldn't walk steady.'

'That is nearly four hours ago, and he hasn't come home. I am very anxious, Crockett.'

'Oh, don't be, sir. He was just in that state that he'd drop down anywhere to sleep it off,' said the policeman cheerfully. 'Nothin's happened him, take my word for it.'

'But, if he was in the state you describe, might he not fall into the river?'

'Never a bit of him. It's when they're in the horrors they jump in. Mr. Robert, I know all the ways of it. It's a bad corner that Gregory's, sir.'

'Ay, it is. It has ruined many another besides my poor brother.'

'Oh, but Mr. Herbert 'll pick up yet; he's not quite gone,' said Crockett cheerfully still. 'Gregory's that cunning, sir, the law can't touch him. But I hope his turn 'll come.'

'What would you advise me to do, Crockett?'

'Go home to bed, sir. 'Tain't no use in the world wandering the streets to-night. Take my word for it, Mr. Herbert 'll turn up all right. I'll look about, and, if I see him, I'll bring him home.'

'Very well, Crockett. You need not speak of this.'

'Oh, I never *do*, sir. Bless you, we see so much. If I was to tell all I see, I'd set this town by the ears, and it 'ud be too hot to hold me. They talk of London, sir, but it can't hold a candle to Medlington, and I walked a beat for seven years at Trafalgar Square. There's mean, sneakin' ways in little towns, sir, that London 'ud be ashamed of. You see, every one lives in terror o' his neighbours fetchin' out any o' his little

peeoolliarities, where, in London, nobody knows anybody, an' people do jes' as they like.'

Robert Hazell smiled at the man's worldly wisdom, and, bidding him good-night, walked off. As he crossed the bridge, the first faint streaks of the dawn were tinging the east with a touch of light. Involuntarily he stood still to look for a moment at the mystery of the dawn, which he now saw for the first time.

When he reached home, he found Mary still sitting, white-faced and anxious-eyed, at her window. She slipped down-stairs when she heard him come in, and heard all that he could tell. Up-stairs Mr. Hazell was in a dead slumber, but his wife's strained ear caught every sound and movement, and she thought Herbert had come home. At breakfast next morning Herbert, of course, did not appear. Mr. Hazell, however, made no remark. It was not a very unusual occurrence for him. More than once he had not come to the dining-room till the others had left it. Robert wished, if possible, to hide Bertie's escapade from his father. He knew it would make a terrible disturbance, and perhaps a breach between them. For the sake of Mary and Mrs. Hazell, he wished an outward semblance of peace preserved. Mr. Hazell was talkative at breakfast, whereby Robert guessed that he regretted the way he had spoken the previous night. It was an effort for him to respond, for he was still anxious, like Mary, who could not even make a pretence of eating. Mrs. Hazell, of course, was not yet down-stairs.

'What were you asking me yesterday, Mary?

Something about the Beckers, wasn't it?' said Mr. Hazell, looking up from his letters.

'Yes, papa. I asked you if you could not take back James? They are almost starving.'

'I can't take back the old man, because I make it a rule never to re-engage a discharged man. It is a bad precedent, and James Becker had plenty of warnings,' said the brewer. 'But you can tell the lad, Willie, he can come over if he likes, and I'll see if I can give him a job. But it's only in charity for the wife, and because you say she is a decent, hard-working woman, and she must draw the wage. Tell the lad that. Will you be in the town to-day?'

'I can go and see Mrs. Becker, papa.'

'Well, see and talk firmly to them. Don't be too sympathetic, or I'll need to prohibit you going among the work-people. You'd have them demoralized in no time, just as they were when your mother was alive. I told Eleanor not to go near them, and she never has; but you are more self-willed.'

'You never told me not to go, papa,' Mary said, with a smile.

'Well, no. You look as if you required to be about in the fresh air. You are as fagged as possible. How have you lost all your good looks since you came home?'

Mary coloured crimson, dreading what the next question would be. She was in terror lest her father should discover that Robert and she had spent the night in waiting for Herbert. She hated even the appearance of deceit,—it was foreign to her nature,—and yet something had to be concealed for the sake of peace.

'Eleanor is very tired this morning. You will go up presently,' was Mr. Hazell's next remark, which greatly relieved her.

'Yes, papa, I shall go up. Do you wish anything more? I have quite finished.'

'Nothing more, thank you. Wait a moment, Robert, and I'll go down with you.'

'Papa, I had a letter last night from my friend Madeline Rayne, who was at Madame Gebhardt's with me. She is leaving Bonn, and has nowhere in England to go to till she gets another situation. May I ask her to come here for a little?'

'Nowhere in England to go! Has she no friends?'

'No; she is an orphan.'

'And a governess?'

'Yes, papa.'

'Have you spoken to Eleanor about it?'

'Yes, she is quite pleased.'

'Oh, well, it is her business, not mine. Let her come,' said Mr. Hazell in his quick fashion. 'Is she a nice person?'

'The best in the world,' returned Mary warmly; and her eyes shone with love for her absent friend.

'Oh, that is schoolgirl talk,' said Mr. Hazell, with a smile. 'But it is odd for you to have such a work with a governess—you might have found a companion more suitable in age and other respects.'

So saying, he left the room. Apparently he had forgotten the very existence of Herbert. In reality he had not. But it suited him not to mention his name just then. Robert, however, was thankful that the

subject was not brought up even as they walked together down to the brewery. He hoped that his brother would turn up in the course of the day, and that the affair would be passed over without remark. He was very curious concerning Herbert's night out of doors, and intended to probe the matter to the bottom.

When her father and brother left the house, Mary ran up to Mrs. Hazell's room. She found her sitting up in bed, sipping a cup of chocolate the maid had just brought up.

'Good morning, dear. You look tired as well as I,' she said, with her pleasant smile. 'I fancy we had all a disturbed night. Was Herbert at breakfast?'

'No, mamma; he has never come in.'

'Never come in!' exclaimed Mrs. Hazell in amazement. 'Then what was all the noise I heard in the house in the early morning?'

'It was Robert coming back. He went over to the club-room to seek him,' said Mary. 'May I open the blind, mamma, and let in the light?'

'Yes; but, my dear, I am alarmed. Where has he been?'

'We don't know. I am very anxious; but Bob thinks he will be all right.'

'Does your father know?'

'No. It is painful to have to conceal things as we have to do about him, mamma. It makes me feel mean. Why, there is Herbert now, coming across the park. Where can he have been?'

'You had better go down, my dear, and meet him. When you have spoken to him, come up to me again, will you?'

'Yes, mamma.'

Mary flew down-stairs, and met Herbert just as he entered the house.

'Is the governor gone?' he asked, looking round rather anxiously.

Mary was shocked at his appearance. A night on damp ground does not improve the appearance of a light tweed suit, and the lad's face was pale and sickly-looking, and his eyes encircled by deep shadows.

'Yes, he is away. Come into the dining-room,' she said hurriedly. 'Where have you been?'

'I made an ass of myself last night at Gregory's,' said he shamefacedly. 'I suppose I had too much drink. My head was muddled, and I couldn't find the way home. I slept all night on the river bank out at Royston, and I'm pretty stiff, I can tell you. I'm jolly ashamed of myself, I tell you too, and I'm not going back to that vile Gregory's. He's an out-and-out swindler. Is the governor awfully mad?'

But all the answer Mary made was to turn her head away in sadness and shame, and burst into tears.

CHAPTER V.

PARADISE ROW.

AFTER a few minutes Herbert went up-stairs, refreshed himself with a good wash, and went off to the brewery. He was not a coward; he would face it out at once. It was about half-past ten when Robert, chancing to look out of the counting-house window, saw him come through the big gates. He put on his hat and went out to meet him.

'Where have you been? Have you come from home?' he asked.

'Yes. I made a jolly fool of myself last night, Bob,' Herbert answered confidentially. 'I'll tell you about it after. What's the governor saying? I suppose he's awfully mad.'

'He knows nothing about it. He thinks you came in late, or, rather, too early to be up in time,' Robert answered. 'This is the worst escapade you have ever had, Bert. You must not repeat it, if only for mother's sake. She was quite ill last night and this morning. I was down at Gregory's at two o'clock this morning.'

'Were you? We were out long before that. I lost my watch at baccarat, and my head was muddled. Fancy, I wandered as far as Royston, seeking the way home.'

'And where did you sleep?'

'Camped out. I awoke this morning in rather a damp condition with the dew. Nobody saw me, fortunately. Perhaps the thing 'll blow over,' said Herbert brightly. His spirits had risen the moment he heard that his father did not know of his indiscretion. Robert looked at his brother's pale face and haggard eyes with compassion. It was impossible to be angry with the lad; he was so simple and winning in his way, ready to acknowledge himself in the wrong, especially to those he loved, and willing to make any promise of amendment, which, alas! he had never sufficient courage to keep.

'I'm glad the governor doesn't know, Bob, because I can't eat humble pie before him; it makes something come up my back. I suppose I'll just go in.'

'I suppose so,' said Robert, with a half sigh.

'Don't look so down, Bob. Really, I'm going to turn over a new leaf. Only I must go back and win my watch from that old swindler. If there was no drink going, we'd soon find out their cheating tricks,' said Herbert; and then they entered the counting-house together, and he went at once to his desk. Mr. Hazell, having occasion to pass through the office a few minutes later, saw him apparently busy, and made no remark. He never alluded in any way to the affair, and it blew over. For a time after such an occurrence Herbert was

generally sober and diligent, until some new temptation assailed him.

After an early luncheon that day, Mary Hazell walked into the town. There was a little basket phaeton at Hazelwood in addition to a carriage for the use of the ladies, but, unless Mrs. Hazell accompanied her, Mary preferred to walk. The long pedestrian excursions she had been wont to take among the Rhine mountains had given her both strength and liking for that healthful exercise. She was sometimes three or four times in the town in a day. But she had never yet been within the brewery gates.

To reach Paradise Row, where the Beckers lived, she had to go down Sandford Street, and keep close to the high wall which enclosed the extensive buildings in connection with the brewery. Paradise Row was entirely the property of Mr. Hazell, and the houses were all occupied by his workpeople. They were brick cottages, containing a room and kitchen, some outhouses, and a small piece of garden ground. Another line of cottages, running parallel with a lane between, was called the Back Row. They were neither pretty nor picturesque. The site was bad, to begin with, the houses being built in a hollow, and the soil being damp and marshy. It was said that the drainage was bad, and if there was any epidemic in Medlington it always scourged Paradise Row and its companion. Mr. Hazell, however, had built the houses for his people, and he made residence in them a condition of employment. In some respects he was a hard master. If any grievances were redressed it was generally through

the interference of Mr. Robert, and the hands were looking forward to the time when he would have the entire control. They said good times were in store for them: he was greatly beloved by all classes in Medlington. The gardens in Paradise Row were not kept with taste. A few vegetables were cultivated by the majority, but there was a decided scarcity of flowers. Miss Hazell, coming from a land where flowers are plentiful, had been quick to notice the absence of colour and beauty in the workfolk's gardens, but her suggestions as to sowing and planting flowers had not been particularly well received. In fact, they had been a little shy with her altogether, rather resenting her visits, though she had such a pleasant, winning way with her. Only the children always greeted her with unmistakable warmth. She had found her way to their hearts, and might be expected through them to win the parents. She had made great plans for the winter among them, and was thinking of them as she walked that pleasant afternoon by the river-side to the town. But the thought of her brother would intervene sometimes with a saddening influence. Unless she could begin her work with success at home, how could she look for good results outside? And as yet all her earnest pleading, her loving, sisterly endeavour had been in vain.

It was ten minutes past three by the big brewery clock when she turned into Paradise Row. When she made her appearance, there was a general scamper of sundry untidy females into the houses. It was a slack time, it must be supposed, with the ladies of Paradise

Row. They had got dinner comfortably over, husbands and children out of the houses, and they could breathe in peace. Miss Hazell did not approve of the general condition of the houses, and the appearance of the women as they sat unwashed and untidy on the door-steps. She had even ventured to hint more than once that they might find a more profitable employment, but her suggestions had not been acted on. In point of fact, they had as good as told her to mind her own business. Mary was quite inexperienced in district visiting, and had hardly yet learned to shut her eyes to a great deal until she had built a sure foundation for her feet.

The Beckers, whom she had specially come to see, lived about the middle of the row. James Becker, the man who had been dismissed, was leaning up against the rain-water barrel smoking his pipe, when he saw the general stampede, and then noticed his master's daughter coming round the corner. He immediately took himself off in the opposite direction, with rather a scowling face.

These things were not particularly encouraging to Miss Hazell, and she felt depressed as she passed up the Row. She made a pretty picture in her neat, well-fitting autumn dress; and as she entered the cottage, the faint perfume of her presence seemed to fill it.

There was a woman in the kitchen sitting on a low stool at the fire, with an infant on her lap; another child, about two years old, tired of his play, had fallen asleep on the rug, with his head leaning against her knee. She was a pleasant-looking woman, between

thirty and forty, but her face was somewhat faded and worn. She had borne a large family, and at that moment her heart was full of care concerning them and their future. The place was scrupulously clean and tidy. Susan Becker was an exception to the general rule of Paradise Row; and, because she kept her own house, and attended to its concerns, rather than meddled with the affairs of others, she was not particularly well liked by the neighbours.

She nodded gravely when Miss Hazell's shadow darkened the doorway, and pointed to the two babies as an apology for not rising.

Mary nodded also, gently closed the door, and took a chair near the window. She missed the pleasant smile with which Susan Becker had been wont to greet her; and, for the first time since she had first visited her, felt at a loss for something to say.

'Shall I waken the babies if I speak, Mrs. Becker?' she asked in a whisper.

'Oh no. Charlie got so fretful an' worrited, I was thankful when he fell over. He's as sound as sound can be. When did you come home, Miss Mary?'

'Ten days ago; but mamma has not been so well, and I have been busy,' Mary answered. 'Are you stronger?'

'A little; but this last baby has taken the strength out o' me. Life's a hard struggle, Miss Mary,' said the woman, not bitterly, but with a kind of quiet hopelessness, which was indescribably pathetic.

'I am sorry to hear you say that. You have always been so happy among the children. They are all at school, I suppose?'

'All but Willie. He's gone over to Royston, because he heard that Mr. Carthew, the grocer there, wants an errand-boy. He was vexed to leave the school; but, as I said to him, he must put his hand to, so long as his father's out o' work at least.'

'I was very sorry to hear about it, and quite astonished. I thought your husband had been doing so well of late.'

'So did I. But one never knows,' said Susan Becker hopelessly.

'I came on an errand to-day, Mrs. Becker. I spoke to papa about it, and he says you are to send Willie over to the brewery, and he will give him something to do.'

'I won't do that, Miss Mary,' the woman answered, as she bent her head low over her baby's face.

'Why not?'

'Because one on the bad road is enough, Miss Mary. I'd rather the lad begged his bread mostly, rather than go the road his father's gone.'

'But what has that to do with his getting something to do at the brewery, Mrs. Becker?' asked Miss Hazell in a puzzled voice.

Susan Becker lifted her head quickly, and seemed about to make a sharp retort, but something in the young lady's sweet large eyes arrested her. She would not hurt that earnest soul, who seemed anxious to help her in her trouble. So there was a moment's rather awkward silence.

'And if Willie does not get that situation at Royston, what will you do?'

'Oh, he must go and seek for work somewhere else. We'll need to shift soon anyway. We expect notice from the master to quit the house every day.'

'Oh, papa will never send you out of the house, at least until your husband gets something to do elsewhere.'

'Won't he?' A slight and peculiar smile, which Mary did not like, touched the woman's lips. 'He gave Job Timms notice to quit twenty-four hours after he was dismissed last Whitsuntide; and there 'll be a man put in Jem's place, and the master 'll want him to live in the Row, sure.'

Mary sighed, and her colour rose a little. The woman's words were not in themselves offensive, but she felt that in some way they cast discredit on her father. She could not help resenting them a little, knowing nothing about his relations with his work-people. At home Mr. Hazell was generally kind and indulgent enough, especially to the women of his household. 'But, you know, your husband has had many warnings. Papa told me so, and sometimes for the sake of the rest an example must be made of one,' she said a trifle hastily. 'I am very sorry for you and the children, Mrs. Becker, but I cannot say Jem did not deserve to be dismissed.'

It was Susan Becker's turn now to colour up.

'When my Jem went first to Hazell's, Miss Mary, there wasn't a soberer man in Medlington, nor anywhere else. Excuse me bein' so plain, ma'am, but how the master can expect 'em to be for ever sober, and that bar open night and day in the place for 'em to drink as much ale as they want, I can't imagine. It's more

than flesh and blood can do to stand straight an' so much temptation. I've often, often said to Jem that if the master meant it in kindness somebody should tell him his mistake. That bar's been the ruin o' dozens I could name at Hazell's, though I never thought my man 'ud ever be among them.'

Mary Hazell had not a word to say. She felt the undeniable truth of the woman's words.

'I'm not meanin' no disrespect nor impudence, Miss Mary, an' I wouldn't hurt you, 'cos you've allus been more than kind,' Susan Becker said, when she saw the downcast look on the young lady's face. 'But I can't bear to hear everybody castin' the blame on the men who drink. They're poor stupid fellows, Miss Mary, but them that puts the temptation always in the way are the most to blame, that's what I think.'

Miss Hazell rose to her feet. 'Then you won't send Willie over, Mrs. Becker?' she said quietly.

'No, Miss Mary. Say to the master I'm obliged for his offer, kindly meant, but I can't let Willie go, nor he has no wish himself. The lad's set against the drink just now, if he keeps to it. He thinks it's took him from the school, an' I never saw such a boy for his books, never. I believe he'd a' turned out a real scholard.'

'I don't know what to say, Mrs. Becker,' said Mary, and a tear rose in her eye. 'I am very sorry for you all; but what can I do to help you?'

'Nothing, I know, Miss Mary. You have a kind heart, an' I'll never forget what you did when the baby was born,' said Susan Becker, with a gulp. 'Will you

tell the master not to send Ford to put us out. We'll go quietly. He has such a nasty way with him. We'll go as soon as we can get. If Willie doesn't get Mr. Carthew's place we'll move to Burnley likely, an' Becker an' the lad 'll go to the pit.'

'Oh, Mrs. Becker, that would never do for Willie!' cried Miss Hazell, recalling the bright and intelligent face of the boy who had been for years the best scholar in the town school, and whom everybody expected to rise above the station in which he had been born.

'It'll need to do, I guess. It's not what we'd like, but what we have to do and to take in this world, Miss Mary, as Willie 'll soon find. Good-bye, Miss Mary. God bless you.'

Mary Hazell shook hands with the drayman's wife, and turned away from Paradise Row with a heavy heart.

CHAPTER VI.

BEGINNINGS.

MISS HAZELL turned back the way she had come, not caring, in her present frame of mind, to encounter any more of the residenters of Paradise Row. But before she had got beyond the precincts she met the lad, Willie Becker, who was about to pass on with a touch of his cap, when she stopped him.

'I have been at your home, Willie, and your mother told me on what errand you had gone to Royston,' she said kindly. 'What success had you with Mr. Carthew?

'The place is filled up, Miss Mary, the lad answered quietly, but his keen disappointment was quite visible in his dejected look. He was a tall, fine-looking lad, with an exceptionally bright, honest face, and an intelligent, speaking eye. Mary Hazell had only seen him a few times, but had been drawn towards him in no ordinary way. She was a great favourite with all the young people in Medlington.

'I am sorry to hear that,' she said sympathetically.

'Your mother spoke of Burnley. I hope it will not come to that, Willie.'

The lad turned his head swiftly away, and Mary heard him gulp down a sob.

'Will you walk a little way with me, Willie, and let us talk it over,' she said, laying her daintily-gloved hand on his shoulder. 'Come, let us go up this cinder path. It is quite quiet there.'

The cinder path was a little narrow lane, leading from the back of Paradise Row, between two tall, prickly hedges, right down to the river. It had got its name from the refuse from the engine-houses being spread upon it, to keep it dry. The ground just there was very marshy.

The lad turned at once, though with some shyness, to accompany the young lady through the lane.

'I had an errand in coming down to-day,' she began. 'Mr. Hazell wished you to come and get employment at the brewery.'

'I am much obliged to the master, Miss Mary, but I'd rather not go to the brewery,' Willie answered, with reddening cheek.

'Why not?'

It was painful for Mary Hazell to ask such questions, and yet she could not help it.

'You'll be angry, Miss Mary, but I'm feared I get like father,' Willie answered humbly, and yet with firmness. 'I'd rather go to Burnley any day.'

'But, Willie, it is a frightful thing to work down in a coal-mine, away from the light and the sunshine. I don't think it will suit you at all. And

you can keep quite steady if you like. I am sure it is in you.'

The boy shook his head.

'Father thought that once too, and a lot others that have been put away like him. I can't go to the brewery, miss.'

'And there are so many advantages, Willie,' continued the young lady earnestly. 'There's the library, and the night-school, and the reading-room, all for nothing. Think how you could improve yourself, and keep up your studies.'

Again Willie Becker turned his head away. He had already done battle with all these temptations, and had trampled them under foot. Young though he was, he had seen the evil of the license given to the employés at Hazell's, and had registered a vow that nothing should induce him to go there. And yet Mr. Hazell provided generous and valuable facilities for the mental improvement of his people. The library and reading-rooms had cost him over two thousand pounds, and he paid the salary of the night-school teacher out of his own pocket.

'And what is to become of your scholarship down the Burnley coal-mines, Willie?' asked Miss Hazell, after a little pause.

'Perhaps there 'll be a night-school and library there, too, Miss Mary. I hope there are.'

'I think not. The miners as a class do not show themselves anxious for self-improvement, and any effort in their behalf has met with so little encouragement that it has been abandoned. Mr. Fergus, of the

Ladywell miners, told me that cock-fighting and such-like sports were their staple amusements. I am afraid you will find it a hard life, Willie.'

The lad's lip quivered. She was not speaking in her usual helpful fashion, he thought, and imagined she was angry at his refusal to go to the brewery.

They walked a few steps in silence, and then the young lady spoke again. This time her voice was very sweet and tender, and had even a slight tremor in it.

'Do you think me very hard, Willie?' she asked.

'No, but I thought you were vexed with me about not going to the brewery,' he answered hesitatingly.

'Not I. If I dared, I should say you were entirely in the right. It is always wise to keep as far as possible from temptation. We never know how weak we are until we are tried. How far is Burnley from here, Willie?'

'About five miles, Miss Mary.'

'And you are very anxious to keep up your studies, are you not?'

'Yes, Miss Mary.'

'What would you like to be?'

'I hardly know, but there is nothing in the world I should like better to do than go to college.'

'To college! You are ambitious.'

'Yes, but mother knows, and she thinks I am quite right—at least she used to,' added the lad, with a sigh. '*Now*, of course, I can't think about it any more.'

'Will you try and keep up your studies, whatever you do?'

'Oh yes; I'll keep all my books, and read them

when I can. But Mr. Bertram, the schoolmaster, says it is very difficult to get on without a teacher.'

'I know it is. What do you say to my turning teacher, Willie?'

'How, Miss Mary?'

'Let's sit down here and make a compact,' said the young lady, motioning him to a pile of wood lying on the river bank, which they had now reached. 'Would you be willing to walk over from Burnley on your half-holidays to get some lessons from me?'

'Oh, Miss Mary!'

The lad's face positively glowed with delight.

'You would like it? Then we'll settle it,' she said, with her happy smile. 'I am fresh from school myself, you know, and ought to be able to make some use of my opportunities. I was the Professor's best Latin scholar at Bonn, Willie. I have gone through Horace and the two first books of Virgil.'

'Oh!'

Willie Becker looked at his master's daughter with a new and reverential interest.

'It is true,' she said, nodding brightly. 'Well, shall we say Saturday afternoons, at four o'clock, for our studies?'

'If you please, Miss Mary. But it will be a great deal of trouble to you.'

'Oh, none in the world! It will be a pleasure. You will just come up to Hazelwood, and we will go into the old schoolroom which has never been used for years.'

'Thank you, Miss Mary,' said the lad simply; but

his eloquent eyes and beaming face expressed a great deal more gratitude than his few words conveyed. A ray of sunshine had fallen across what had appeared to him a very dark horizon. They parted there with a kindly handshake, and Mary Hazell turned her steps into the town again, with a warm glow at her heart. She had done some good; she had, at least, given a young heart something to hope for, and her own reward was very sweet. It was quite early yet; half-past three on the brewery clock when she reached the gate. She hesitated a moment there, and looked into the yard, where the casks were piled one upon another in great stacks. She had never been within, and a slight feeling of curiosity made her feel inclined to enter. She felt that she would like to see the place where her father and brothers spent so much of their time. She passed through the gates, crossed the paved courtyard, and entered the office. The clerks looked up in surprise at sight of her, and when Herbert saw this he jumped down from his seat.

'Hulloa, Molly!' he said, in his off-hand fashion; 'what's up?'

'Nothing; I was walking through the town, and I wanted to see papa. Is he in?'

'Yes, in there,' Herbert answered, and, pushing open the baize-covered door, motioned her to enter.

'Here's a lady to see you, father,' he said, addressing him for the first time that day. Perhaps he was glad of the chance.

Mr. Hazell looked round quickly. 'Oh, it's you, Mary! Come in and shut the door. You needn't wait,

Herbert,' he added curtly to his son, who immediately withdrew.

'What's brought you here? Nothing the matter with Eleanor, I hope.'

'Oh no; I left her much better. I have been to the Beckers', papa, and I thought I would come over when I was so near and tell you about it.'

'Well,' said Mr. Hazell, continuing the letter in the writing of which he had been interrupted, 'when will the boy come?'

'He's not coming, papa.'

'Why not?'

'Neither his mother nor himself wishes it. I had a talk with them both. He seems to feel a good deal about his father, and he will not come to the brewery.'

'Of course they resent the old man's dismissal; but he was hardly a day sober, and Ford was growing rebellious over it.'

'I don't think it is that, papa. It is the temptation the lad fears. He is very conscientious, too.'

Mr. Hazell's lip curled.

'Well, and what are they going to do?'

'Go to Burnley to work in the mines, I think.'

'And are they going to send that fine bright lad down the mine?'

'There is nothing else for him, I am afraid.'

'They are fools. Did you point out the advantages he would have here?'

'I did; but I could not urge him. I think he is quite right.'

Mr. Hazell grunted, and, folding up his letter, carefully sealed it.

'Papa, is it true what Mrs. Becker told me, that there is a bar here, where the men can drink as much as they like?' asked Mary timidly.

'Yes, it's true. Were they throwing the blame on that? Just like them, the ungrateful set.'

Mary sat silent a moment, and then her father wheeled round his chair and looked for a moment into her grave, troubled face.

'Look here, Mary, I am going to tell you, once for all, that I will not have you meddling with the work-people and the business concerns. I'll have you telling *me* my duty next. Why can't you stay at home and interest yourself in your music and painting, as other girls do? What is the use of all the money I spent on your education? Wasn't it that you might be able to give pleasure to others and be entertaining at home? *That's* your duty, my girl, and the sooner you learn it the better it will be for us all.'

The girl's sensitive colour rose, and her eyes even filled with sudden tears. She had been so earnestly seeking a sphere of usefulness, that it was hard to meet with such strong discouragement on the very threshold of her new endeavour. How poorly all the glowing visions she had cherished at school were being fulfilled.

'I am anxious to do a little good, papa, but I will not vex or annoy you,' she said, with a beautiful humility that went straight to his heart. He was not only proud of his beautiful daughter—he loved her with a tender love. But, in spite of that, she must not stand

in his way, or interfere in any degree with his wishes or desires. Even in his love Mr. Hazell was a selfish man.

'Do good? Well, if it will please you to give away money, I'll increase your allowance, though I say that the giving of charity is demoralizing to those that receive it. There is no need for any person to require charity. There is plenty in the world for all, and honest work will always command its market value. You should study these things carefully, Mary, and not allow your feelings to run away with your common sense. What good do you suppose you can do in the Rows suppose you visit them every day in the week, eh? Just let me hear.'

The brewer's manner and speech were brusque, but Mary knew that he was not angry, and took heart again.

'The women are not what they should be, papa. They seem to have so little interest in their homes. Some of them are so squalid. It must be wearisome, of course, and sometimes disheartening, to toil among so many little babies. The Trevors have eleven, papa; just think of that! If I were to have a mother's meeting occasionally in the schoolroom you would not be vexed, would you?'

Mr. Hazell's mouth relaxed into a smile.

'Not I, but that would be a mistake. What would Mrs. Trevor, for instance, do with the eleven while she attended your meeting in the schoolroom? She might go home to find that half of them had fallen into the fire, and the other half into the Med.'

'You are laughing at me, papa. I would have the meeting in the evening, when the little babies have gone to bed, and the fathers are in to look after the bigger ones. The women lead such monotonous lives; they can't get to church, and they have no object in life. I think a pleasant hour together, with a cup of tea, perhaps, and the reading of a nice story while they worked, would be so nice for them. Do let me try it.'

'You can try it if you like, though I can't for the life of me understand how you can bother your head with such things at all. There is a good deal done for our people, Mary, in comparison with others, and I must say I don't think they are a whit more grateful or intelligent. Perhaps your philanthropy in Paradise Row will work its own cure; so we'll just leave you alone. So the Beckers are going to Burnley? They'll need to go out of the house double quick, or Ford will be at their heels.'

'Oh, papa, Mrs. Becker asked me, would you not send Ford to eject them. Surely he is not a very nice man. They dislike him so in the Rows.'

'Hem! as they dislike everybody who conscientiously does his duty,' said Mr. Hazell grimly. 'I only wish I had a few more servants like Ford. He is a thoroughly capable fellow. Come in,' he added, in response to a knock at the door.

A gentleman entered, and Mary rose to go. She glanced at him as he closed the door, and was conscious of a vague feeling of dislike and distrust of him. He was a slight young man, with fair hair, a sallow complexion, and a pair of unpleasantly penetrating grey eyes.

'Ah, Ford, is it you? My daughter—Mary, this is Mr. Ford.'

Mary acknowledged the manager's obsequious bow with a distant bow. It was not that she was proud, or wished to measure any distance between herself and her father's manager, but she did not like the appearance of the man.

'Good-bye, papa. Mamma will be wearying for her afternoon tea,' she said, with a smile. 'You will not be late?'

Mr. Ford instantly held open the door, and, as the young lady passed out, favoured her with a look of undisguised admiration, which made the indignant colour rise to her cheek.

CHAPTER VII.

PERPLEXITIES.

WHEN Mary reached home she found Mrs. Hazell in the drawing-room with a visitor, Miss Meredith from Clieveden.

She was a little, slender, fair-haired girl, with a pretty face and a pleasing, girlish manner. There was not much strength of character, perhaps, about Lucy Meredith, but she was amiable and gentle-hearted. She was a special favourite with Mrs. Hazell, perhaps because she knew Robert cared for her. Eleanor Hazell had a great love for her husband's elder son.

'How are you, Lucy? What an age it is since I saw you!' said Mary, taking the girl's hand in hers and looking affectionately down into her sweet eyes. 'I am so glad to see you. Mamma, I am afraid I am very late. Let me make out the tea, if you don't mind my dusty garments. Guess where I've been to-day?'

'I thought Paradise Row was your destination when you went out, my dear,' said Mrs. Hazell, with her pleasant smile.

'So it was, and I fulfilled my duty there to the best

of my ability; perhaps it was a very poor best,' said Mary soberly. 'Then I went and invaded papa's sanctum—actually bearded the lion in his den.'

'You were at the brewery?'

'Yes; I wanted particularly to see papa at once about the Beckers. Do you know them, Lucy? They live in Paradise Row; the fourth house, I think, from this end.'

'I have heard Guy speak of them, I think. The man is not very steady, is he?'

'No; that is just the family. Papa has dismissed James Becker,' said Mary, with slightly clouding brow. 'Do you know the lad, Willie?'

'Yes; he is in Guy's Bible class.'

'Indeed! Has your brother a Bible class in the town, Lucy?'

'Yes, he has had it for years. It is a splendid class of forty young men and lads.'

'And does he find it do any good? Some more sugar, mamma? How would you do without your waiting-woman, eh?'

'Not very well, my darling,' answered Eleanor, with a swift, appreciative smile. 'Mary has a great deal to learn about Medlington, hasn't she, Miss Meredith? She is quite a stranger in her own town.'

'She is, indeed. I came from mamma to-day, Mary, with a special message. When can you come up and see her? She thinks you have forgotten her.'

'Mamma and I have often talked of it. We must come before the days grow cold, and before your roses are all blown. Robert tells us little bits now and again, Lucy.'

Lucy blushed, and her lips parted in a sweet, tender smile.

'Well, when will you come? I seem to have such a lot to say and to hear. You never told me anything about your school-life, Mary.'

'Have I not? It seems almost unreal now; looking back, I seem to have been years at home. I am expecting my friend Madeline Rayne shortly on a long visit.'

'Are you? I shall be afraid to meet her. She is so very clever, is she not?'

'Yes, I suppose she is. I have never thought of that, only I know she is dear and good,' said Mary, a little absently, for her thoughts had flown to the old chateau on the Rhine banks, and memories thronged about her heart. 'Willie Becker is going to the coal-mines at Burnley, Lucy,' she said, her thoughts reverting, after a moment, to the subject which had been engrossing her attention all afternoon.

'Oh, that is dreadful for poor Willie! He is such a scholar. Guy is always speaking of him. He joined the total abstinence society only a few weeks ago. It was his own request.'

'Does your brother superintend that also?' asked Mary, with a slight constraint in her voice.

'Yes, he does.'

Lucy Meredith wished she had not mentioned it; but the words had slipped from her unawares.

'That would be one reason why he refused papa's offer of work. Do you think the total abstinence society does any good, Lucy?'

'Guy thinks it does. He has known of several young men whom nothing else but a binding pledge would have kept sober.'

'Ah, then, it must do good,' said Mary, with a sigh, and she turned towards the tea-table, and was silent while the other two talked.

Eleanor Hazell saw that the girl's heart was troubled, and she partly understood it. Mary had begun to study cause and effect, with the result that she was rendered restless, and even unhappy. The conversation drifted after a little into more general topics; but, though Mary was not quite silent, Mrs. Hazell saw perfectly well that she was preoccupied. Lucy left early, taking with her a promise that the ladies should come over to Clieveden on the first fine day.

'You are grieved about something, Mary,' Mrs. Hazell said the moment they were left alone.

'Not grieving, exactly, mamma, only feeling a little perplexed,' Mary answered, throwing herself into a swinging chair, and beginning to rock herself backwards and forwards. 'I spoke to papa to-day about the mother's meeting.'

'Yes, my dear?' said Mrs. Hazell with a touch of anxiety in her voice.

'He says I may have the schoolroom if I like, but I can see he thinks I shall not do any good. Do you know Timothy Carr's wife?'

'I have heard the name, but I know very little about the workpeople, Mary.'

'Well, she has gone dreadfully to drink, I am told,

and she is actually cruel to her poor dear little children. Mamma, these things weigh on my heart.'

'Don't let them vex you unduly, my darling; you cannot help the failings of others, and it is the woman's own fault.'

'Yes, but they are so fearfully tempted, mamma. Their houses are so poor and squalid, and the "Base-Ball" so near. I wish that place could be shut up; and yet, what right'—

She stopped short, not wishing to grieve Mrs. Hazell by casting a reflection on the brewery. But Eleanor Hazell knew quite well what was passing in the girl's mind, and was deeply sorry for her.

'You have written to Miss Rayne to-day, dear?' she said, changing the subject.

A gleam of sunshine smiled through the gloom on Mary's face. 'Yes, and in a few days she will be here. She will make everything clear and plain. I hope you will love Lena, mamma. I shall be dreadfully disappointed if you don't take to each other at once.'

'I am prepared to be very fond of her, my dear, for your sake,' was the kind answer. 'Is that your father and the boys already? But, dear me, it is half-past five!'

Mary sprang up, gathered her outdoor wraps together, and went up to her own room to change her dress for dinner. Herbert was very decorous and subdued at table, and there was no allusion made to his escapade of the previous night. It was Mr. Hazell's custom to take a nap every evening after dinner. When Robert was not at Clieveden, he spent the evening in the drawing-room, sometimes alone, or practising duets with his sister. His

tastes were quiet, he enjoyed the society of the ladies; but Herbert found an evening at home an insufferable bore.

'Lucy was here to-day, Robert,' Mary said, when her brothers came up after having smoked a cigar together on the terrace.

'Was she? I am going over to-night.'

Are you? She did not say she expected you.'

'No; but I met Meredith this afternoon, and he asked me. Are you going out, Bertie? Would you come with me?'

'Oh no, thanks. I don't want to go out. Besides, I don't enjoy playing gooseberry,' he answered, with a laugh. 'I may go down town later. I was to see Atkins.'

Shortly afterwards Robert left the house. Mr. Hazell had a corporation meeting to attend, and drove into the town before eight o'clock. Herbert wandered restlessly about the drawing-room, and at last, with a murmured excuse to Mrs. Hazell, left the ladies alone. He could not rest at home. No sooner was his anxiety concerning his latest escapade set at rest, than he was thinking longingly of the excitement of Gregory's rooms. Then there was his watch. He must win it back again before his father missed it, or there would be a scene over it. He took a by-way to the town—a little unfrequented path which skirted the face of a wooded slope above the river. It was a private road belonging to the Hazelwood property, but Mr. Hazell did not insist upon his right of way. It was used indiscriminately by those who loved a quiet, picturesque walk, and was much frequented by lovers.

Many a time had Mary Hazell, in her madcap, girlish days, lain in wait for country swains, and then rehearsed what she had seen and heard for the benefit of her father and brothers. She had a rare gift for mimicry, which, in her earlier years, she had taken full advantage of, but when she went to Bonn, she had laid it, in great part, aside. Madeline Rayne had pointed out the danger of such a gift, and had shown her that its reckless use was not kind. Mary had been falling into that foolish and disagreeable habit of turning every person and everything into ridicule. Happily she had just been checked in time.

It was quite dark when Herbert left the house, but the moon rose before he had gone far on his way. He sauntered leisurely along the path, puffing his cigar, and occasionally pausing to look through the gaps in the trees at the silver thread of the river winding at the base of the slope. The landscape, though not very picturesque in daylight, looked fair enough under the mystic touch of the moon. Even the tall chimneys of the brewery were softened into a graceful outline against the mild autumn sky. Some leaves had already fallen, and they made a gentle rustling under foot. It was just the time and the place for quiet meditation. Herbert was meditating, certainly, but it was on various rather perplexing problems. There were at least two entanglements in Medlington which were causing him some anxiety. One was a debt he owed to Mr. Miles Gregory; the other a promise he had made to Mr. Miles Gregory's daughter.

The upland path, as it was familiarly called, ended

somewhat abruptly, and made a rapid descent on to the public highway which skirted the river bank and passed the Hazelwood gates. Just at the foot of the path, and almost directly facing a foot-bridge over the Med, stood a neat, compact little house, half villa, half cottage, surrounded by a picturesque and well-stocked garden. It had a paddock behind, which was separated by a group of lime trees from a wide stretch of waste moorland called the Common. The house was called Mileswood, the residence of Mr. Miles Gregory. Herbert Hazell knew it well both outside and in. Many an hour he had spent in the cosy sitting-room, playing bezique and backgammon with Mr. Gregory, and making love to Mr. Gregory's handsome daughter. He looked quickly round, perhaps to see whether there was any one in sight, and then entered the garden by the side gate, and knocked with the head of his cane on the door. He was immediately admitted and shown into the sitting-room. There was a lady there alone, a stout, rubicund, motherly-looking person, rather over-dressed, but still not unpleasing to look at.

'Law, is it you, Mr. Herbert? I was just saying to Janie this very day surely we 'adn't seen you for an age. Sit down, sit down, and have a drop o' suthin', an' I'll send Patty out after her.'

'Is she not in, Mrs. Gregory?'

'No. She'd been mopin' in the house all day, an' ran out jis' about fifteen minutes ago for a mouthful o' fresh air. Sit down. You'll never go without seein' Janie, Mr. Herbert,' said Mrs. Gregory coquettishly. 'She'd break 'er heart over it. Sit down an' tell us

what's come over you this age. We sees you goin' up an' we sees you goin' down, an' Janie watches behind the curtain there as a cat on a watch for a mouse, but never a look nor a nod do you give. It's too bad, Mr. Herbert, an' so friendly as you've allus been 'ere.'

'We have been a good deal down at Sandgate, you know, and since my sister came home there have been more people at the house,' said Herbert in explanation. 'I'll just go out and meet Janie. I have a pretty good guess where she will be.'

'Oh, very well. If you've any little tiff to clear up, pr'aps you'd better do it outside,' said Mrs. Gregory, with a laugh. 'Off you go, and don't bide too long, an' I'll have a bit o' somethin' nice for supper against you come in. Janie's in the dumps about something, that I know. You'll not play with my gel, Mr. Herbert? She's all we have now, and we're very fond o' her.'

There was something touching in the motherly solicitude of Mrs. Gregory's look and tone.

'No, no, honour bright, Mrs. Gregory. I'm awfully fond of Janie, but you know I have to be cautious in feeling my way. If anything was to come out just now, there would be an awful row.'

'I'm sure I don't know why,' said Mrs. Gregory, bristling up. 'Our gel's as good a gel as ever lived; an' for looks, she'll come nigh your sister, anyway, Mr. Herbert, if you'll excuse me sayin' it. An' she wouldn't go to you empty-handed either; her father 'll see to that. Me an' Gregory may be common folks, riz from nothin', maybe, but we know what's what. We've allus expected Janie to make a good match, an' we've

edicated her for it. You can't deny, now that she plays the pianny somethin' splendid ?'

'She has a brilliant touch, certainly,' Herbert answered, unable to suppress a smile.

'An' I've never let her sile her hands, which are as white as your sister's is fit to be, Mr. Herbert,' continued Mrs. Gregory, with an earnestness which had something pathetic as well as comical in it. 'I've wanted to speak to you on the quiet for a long time, though Janie dared me to do it. She's a queerish girl, our Janie, Mr. Herbert, but as good as gold. You should see how she looks out at Miss Hazell when she goes past. Your sister looks a haughty young lady, Mr. Herbert. Do you think she'll look very much down on Janie ?'

'I'm sure she won't,' said Herbert emphatically, beginning to move towards the door. 'She's a real good girl, and would do anything for me.'

'Would she, now ? That's nice of her. Well, Mr. Herbert, I wish you'd settle it all soon ; becos it's horrid to keep hidin' things, an' folks is begun to know you come a lot here, and walk Janie out. If the old man should be stingy at first, I'd be willin' to pay a rent for a house—say one of them pretty cottages in Amanda Terrace. Nobody'd be any the wiser—not even Gregory ; for I've my own little pile in the bank, Mr. Herbert, and what would I do with it if not let it go to make my little gel happy ?'

'You are too good, Mrs. Gregory, but there 'll never be any need for that,' said Herbert Hazell quickly. 'I hope you won't say anything outside, because if it

comes to my father's ears it 'll get me into a frightful scrape. He's a very proud man, and I must come round him by degrees.'

'Proud, is he?' exclaimed Mrs. Gregory, with a mild scorn. 'Well, he needn't be, seein' his father was once a drayman at Hazell's, when it was Bentley's. Are you off? Don't take offence, Mr. Herbert—I don't mean no impertinence; an' don't tell Janie, for, mercy me! she'll be down on me, you've no idea.'

'No, no! Good-night, in case I don't look in again,' said Herbert hastily, as he quitted the room.

The woman made him feel ill, but the meshes were woven closely round him, and it would be difficult, if indeed possible, to free himself from the chain which had become intolerable.

CHAPTER VIII.

HEMMED IN.

HERBERT HAZELL went quickly down the garden path, through the wicket, which was open, and then paused for a moment to scan the moorland. The light from the full moon was beautifully clear, and he could see right across the expanse to the low range of hills which hemmed it in. There was not a solitary being to be seen on the common, but Herbert knew very well where he could find the person he sought. He struck across the corner of the moor to where a lonely patch of wood stood out against the sky—a little oasis where the cows sheltered from the heat in the summer-time, and the sheep from the snow in the winter. Many a tryst had Herbert Hazell kept with Miss Gregory at the knoll. As he approached it, he caught the gleam of something white among the trees, and then the movement of a figure which he instantly recognised. She saw him coming, but did not offer to come and meet him. She was standing against the gnarled trunk of an old oak tree, against which her white shawl showed in fine relief. She wore a dark

dress, and a little tweed cap, which, however, was not allowed to interfere with the elaborately curled fringe which adorned her brow. She had a pretty but rather pert face, a trifle sallow in colour, but relieved by a pair of large and brilliant black eyes. Miss Gregory was proud of her eyes, which were doubtless her chief charm. She was rather under the middle height, and inclined to plumpness. The smallness of her waist looked a little out of proportion with her square, well-built shoulders. Her face wore an expression of perfect indifference, but her eyes softened wonderfully as the young man approached. He had won her heart, and she loved him with a passionate love, but she was not a meek, gentle, pliable maiden by any means. She exacted more attention, sometimes, than Herbert Hazell was willing to give.

'Well, Janie, my love, how are you?' he said, and put his arm round her as if he had a perfect right to do so.

'I am very well, thank you,' she said coldly, and drew herself back a little.

She meant to punish him for his inattention. More than a fortnight had elapsed since his last visit to Mileswood.

'Hulloa; are you going to cut me?' he asked, with a kind of bantering fondness. 'Don't, Janie. I couldn't help it, and I'm awfully glad to see you. It seems an age since I saw your sweet face.'

Her mouth relaxed a little into a smile. His way was wonderfully winning. It was impossible to resist it.

'Oh yes; that's a fine story,' she said, with affected

unbelief. 'Why, you've passed the door twenty times without a look. I believe you're tired of me, Herbert.'

'Tired of you! No, I'm not. I only wish I had you all to myself,' he said rashly. 'I was in the house, and the old lady took me to task, Janie.'

'Ma's tongue's miles too long, said Janie quickly. 'What did she say?'

'Oh, she wanted me to fix the day. You'll have to keep her in order, Janie, till I get things gradually smoothed away.'

'They take a mighty lot of smoothing,' she said, with a tinge of bitter discontent in her voice. 'It's more than a year since we got engaged. I hate this secrecy, Herbert. How much longer has it to go on?'

'Well, I don't know. Things are all at sixes and sevens with me. The governor and I can't get on, and it would be no use to ask a rise, for I wouldn't get it. He'd tell me quick enough I don't work for what I get already. He's an awfully hard old beggar, Janie.'

'He doesn't look like it,' said Miss Gregory doubtfully. 'Is it true your brother's going to be married to Miss Meredith?'

'Yes, I believe it is. I think he's spoken to the governor about it; but Bob's very close about his own affairs. I daresay Mollie knows, and she'd tell me if I ask her.'

'It's nearly four months since your sister came home, and I've never seen her yet. Don't you remember you said you'd tell her all about it, and that she'd call when she came home.'

'Well, you see, I've never had a proper chance with

Molly, she's so much taken up with Mrs. Hazell; we're not the chums we were. I'm getting awfully sick of Medlington, Janie. Would you go away to a new country with me?'

'What would be the use of that?' asked Miss Gregory. She did not at all approve of such a proposal. She was ambitious and vain, and wanted to marry well in her own town, where those who had known her all her life would be witnesses to her ascent of the social ladder. What would be the use of making a fine marriage and then running off to a strange new country where nobody knew her? Such a prospect did not at all commend itself to Miles Gregory's aspiring daughter.

'I heard you were locked out last night,' she said presently.

'How did you hear that?'

'I was talking to Kitty the housemaid this afternoon —I was in the garden when she passed on some errands. Kitty keeps me posted up in all the doings of Hazelwood.'

'I wonder you would stoop to gossip with the servant girls, Janie,' he said angrily. 'How do you suppose you could ever keep up any position afterwards before them?'

'Oh, when I have the position to keep up, I'll sit on all these kind as easy as eat bacon,' said Miss Gregory flippantly. 'You leave me alone—I know what's what, and can do it too; but in the meantime I like to know what's going on. It's not a bad thing to have a friend at court.'

'I suppose you've told Kitty we're engaged, or something of that sort,' he said sarcastically.

'Perhaps I have and perhaps I haven't,' said Miss Gregory coolly; but he knew quite well she was too prudent for that. 'I say, Kitty says your sister's awfully nice, but I think she is very proud. I saw her go past this afternoon just after Kitty. She walks like a duchess. Do you think she and I would get on?'

'Oh, I daresay you would,' said Herbert absently, but in his own mind he had his doubts. Mary was very fastidious in some things, and Miss Gregory had not many fine feelings. She often said and did things which jarred on his sensibilities, though he cared for her after a fashion. It must be told that it was since Mary's homecoming that he had seen glaring faults in Jane Gregory. He had been madly in love with her a year ago, and had solemnly promised to make her his wife. How he regretted that promise we may see hereafter.

'There is a young lady coming from Germany to visit your sister, isn't there?' asked Miss Gregory presently.

'I believe there is,' he admitted. 'I think I must warn Mrs. Hazell about that girl's gossip. It'll make them careful what they say before her.'

'Oh no, you won't, because you'll have to tell how you knew she gossiped, dear,' said Miss Gregory. 'Don't go falling in love with this fine friend of your sister's.'

'Fine friend! I wish you saw her. She'll pass for my great-grandmother. Would you care, Janie? I don't

believe you would, though I were to fall in love with her.'

'Wouldn't I?'

An unbidden tear sprang to the girl's beautiful eye, and her mouth trembled. That softening touch made her face almost beautiful, and showed that under all the flippancy and banter there was a warm, pulsing woman's heart. Herbert Hazell saw the tear and the trembling lip, and in a moment had her to his heart. He was easily touched, and he could not forget that he had loved her passionately once. So the old vows were renewed with still greater fervour, and he bound about him yet more firmly his chain of bondage.

'I don't see how we're ever to get married, Jamie, unless we go off abroad together,' he said presently. 'I'm sure the governor would never give in, and to marry without his consent would mean an end put to the meagre allowance I have.'

'Why should he object?' asked Miss Gregory jealously. 'Pa's rich, and he makes his money in much the same way as Mr. Hazell. I don't see that much difference between making and selling.'

'I only wish he heard you, that's all.'

'It might do him good,' was Miss Gregory's smart retort. 'If you'd tell him more plain truths like that, you'd find yourself a trifle better off. You and your brother have always been too soft, just like big babies, everybody says.'

'You are very complimentary, Miss Gregory.'

'No, but I'm candid. I've heard pa say that times over. You'll get all your thanks in one day when the

wife gets it all. Come on in. It is chilly here now,' said Janie, beginning to move away from the knoll.

'I say, isn't it a queer thing for your brother to take up with the Merediths?' she said presently. 'They're such teetotallers. Guy Meredith's perfectly mad on the subject. I've heard that your sister preaches temperance at the Rows too, and that it doesn't go very well down.'

'You hear a great deal of nonsense, Janie,' said Herbert, a little crossly. He was tired of her already. In ordinary conversation she often wearied and disgusted him. She could only talk about her neighbours and the gossip of the town; her mind was frivolous and empty. At times the desire for better things, the yearning after a purer and nobler life, visited the young man, and in these moments Jane Gregory could not help; nay, she hindered him, although she was not conscious of it. She had blunted some of his finer sensibilities. One thing was certain, she didn't present to him a very exalted type of womanhood. It was not that she lacked education, or even a kind of outward polish which might have passed for good manners, but the tone of her mind was not high. She did not exact that most absolute respect which is every good woman's due, and which never fails her when she is true to her womanhood. Jane Gregory had shown herself too eager to be flattered and made love to by the brewer's son. I fear I must add that she had done more than half the wooing. But she had her good points, which were revealed when she had to meet a crisis in her life.

'I'll never go abroad of my own free will for you or

anybody else,' she said coolly. 'I mean to marry and settle here, where everybody knows me.'

'Then it must be the marrying and the settling you care about, and not me,' returned Herbert quickly. 'If you liked me, you'd go anywhere with me.'

'Maybe; but it would look like as if you were ashamed to live here with me,' she maintained. 'Why are you holding out your hand? Aren't you coming in to supper?'

'Not to-night, I think.'

'Oh, come in; don't be vexed with me. I've only been chaffing,' she said coaxingly. 'Pa'll be in at nine or half-past. He'll be sorry not to see you.'

Herbert hesitated a moment. There was not much at Hazelwood to tempt him back—only Mrs. Hazell and Mary reading quietly by the fire; besides, he wanted a private word with Miles Gregory about his watch. Janie saw his hesitation, and opened the door. Then they entered the house together. Mr. Gregory was in the sitting-room. It was his custom generally to come home to a hot supper about nine, and then go back to close up. But on Saturday nights he was obliged to content himself with a pie and a drink of ale at the tavern. The supper, something smelling savourily of onions, was on the table; but Mr. Gregory was busy with the local evening paper, which was published three afternoons in the week in Medlington. He looked up, gave young Hazell a familiar nod, and threw aside the paper.

'Been studyin' the stars, you an' Janie, eh?' he asked jocularly. 'She's uncommon smart at all kinds o'

sciences except cookin' an' dustin' up a house. I say sometimes to my missus that the darter may be ornamental, but she certainly can't be called useful. Have a seat and a bite along o' us.'

'No, thanks, it isn't long since I dined,' answered Herbert, but took the offered seat. He did not like the man, nor anything pertaining to him, and yet a curious attraction brought him night after night into his company, either in his own house or at the club-rooms.

'Feel rather seedy to-night, eh? You look it,' said Mr. Gregory, as the young man drew near the fire.

'Yes, I'm seedy; I'm not going near that beastly place again,' he said crossly. 'What about my watch, Gregory?'

'Ay, what about it?' asked Gregory dryly, as he fell to with knife and fork.

'I suppose I'll need to go and win it back. If I hadn't had drink I'd have left when my money was done.'

'Well, why *had* you drink? I didn't force it down your throat,' said the tavern-keeper offensively, as he helped himself to a long draught of strong ale.

'That's the way of you gents,' he continued, when Hazell made no reply. 'You make fools of yourselves, and then blame me. Mr. Atkins was at me in the same strain to-night. I gave it 'm hot and strong, I tell you. I don't want you to come if you don't want. You're free-will agents, I reckon, and the "Base-Ball" can get along without you. Do you want your watch back? Has the gov. been askin' after it?'

'No; but I want it, Gregory. It's not convenient to be without it.'

'It's a pretty toy. I was thinkin' on givin' it to Janie to wear as a kind of keepsake,' said Mr. Gregory, with a twinkle in his eye. 'You wouldn't object to that, I s'pose?'

Herbert made no reply. Gregory was particularly disagreeable. The young man almost hated him at that moment.

'Is it all fair and square between Janie and you?' he asked presently, leaning back in his chair, and wiping his mouth with his red handkerchief. 'The missus and me's been talkin' o' it, an' we've come to the conclusion that we're sick o' this shilly-shallyin'. When is it to be? That's what I want to be at!'

'I don't know. How can I marry when I have not as much as keep myself?' asked Herbert Hazell gloomily.

'There's plenty *in* the concern, as I know,' said Mr. Gregory quietly, 'an' I don't see why the old boy should be so selfish with it. You'll need to make him stump up, my man, or I'll maybe give him a word o' comfort myself one o' these days.'

'You'll find yourself in the wrong box, I doubt, Gregory,' said Herbert, with a short laugh. 'I was speaking to Janie to-night. If she'd go abroad with me, I'd go to-morrow.'

'I daresay; but I won't let her. No man shall sneak off with my gel, as if he were ashamed of her. She'll stand a look an' hold her own any day in Medlington. An' that's where it's to be! I give you three months to make up your mind, Mr. Hazell. You've dangled after her, an' keep others away, an' you're not goin' to shuffle out o' it now. I'll see to that.'

The young man's face flushed, but he had not a word to say.

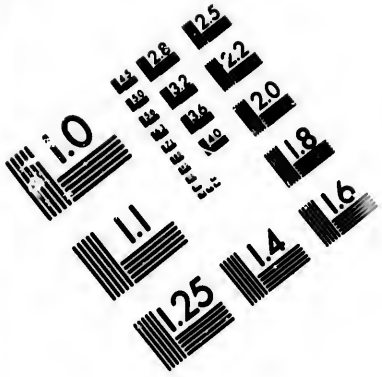
'Three months, my boy, and then I goes to the old boy an' tells him the whole story, an' lets him know how much he's got to stump up. I was lookin' the book this afternoon, an' it's a pretty round sum—nearer two hundred than one—you owe me. But if you're open and square with my gel, an' tell your father about her, and bring your women-folks to call on mine, an' hev the marriage in St. Nicholas' afore six months, I'll never say a word. That little sum 'll be wiped out—it'll be a kind o' marriage gift, as it were. So there's my terms—an' very generous an' kind I'm sure they are; an' to show I'm in earnest, there's your watch back as a pledge.'

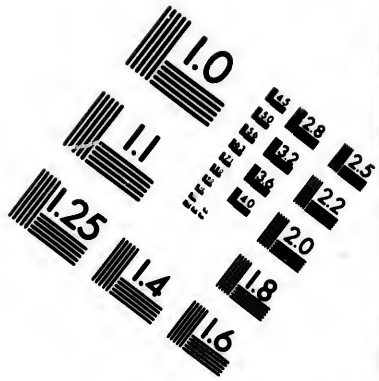
Herbert took the watch, which Mr. Gregory produced from his watch-pocket, and hastily slipped it into his own. At that moment the ladies entered the room, and the private conversation was at an end.

CHAPTER IX.

MADELINE RAYNE.

MARY HAZELL was walking impatiently up and down the platform at Medlington Railway station awaiting the London train. A boy was holding her ponies in the station enclosure, Mary being too excited to sit still in the phaeton. She was waiting for Madeline Rayne. It was a still, sere October day. The sky was grey, but not gloomy, nay, there was even a glimmer of soft brightness on the horizon, although the sun had been veiled all day. A soft rain had fallen in the night, and the roads were muddy, and the country lanes strewn thick with autumn leaves. The trees, half-stripped, stood out solemn sentinels against the quiet sky, there was a hush in the moist, mild air, as if nature were resting a brief space before she should be torn with the winter conflict. In spite of her gladness, Mary was conscious of a curious feeling of depression, almost of sadness. Perhaps the state of affairs at home conduced to such a state of mind. Mrs. Hazell had caught a chill at an evening party, and had been for some days





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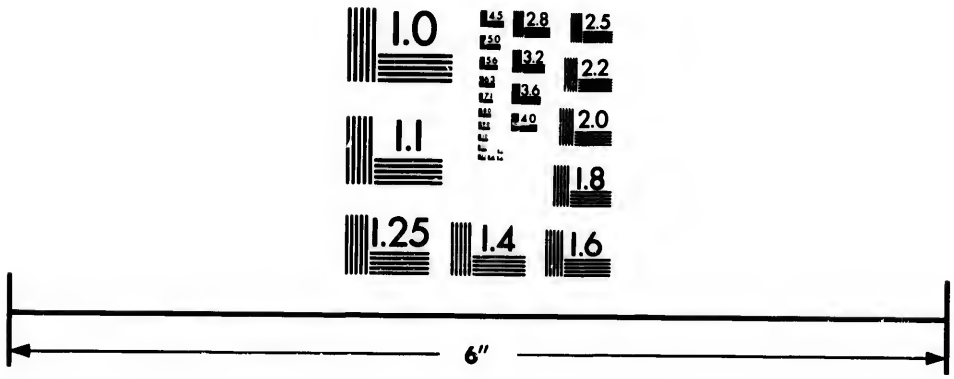

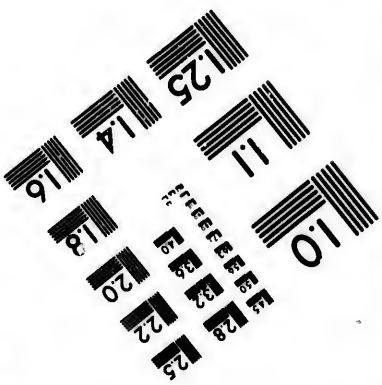

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confined entirely to her room. Mr. Hazell was in a chronic state of ill-humour. He had decided to be hugely displeased about Robert's wooing of Lucy Meredith, and had practically withheld his consent. At least he had not paid the slightest attention to Robert's pointedly expressed expectation that in the event of his marriage a fitting income would be provided. The old man forgot apparently that his lads had grown to be men, and he resented any action taken by them without consulting him. Then he did not like the Merediths, chiefly because of their active exertions in the temperance cause in Medlington. These water-drinkers, as he contemptuously called them, were not at all to his mind, and he often wondered that Guy Meredith got any business in the town. But, in spite of his eccentricities in the way of temperance advocacy and earnest gospel work, Guy Meredith's business did increase. He was a Christian lawyer, and was trusted accordingly.

In consequence of his father's open displeasure, Robert Hazell was a trifle depressed. There was something else, however, weighing more heavily on his mind. He could not get rid of the conviction that the business in which his father had made his money, and to which he had been trained, was not one whose operations could be useful or helpful to any. There was a great deal of drunkenness in Medlington, and too much tippling constantly among the men at the brewery. He had screened several, whose misdemeanours, had they been known to the old master, would have been rewarded with instant dismissal. Mr. Hazell was curiously peremptory in his punishment of drunkenness. On the

bench he was known as 'the hard justice,' and the Monday morning delinquents at the Police Court knew what to expect when their fate rested with him. He fined heavily and gave the longest imprisonments in his power to the drunks and disorderlies who were locked up from Saturday night. Robert Hazell had seen the practical wrecking of more than one steady and fine character among the men, and more than once he had remonstrated with his father about the taproom at the brewery, urging him to shut it up. But Mr. Hazell had pooh-poohed his objections, and had instanced the three large firms who had acted on the same principle. Mr. Hazell prided himself upon a certain open-handed, generous way with his employees; he was indeed a man of many sides, and full of strange contradictions.

Herbert was not behaving any better. Night after night he was out past the hours, morning after morning he was late at the breakfast-table; and the frown was seldom absent from his father's brow. Altogether, these thoughts were rather troubling Mary Hazell. Her ambitious hopes of doing good and living a useful and noble life seemed to be nipped in the bud. So she thought, not knowing that but for her the family life at Hazelwood would have been a miserable thing. She was sweet and wholesome and earnest-hearted, the only sunshine, as Robert put it, in the house.

The train was a little late, and the ponies were very restive when it came puffing into the station. Mary eagerly scanned the carriage windows, and at length caught sight of the face she loved looking out of a third-class compartment. She was astonished at first, having

forgotten that Madeline Rayne was a young woman of extremely limited means.

'Oh, Lena Rayne! I never, never was so glad to see any one as I am to see you at this moment, my blessed girl!'

Such was Mary's greeting, which fell warm and sweet on the ears and heart of Madeline Rayne. She was a desolate woman, without kith or kin in the world, and she loved Mary Hazell with a great love. Her face was transfigured by it, as she stood a moment in silence, her large, serious eyes suffused with tears.

'Just the same,' she whispered under her breath, after that one yearning, lingering look.

'Of course. What did you expect?' said Mary gaily; for a sense of rest and freedom from care stole upon her in the presence of her friend. 'Come. I know my animals will be frightening Jimmy Tompkins out of his wits. Have you any luggage?'

'A little,' said Madeline, with a smile. 'I am here with everything I have in the world—a waif and a stray, Mary, but for you.'

'I'm glad you had the grace to add that,' said Mary grimly. 'Here, Tompkins,' she added to a porter passing at the moment, 'send up my friend's luggage to Hazelwood—at once, please, will you? We can't take it in the phaeton.'

'Very well, Miss Hazell; the van's just ready,' said the man, with a touch to his cap. Every one served Miss Hazell readily. Her smile was worth a great deal to some in Medlington.

'Are you ready now, Lena? Nothing left in the

carriage? Come, then, and let me look at you. I am not quite satisfied about you. What is the meaning of all this turn-up? I thought you were a fixture at Madame's. Ah! here's poor little Jimmy, nearly shaken to pieces with these tossing heads. Aren't they pretty creatures, Lena? They are mamma's and mine; but mamma never drives them.'

'Yes, they are pretty. So this is Medlington, Mary?'

'It will be presently. Here, Jimmy, my boy, spend it judiciously,' said Miss Hazell, with a laugh, as she gave the boy a silver coin. 'Come now, my beauties, off you go!'

Off they went then at a brisk trot, while Mary turned once more to look at her friend.

'You look pale, and old, and generally depressed, Lena. Tell me about it all, in case we don't have a chance before bed-time at least.'

'There is not much to tell, Mary,' said Madeline Rayne, and a slow colour rose in her cheek. 'Paul Gebhardt wanted to marry me, and Madame his mother naturally felt aggrieved. She was not kind to me, Mary. Was I not blameless where Paul Gebhardt was concerned?'

'Did the old creature hint that you encouraged him? Don't you remember the caricatures you used to make of him in his velvet coat and long hair? So you did not aspire to be a poet's wife, Lena?'

'No, I did not. That is a pretty view, Mary.'

They were descending the slope from the station, and were in full view of the valley where the town stood on

the banks of the river, which wound, not ungracefully, for many miles.

'Yes; it is rather pretty. The Med looks well from a distance, but it is frightfully unsanitary. It is so polluted with chemicals from the works that no living thing is found in it. That is the brewery, Lena, where the big chimney stalks and the two little ones stand in a line.'

'It is an immense place, surely, like a colony of houses?'

'Yes; it is big enough, certainly,' said Mary, with a sigh.

'And where is Hazelwood?'

'Oh, a long way over the bridge and up the river bank, and away from the smoke and the smells. Can you see the row of brick houses now, beyond the brewery wall? That is my mission field.'

'Indeed! The houses lie very low, do they not?'

'Yes; far too low. Medlington is *not* pretty, Lena, nor very salubrious, but Hazelwood is lovely, and there is a moor not far from us which you and I will explore thoroughly. I believe there are some rare flora among the little hillocks. We are going to have a splendid time, now you have come.'

'Are we?'

A slight, sad smile touched for a moment the lips of Madeline Rayne.

'Yes, of course we are. The boys are quite excited over your coming. Not many young ladies visit us. I am afraid I am not a very lovable person, Lena; I have so few girl friends.'

'Is your mamma keeping better?'

'No. Mamma is not strong, and papa is often cross, and Robert melancholy, and Herbert naughty. As for me, I am constantly in hot water about something. Do you enjoy the prospect of dwelling indefinitely in such a charming household?'

'I shall reserve my opinion, Mary,' was Madeline Rayne's answer. 'I am very sorry to hear about your brother Herbert.'

'Oh yes; it is dreadful. He is never in the house, Lena. Night after night he is away at a horrid gambling club, and our maid told me one day that he visits constantly at the house of the man who keeps it. I shall show you the house; we pass it presently. But I don't believe that. You must take him in hand, Lena. Then Robert, you know, wants to marry Lucy Meredith,—a dear girl,—but papa doesn't like them because they are such temperance people. I don't think he is quite just to Robert, and I see he feels it a good deal. Oh dear, oh dear! I do believe these old days at Bonn were the very happiest any girl could have. It is such a grieving thing to be grown up, and to want to do a great many things one can't get doing. May I tell you, Lena? As long as the brewery flourishes, I may stop my mission work. I see that very plainly, and it is a great grief to me.'

'We shall talk all this over by and by, Mary,' said Madeline Rayne soberly. 'You are sure Mr. and Mrs. Hazell will be glad to see me?'

'Yes. I am an honest person, Lena. I wouldn't bring you here under false pretences. You *will* be

welcomed, I assure you. See, Lena, there is Mileswood, just over the bridge, see,—where they say Herbert spends his evenings.'

'I see a girl's face at the window; is she the attraction?'

'Oh no! I believe there is a daughter, but of course Herbert would never think of her. He doesn't go in for that kind of folly, Lena. There is a good deal of private gambling in that house, I believe.'

As the phaeton swept past the gate of Mileswood, Lena Rayne took a long look at the house, and at the face at the window. She felt curiously interested in the latter, she could not tell why.

'The young lady is looking very curiously at you, Mary.'

'Oh, I daresay. She is always at the window watching me. She irritates me, I don't know why. The poor mother must do all the work, for they keep no servant, and that girl is always at the window dressed up with a curled fringe.'

'Mary, you are very bitter,' said Madeline, with a smile of amusement.

Mary coloured a little.

'I feel that I am saying horrid things. I don't know what makes me do it. I am sadly in need of you to put me right, Lena. Well, here are our gates. Isn't it a pretty avenue? I love those fine old trees. If only you had been a fortnight earlier you would have seen them in their glory.'

'Yes, they are fine old trees. You have a beautiful home, Mary.'

'Yes; and yet we seem to be a miserable, discontented kind of family,' said Mary, and she dashed away a sudden tear.

There was no more said until the phaeton drew up at the handsome doorway, then Mary turned to her friend, and laid an affectionate hand on her shoulder.

'You are welcome to Hazelwood, dear Lena,' she said; then they alighted, and ran up the steps to the house.

'Has the luggage come, Kitty?' Miss Hazell asked, as the maid came forward to take the wraps.

'Yes, Miss Mary; it was taken up to the blue room.'

'Ah, that is all right. There is a fire, I hope, in Miss Rayne's dressing-room.'

'Yes, Miss Mary. Mrs. Hazell gave the order in the morning.'

'Come then, Lena. Is papa home, Kitty?'

'Yes, Miss Mary, the gentlemen are all home.'

At that moment the library door opened and Mr. Hazell appeared.

'Oh, papa, here is Lena,' Mary said; and Mr. Hazell came forward with a cordial smile.

'How do you do, Miss Rayne? I am glad to see you. This foolish girl of mine will surely be satisfied now,' he said kindly, as he shook hands with the shy, insignificant-looking stranger.

'Thank you, Mr. Hazell,' Madeline Rayne answered, feeling as if an ordeal were over.

'After you have taken Miss Rayne to her room, come to the library a moment, Mary, before you dress,' Mr. Hazell said.

Mary nodded, and, taking her friend by the arm, led her up-stairs.

'Just let us peep in on mamma. I think she will be down in the drawing-room to-night for a little, but not at dinner. After you have seen her, you'll surely feel at ease. I'm sure there is nothing very terrible about papa, is there?'

Madeline Rayne smiled. She was certainly feeling more at ease. Mrs. Hazell's rooms adjoined the drawing-room. In answer to Mary's light tap her sweet voice bade them come in.

She was dressed in a soft grey shining silk, with a profusion of lace at the neck, which somehow gave her a singularly frail look. But there was no mistaking the kindness and sincerity of her welcome.

'Come here, my dear, and let me kiss you. You have come a long way to see us. I hope you will like us, and feel at home at Hazelwood.'

'I am sure I shall, thank you.' Madeline Rayne's eyes were full of tears as she responded to these kind words.

'You have not many minutes to dress—it is twenty minutes past five already,' Mrs. Hazell said. 'Mary, I think Lena's r oms will be comfortable. You will look after her, I know. Without Mary, Miss Rayne, this house would be in a sad way.'

Mary laughed, and danced out of the room. The evening had opened pleasantly. She felt in the best of spirits. She took her friend to her rooms, and then ran down to the library to see what her father wanted with her. Mr. Hazell did not dress for home dinner as a

'You are not going to sit down to dinner in that frock, are you?'—*Page* 101.

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rule. He wore, however, a black velvet coat, which was very becoming. He was pretty vain of his handsome figure and face still. Neither of his sons could compare with him.

'Well, your friend must be better than she is bonnie, Mary,' he said, with a slight laugh. 'But, if you are pleased, we must not say a word. What are you going to put on to-night?'

'How do you mean, papa?' asked Mary in some bewilderment. It was so unusual in her father to take any interest in her attire.

'You are not going to sit down to dinner in that frock, are you?'

'Well, no, as Lena is here, though I have often worn it at dinner here, and you never noticed that I had it on.'

'Oh, well, put on something finer. I asked Ford to drop in and dine this evening, and we must not make him feel as if we had no respect for his company because he is my servant.'

'Ford!'

Mary was mystified for a moment. She had only once seen the man, and could not recollect him.

'Oh, Mr. Ford, your manager, papa. Asked him to dine! Why?'

'I can ask him if I like, I suppose,' said Mr. Hazell, a trifle irritably. 'He is a fine fellow, invaluable to me, and quite a gentleman. I beg you will not turn up your nose at him.'

'I should never be rude to any guest at my father's table, papa,' Mary said quickly, and her

colour rose. She could not understand her father's strange irritability.

'Well, well, see that you are kind to him, that's all. We ought to be, because he has no friends here, and it is to his credit that he is so steady. I only wish Herbert would take example by him.'

'Very well, papa. May I go now? I have only about ten minutes to change my dress.'

'Yes, you may go.'

Mary went up-stairs in a very perplexed state of mind.

CHAPTER X.

CHUMS.

MR. FORD was not very punctual. They had all been waiting in the drawing-room for about ten minutes, when he was announced. He was in full evening dress, very new and very shiny, but did not look quite at ease in his attire. Robert and Mary received him kindly, Herbert coolly, with rather an off-hand nod. He did not approve of meeting Mr. Ford in his father's drawing-room an invited guest.

Mr. Hazell, of course, took down Miss Rayne, Mr. Ford the daughter of the house, the two young men following behind. Herbert made several grimaces behind Mr. Ford's back. Mary felt, though she could not see them, and shook with inward laughter. The effort to keep her face straight gave it a severe and even stern look rather discouraging to Mr. Ford. Of course he could not see her dancing eyes, as she kept her lashes down.

At the table Lena sat between Mr. Hazell and Robert. The latter had admired Miss Rayne the moment his eyes

fell upon her. When she spoke her face lighted up and changed entirely. Her attire was quiet and plain, but it seemed to suit her, and her every movement was full of grace.

Mary tried honestly to be agreeable to Mr. Ford, but her consciousness of his undisguised admiration for herself made her most uncomfortable. Her face was unnaturally flushed all the time the dinner lasted. She certainly looked lovely. Her dress was grey too, a soft shimmering material open at the neck, and revealing the fine contour of her full white throat. Mr. Ford looked at her a great deal, and addressed all his remarks to her. He was very talkative, and not in the least abashed. Herbert appeared to be in private convulsions. Mary saw his lips twitching more than once, and her own composure was put to a severe strain. Several times Mr. Hazell frowned at his younger son, and his polite attentions to his manager were very marked.

Mary, however, was glad when dessert was over, and she could rise.

Lena and she went up to the drawing-room together with their arms about each other's waists, an old schoolgirl fashion which neither had outgrown.

'It is so lovely to have you here,' said Mary, with unmistakable satisfaction. 'They all like you. Isn't Robert good and nice, and poor Bertie, too, if only he were a better boy.'

'I like both your brothers, Mary; but who is Mr. Ford?'

Mary's face flushed.

'The manager at the brewery, Lena. He has never been here before. An insufferable man! I wonder why papa asked him.'

Mrs. Hazell had not yet entered the drawing-room. The lamps were not lighted, but a splendid fire made a cheerful ruddy glow all over the pretty room. The girls drew near it, and sat down together on the lounge, which had been placed in readiness for Mrs. Hazell. Just at that moment there was a quick step on the stair, and Herbert came into the room.

'Interrupting the confidential, eh?' he said pleasantly. 'Can't help it, Molly. If I'd stayed a moment longer I'd have done something dreadful. To see that little ass sipping champagne and holding forth is more than I'm able for. It doesn't do to introduce one's work-people into one's house in spite of the levelling doctrine of the Socialists, eh, Miss Rayne?'

'Mr. Ford seems to be very well informed,' Lena said, looking up at the handsome, boyish face with a smile. There was something very winning in that sudden smile, it seemed to transform her whole face.

'Mr. Ford is a well-informed but cheeky little ass,' was the disrespectful rejoinder. 'I beg your pardon, Miss Rayne, but you know we know you so jolly well we can't stand on p's and q's, and I don't believe you'd like it—there!'

'No, she wouldn't,' laughed Mary. 'Well, I suppose I may leave you two without fear that you will fall out until I see whether mamma has had her dinner.'

So saying, she left the room, and the two were alone.

'You must be frightfully tired, Miss Rayne. How far have you travelled to-day?'

'Only from Harwich. The boat got in this morning. We had a stormy passage; it blew a gale in the night; but I am not very tired.'

'I hope you'll stay a jolly long time then, though we aren't a very lively household. Molly, of course, is A1, but the rest of us don't amount to much, especially me.'

'What is especially disagreeable about you?'

'I'm a weed, if you know the meaning of that light and elegant phrase. I am of no use to anybody under the sun.'

'And whose blame is that?'

'Oh, mine, of course. I say, Miss Rayne, aren't you awfully good and religious? When you have been here about a week you won't speak to me. I quite expect it.'

'Tell me why.'

'Oh, I don't behave myself. I stay out nights, and play billiards and baccarat. I know it's wicked, and that I'm a fool. The money I've lost at that Gregory's, Miss Rayne, makes me pale with unavailing regret, as the song says. I only wish I had the third of it now.'

Madeline Rayne leaned back in her chair, and lightly folded her hands in her lap. They were beautiful hands, soft, white, and gentle, and they had the touch of a ministering angel. There was no smile on her face when she looked at Herbert Hazell.

'I gather from the way you speak that you are rather proud of your reputation as a weed. Shall we change the subject?'

Herbert Hazell felt her sarcasm, and yet it attracted him. No young lady had ever spoken to him in that way. He was accustomed to be flattered and made-of by the few he knew.

'By Jove, you can hit a fellow hard, Miss Rayne!' he said, with a slight flush. 'Did I appear to brag? I didn't mean to. Look here, do you know I'm sick of everything!'

He threw himself into a chair, but immediately leaned forward and fixed his eyes full on the grave, serious face of the woman before him. He did not know how it was, but he felt a curious nearness to her, a dependence upon her, which made him marvel. If any woman could help him in the better way it would be Madeline Rayne. Mary was anxious and willing, but too pliable; the least sign of penitence caused her sternness to melt away in a moment. But Madeline Rayne was made of different stuff.

'Tell me what you mean?' she said quietly. She felt intensely interested in this young man, and did not even feel astonished at the readiness with which he confided in her.

'Well, to begin with, I'm going to tell you everything, Miss Rayne, though, of course, Molly has told you a lot. Girls always do tell each other everything, don't they? I'm miserable at the brewery. The governor and I don't agree, and I hate the work. I'm just a common clerk, and Bob is not much better, though he doesn't sit on a stool. I'll tell you what it is, Miss Rayne, it's Ford that's the boss of the concern, and his presence here to-night is evidence of the fact.'

Madeline Rayne was silent. She had certainly not been favourably impressed with Michael Ford, but she did not care to say so.

'If a fellow felt himself getting on, or had any interest in his business,' continued Herbert, still bitterly, 'he wouldn't care to go out seeking enjoyment at nights. But it makes a fellow forget. I really don't know what the governor's thinking of. It's my opinion,' he added, lowering his voice, 'that Ford's got him under his thumb.'

Madeline Rayne sat up, and lifted her hand with a slightly deprecating gesture.

'You are forgetting, I think, how utter a stranger I am to you. Perhaps it is not right that I should hear all this.'

'Oh, bother! it's quite right. You're Molly's chum, and I know jolly well you know when to hold your tongue. Besides, do you think all Medlington doesn't know how the land lies? Just you watch Bob, how worried he looks. There'll be a regular rumpus soon, you'll see. Bob doesn't rouse easily, but he's just about as sick of Ford as I am.'

'But, to go back to where we were,' said Lena gently. 'Allowing that you have a good deal to try you, is it a manly thing to allow these worries to master you? Don't you think you could keep your self-respect through them all? Were I you, I would find a joy in surmounting all these difficulties nobly. Duty, well done, always brings its reward.'

'I know you are right,' said Herbert, humbly as a rebuked schoolboy. 'Sometimes I do try jolly hard to improve, but things are too many for me.'

'Don't say so. A temptation once overcome can never have the same influences again,' said Lena, with earnest, shining eyes. 'Have you never proved that?'

'Oh, well, I don't know. You see I'm not good at withstanding temptations. But I'd like to try. I'd like to keep a straight course, just to watch that Ford, and get the better of him. I know he's plotting mischief, and he has too much influence with the governor. He'll do for Ford in a moment what he won't listen to from Bob or me. It is not fair to a man's sons, is it, now?'

'But, leaving Mr. Ford out of the question entirely, won't you keep the straight course for your own sake, and for the sake of those who love you? I should like you to be a man for your own sake.'

'Would you care?'

A curious, even half-wistful look was in the lad's eyes as he asked the question. The colour rose slightly in the cheek of Madeline Rayne.

'Yes, of course I should care. If I am Mary's "chum," I suppose I may be yours too?'

'All right; we're chums. Shake hands upon it. I'm jolly glad you've come,' said Herbert, quite joyously. Then they shook hands, and Mary, entering at the moment, caught them in the act.

'We've been falling out, and agreeing again,' said Herbert, with a laugh, but Mary guessed that something serious underlay his banter.

Madeline rose to make way for Mrs. Hazell, who had followed Mary into the room. The servant entered

to light the lamps; the steps of the gentlemen on the stairs announced that their talk over the walnuts and the wine was over.

'Now, you young ladies must entertain us with music and song,' said Mr. Hazell jocularly, as he threw himself into a chair. His voice was a little thick, his eyes rather hazy—evidently he had imbibed too freely at the table.

Mary, perhaps to escape from the persistent gaze of Mr. Ford, went at once to the piano, and began to sing. She had a clear, well-trained voice, and sang without affectation or effort. Mr. Ford stood by the side of the piano looking down at her, but Mary appeared to be entirely engrossed by her music. In reality she was highly indignant.

'May I thank you for a rare treat, Miss Hazell?' he said impressively when her song ended.

'Oh, it is no treat,' she answered flippantly, and turned quickly aside. 'Mr. Ford, we must have a song from you. I hear you are quite a star.'

'I sing a little for my own amusement,' said Mr. Ford modestly. 'If I find something here, will you honour me by playing my accompaniment?'

'Oh, I am not a good musician. Miss Rayne will help you. Won't you, Lena?'

'Certainly.'

Madeline Rayne, understanding the appeal, came at once to the rescue. Mr. Ford endeavoured to hide his chagrin, and sang 'The Anchor's Weighed' with considerable effect. Then Madeline, remaining at the piano, began to play with her own exquisite touch some

of the 'Songs without Words,' the very spirit of which she had caught on the banks of the enchanted Rhine. Mary sat close by Mrs. Hazell's couch, both ladies enjoying the beautiful melody. Mr. Hazell fell asleep. Mr. Ford fidgeted a little in his seat, not appreciating the music, but finding his efforts at conversation not encouraged. Herbert seemed entranced, and sat with his eyes fixed on the player's face. She had forgotten them all; her face wore a dreamy, far-off expression, and her eyes seemed over-running with tears. Robert walked slowly to and fro the drawing-room, with his eyes fixed on the floor. He was restless and ill at ease, being, indeed, careful and troubled about many things.

'I am afraid I have forgotten myself,' Lena said, presently jumping up. 'It is so long since my fingers touched such keys as these. Do you remember our dilapidated pianos at Bonn, Mary?'

'Don't I! Well, what are we to do now? Papa is sound asleep. Shall we have a hand at whist? You are not going out, Robert?'

'Yes, dear, I promised to be at Clieveden to-night. Mr. Ford will excuse me, as I did not know he was to be here to-night. Miss Rayne, I suppose, is one of the family, and needs no apology.' He smiled as he turned to Madeline, who looked pleased at his words.

'It is kind of you to say so. I am indeed at home,' she said, and, passing to Mrs. Hazell's couch, sat down there with a look of quiet content. They had indeed all given her the truest of welcomes to Hazelwood.

Robert left almost immediately, and without awaking

his father, then the quartette sat down to play whist. Herbert did not care particularly for the game, but with Madeline Rayne opposite him it was a very different matter. There was somebody waiting at the grove for him at that moment, but for the first time in their acquaintance Jane Gregory waited in vain.

'Well, what do you think of us all, Lena?' asked Mary, when the two girls were together in Lena's dressing-room that night.

'What can I say but that I like you all very much,' said Madeline, with a laugh. 'You ask very direct questions, Mary.'

'Oh, so do you, my girl,' said Mary quickly. 'If I have the habit of calling a spade a spade, I have learned it from you. Now, I want to know what you and Bert were talking about just after dinner. Do you know this is the first evening he has spent at home for weeks. And he was perfectly amazed when eleven o'clock struck. If you work a reformation in that boy, Lena Rayne, you shall be my patron saint for evermore.'

'He is only easily led, Mary; there is no evil in him. And he loves music. I can never think that one with a soul for music can sink very low. Of the two I am not sure that I don't like Herbert best.'

The time came, and that very soon, when Madeline Rayne could not deliver such a candid opinion on the brothers.

'Oh, so do I. Bertie is so funny and winning. Robert, of course, is good and steady, and just the man to help in any trouble. But he is a little distant—even Lucy, who is to be his wife, says that. Lena, I am

'Well, what do you think of us all, Lena?' asked Mary.—*Page* 112.

afraid I shall have some trouble with that Ford, as Bert calls him.'

'I am afraid of it. He certainly admires you very much.'

'Horrid little man! He is so self-satisfied and complacent. I should like to behave dreadfully to him if I dared. Lena, it is not nice to be grown up. Do you think it is?'

'Yes, I do. I am very happy to-night, Mary; happier than ever I thought I should be again.'

'Then you love us? You shall never leave us again, my Lena. You have a work here to do.'

It was a word spoken in jest, but it became earnest in days to come.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE LIBRARY.

MR. HAZELL was sitting in the library dozing over his evening paper. The sound of the music from the drawing-room, perhaps, had a soothing effect on him, and yet his face was very flushed, and his breathing heavier than it need have been. Dinner was not long over, the ladies were up-stairs. The touch on the piano was Madeline's touch; even Mary could not play the German 'Lieder' so exquisitely. Three weeks had passed since Madeline Rayne had come to Hazelwood, weeks fraught with grave issues. She had found a place in Hazelwood, and had ceased to talk of leaving. Was she happy? Ah, we shall see.

Shortly after the music ceased, the library door opened to admit Robert Hazell. He had his ulster on, and his hat and stick in his hand. These he laid on the table, after he had closed the door. His face was grave, and there was a determined curve about his mouth. He had come to talk over a serious matter with his father.

'Ah, well, is it you, Robert?' said Mr. Hazell,

rousing himself with an evident effort. 'Going out, are you, eh?'

'Yes, I am going over to Clieveden, father,' Robert answered quietly. 'I wanted to have a little talk with you to-night before I go, if you can spare the time.'

'Eh, well, what about? Not business, I hope? Business in business limits—that's my motto. What is it?'

'It is about the matter I talked to you some time ago, father—my settlement in life.'

'Your marriage with the Meredith girl?' said Mr. Hazell, with a frown; 'I thought you had given over that folly.'

'I told you, I think, that Miss Meredith had promised to become my wife,' said Robert, slightly emphasizing the name. 'I also asked you to consider the question of a suitable income. I am anxious to marry in spring.'

'Oh, you are, are you?' Mr. Hazell was now thoroughly aroused. 'And what would you consider a suitable income, eh?'

'Four or five hundred a year would satisfy me in the meantime,' said Robert quietly. 'The Priory House is to let at present, and I believe it can be got for fifty pounds. But I wanted to come to a clear understanding with you before I made any inquiry after it.'

'Oh, indeed!'

Mr. Hazell calmly folded out the other side of his paper, and began to read. Robert bit his lip. His

father tried him not a little. He knew that he was making a very reasonable request, and he felt hurt at his reception—hurt, but not greatly surprised.

'You will remember that you promised to think over it? It is two months since I spoke of it to you before. I can't wait any longer, father.'

'Four or five hundred a year—rather sweet,' repeated Mr. Hazell. 'The firm can hardly support two expensive establishments.'

'I am sorry to contradict you, father, but I think differently,' said Robert respectfully but firmly. 'And mine will not be an expensive establishment. My tastes are quiet, and my wife's will be similar. I must press for satisfaction on the point of income, because I think it is my right.'

'So you think your valuable services demand handsome recognition,' said Mr. Hazell, with a slight sneer. 'The rising generation have very exalted ideas. Do you know that Ford is worth two of you, and that he thinks himself very well paid at two hundred and fifty?'

Robert's colour rose. He was angry, but he strove to hide it. His father was in one of his frequent irritable moods, and he had no wish to make an open rupture.

'You cannot regard a servant and a son in quite the same light, father; so we will leave Ford out of the question. If I am of no use at the brewery, perhaps I had better leave.'

'That would teach you humility, sir. A few hard knocks out in the world would make you

appreciate the advantages you have had,' said Mr. Hazell grimly.

'These advantages may be questioned, sir,' said Robert. 'You gave us a fair education, and then put us where we are without consulting us. We have had no opportunity to better our condition. I am bound to say that had I been with any other firm I should not be serving for a hundred pounds a year at nine-and-twenty.'

Mr. Hazell's eyes flashed. Perhaps the truth of his son's words went home.

'Well, upon my word, you are confoundedly impudent. That's what a man gets from his family after he has toiled to give them ease and independence.'

'I don't wish to be impudent. I am only speaking the truth, and you know it, father,' said Robert a trifle sadly. 'Am I to have no satisfaction then? In justice to my future wife and myself, I must ask you for a plain answer, sir.'

'I don't approve of the girl at all. Do you know, it is an insult to me for you to take up with these people, who are constantly crying down my trade. Would the food Mrs. Robert Hazell might eat not choke her, I wonder, seeing it would be paid for with the price of ale? Ask her that, with my compliments. Ask her, too, if she thinks it consistent to jump at an offer of marriage from a brewer's son. Ugh! these teetotallers make me sick.'

Robert took up his hat and stick. He saw no prospect of being able to obtain any satisfaction from his father.

'Are you going off, then? Well, I'm not going to be forced into giving away the half of my substance, like the prodigal's father. I'll think over it, but I'll never consent to you renting a mansion like the Priory. You must begin small. If Miss Lucy Meredith wants you, and not your means, she'll be glad enough to wait a while, and mount the ladder with you. It doesn't do to give young people too much liberty.'

Robert Hazell hastily left the room. It must be told that he shut the door with no gentle hand. He was very angry, but there is a righteous anger which is perfectly justifiable. He knew that he was very badly and unjustly treated. The profits accruing from the brewery could be counted by thousands, although it suited Mr. Hazell at times to plead poverty. Robert at once left the house. He had three good miles to walk to Clieveden, but he was glad of it. The fine night air would cool his hot head, and his thoughts would have taken shape again by the time he saw Lucy.

Mr. Hazell folded up his paper, and, rising, opened a locked door below the book-shelves, where he kept a little store. Perhaps he required a good stiff glass of brandy to restore his nerves after his interview with his son. Mrs. Hazell did not know what was kept in the library cabinets, the keys of which Mr. Hazell carried constantly with him. She was neither curious nor suspicious, or she must sometimes have had her doubts.

The brewer had composed himself at the fireside again, when he heard the hall door bell ring, and presently Mr. Ford was shown in. Since the night of the dinner Michael Ford had dropped in several times

familiarly at Hazelwood, greatly to the disgust of the young men. As for Mary, her indignation knew no bounds, and she scarcely spoke to him.

But the master of Hazelwood himself was invariably most affable and attentive to his manager, who could thus afford to ignore the coldness of the other inmates of the house.

'Hulloa, Ford! good evening. Glad to see you; the very man I've been thinking of. Draw in your chair. Coldish night, surely?'

'Yes, there is a touch of frost; winter is upon us, sir,' said Michael Ford, as he rubbed his hands before the cheerful fire.

'Frost, eh? early, is it not? But no; this is the 8th of November, I do declare. Have anything?'

'Not just now, thank you, sir,' returned Mr. Ford. He hoped to be asked to join the circle in the drawing-room, and he had noticed that Miss Hazell never by any chance touched stimulants. Mr. Ford liked a sip of brandy or wine as well as any man, but he wished to commend himself to Mary Hazell.

'All well to-night, I hope, sir. The ladies well?'

'Oh yes, all well. Mrs. Hazell is really greatly improved. She is enjoying Miss Rayne's visit. She is a fine girl that, Ford.'

'Yes, Miss Rayne is certainly very clever,' said Mr. Ford, with a touch of uneasiness. He was mortally afraid of Madeline Rayne, and never felt at ease under the gaze of these clear, calm, womanly eyes. He felt as if she could read his inmost being, and knew every weakness and failing of his mean little soul.

'A fine girl, and good looking too,' pursued Mr. Hazell volubly, being influenced by his latest taste of spirits. 'I'll tell you what, Ford, she'd make you a splendid wife. With her you'd take quite a position in Medlington. She's a thorough lady, and would make people respect her whether they will or no. She's the very wife for an ambitious young fellow like you.'

Mr. Ford grew rather pale, and gave a nervous laugh.

'You are very kind, sir, and I'm much obliged, but I couldn't fancy her.'

'It would be a fine thing for her too. She's friendless and penniless, but she's such a fine sensible girl that I wouldn't mind giving her a dowry myself for Mary's sake, so you can think over it, Ford.'

'I—I don't think I will, sir,' said Ford humbly but firmly. 'If I ever marry, it'll be some lady very different from Miss Rayne. Perhaps I'm very ambitious, sir, but you've often told me you admire an ambition in a young man.'

'So I do. I'd never have been where I am to-day if I hadn't been ambitious,' said Mr. Hazell in the self-satisfied, contented tones of a man who has been made happy by some influence. 'Talking of marrying and ambition, Ford, I'm afraid I'm going to have some trouble with Robert. He's been at it again to-night.'

'I met Mr. Robert on the avenue, and he looked at me as if he could have slain me, though I'm sure I'm his humble friend,' said Mr. Ford virtuously.

'They've an awful pride, these lads of mine, Ford, and it must be reduced. What do you suppose was

his modest request to-night? He wants five hundred a year for his portion, and he's going to take the Priory for Miss Meredith.'

'It seems a great deal, sir, but perhaps Mr. Robert is right,' said Mr. Ford cautiously. 'You wouldn't think of a partnership?'

'No, I would not.'

'Well, perhaps you're right. The last firm I was with at Leeds, sir, when the concern was given up to the sons, they just broke the old gentleman's heart, and grudged him less than they gave their manager. Many a time my heart was sore for him, but, of course, being a servant, I daren't say a word. It was for thinking it injustice to him, sir, that I got my leave,' said Ford modestly, but with a quiet triumph, as if he rejoiced in suffering in a good cause. 'But even a servant is a man, sir, with a man's feelings, an' I couldn't bear to see you put upon, even by Mr. Robert, that Medlington makes such a paragon of.'

'You're a good creature, Ford, and I won't forget you,' said Mr. Hazell reassuringly. 'But what do you think we should do about him?'

'It's not for me to say, Mr. Robert being my master.'

'He's not your master; I am, Ford, and if I choose to ask your opinion it's no business of his. You've been a faithful servant for five years, and have the interests of the firm at heart. Tell me plainly what you think would be a fair thing for Robert.'

'Well, sir, it would take five hundred twice told to keep up the Priory,' said Mr. Ford cautiously. The

Priory rankled in his mind. He had had visions of it in his own castle building, and had pictured himself dwelling there with Mary Hazell as his wife. 'The profits have been a little less of late, and, if you'll excuse me speaking so plain, I think a little less might satisfy Mr Robert in the meantime. There are nice houses in Amanda Terrace past the quay, sir, the rents of which are only thirty pounds—very genteel houses with nice gardens. I'm sure Miss Meredith would like them very well, and in these houses, sir, a young couple could live in luxury on three hundred a year.'

'I should say so. I hadn't three hundred a year when I married Robert's mother, and we lived in your house at the brewery, and had to keep a very plain table. My father kept a very tight hand on the purse strings. I never was indulged as these lads have been, and it's been the ruin of them. I'll speak to Bob about the houses you mention.'

'But don't say I spoke of them, because Mr. Robert would be sure to be mortally offended,' said Mr. Ford hastily. 'You see, sir, I am only a servant, and I've no right to presume, but when you ask me for my opinion, sir, I am bound to give it.'

'Of course you are. You are very useful to me, Ford: your opinion is always worth having,' said Mr. Hazell reassuringly. 'Well, is there any more satisfaction about these houses in the Row.'

'Oh, they're growling away,' said Mr. Ford rather vindictively. 'But I never mind them. I tell them the sore throats are caused by the hoar-frosts from the river. They're goin' to complain to Miss Hazell about

the drainage. If she takes it up, sir, the thing 'll have to be investigated.'

'Oh, but I'll have Mary warned. Hadn't you the surveyor round?'

Mr. Ford's small eyes twinkled.

'Yes, of course we had, and he'd give in to anything. I don't think it would matter much though a few of the children did drop off. How these Trevors get food for their tribe I can't imagine. The twelfth has just arrived. It's a disgrace.'

'It's certainly very imprudent. Have you ever heard anything of the Beckers?'

'Yes; Becker is drinking at Burnley worse than he did here,' said Mr. Ford. 'Trevor has begun to tipple too. I've warned him twice lately.'

'I'll speak to him. We mustn't be too hard on him on account of the twelve,' said Mr. Hazell, now quite restored to good humour. 'You look well after our interests, Ford. You'll be looking for a rise shortly.'

'I am amply rewarded if I serve you well. You are a generous master, sir,' said Mr. Ford modestly.

'Ah, but you won't object to a little increase of pay. You deserve it, sir, and you shall have it. We'll see when quarter-day comes round.'

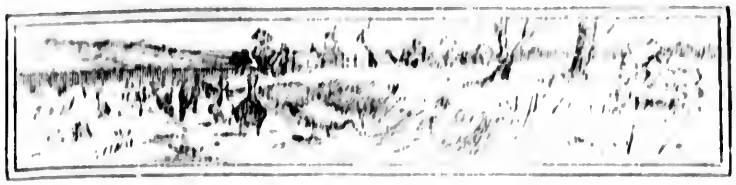
'Don't advance my salary just now, sir; Mr. Robert might not like it. I'd rather you gave anything extra to him.'

'You are too generous, Ford. I wish Robert could hear you. He'd change his opinion of you, which, I am sorry, is not very high at present. Do you ever think of yourself at all?'

'Sometimes, sir. Perhaps I'll ask my reward some day.'

'Well, when it comes, remind me of what I say, that I'll consider it favourably, because I think your request will be quite in reason,' said Mr. Hazell, with a laugh. 'Come, we'd better go up-stairs. I suppose you've no objections to spend an hour with the ladies?'

Mr. Ford had no objections, and said so, but he did not add that to look upon the face of his master's daughter was the object of his visit. The time for such a disclosure had not yet come. But Mr. Ford was cautiously and steadily paving the way.



CHAPTER XII.

CONTRASTS.

MARY was at the piano when they entered the drawing-room. Her face flushed when she saw Mr. Ford enter with her father, and she abruptly rose and went over to Mrs. Hazell's sofa. In the recess at the oriel window Herbert and Madeline Rayne were deeply engaged in conversation. They were much together, and their walks and talks had become very precious to both. Herbert looked round quickly at the opening of the door, and a frown came on his handsome face.

'Confound the fellow!' Madeline heard him say, and they both rose to advance into the room.

'You seem all very quiet here,' said Mr. Hazell jocularly. 'Herbert, you ought to be grateful to Ford and me for coming to the rescue.'

'I'm afraid I'm not grateful. I was very comfortable,' said Herbert, without attempting to hide his disgust, and favouring Ford with his usual off-hand nod.

'Don't rise from the piano, please, Miss Mary,' said Mr. Ford, looking appealingly at his master's daughter. 'Do be tempted to go back.'

'No, thank you; I have been playing for quite half an hour past, to oblige these two,' said Mary coldly, and, sitting down, took up her knitting, and kept her eyes fixed upon it.

'I shall play something if you like,' said Madeline, always willing to make herself of use.

'Thank you, Miss Rayne,' Ford said, but not very graciously, for he was disappointed.

When Mary sat at the piano he could stand near her, and look at her without rebuke; and there were opportunities in that distant corner of the room for saying certain things which were not suitable for the company to hear. But Mary had registered a vow that no such opportunity should again be given to Michael Ford.

'Sing us something then, Lena,' said Mr. Hazell, as he took his accustomed chair, knowing that in three minutes he would be soothed to sleep.

Mr. Ford sat down, and, taking a book of photographs, tried to be interested in them, but cast many a furtive glance at Miss Hazell. If she were conscious of these looks, she made no sign. Herbert, as a matter of course, took up his position at the piano, and watched Madeline while she played. She trusted entirely to memory, and her hands were at home on the keys. As they moved to and fro, sweetest melody followed them. A softened and beautiful expression dwelt on Herbert's face as he looked at her, the sweet woman who had been showing to him as best she could the beauty of a good and noble life. I wish I could transcribe the talks they had had, but they would not materially assist the unfolding of this history, so I must refrain.

'You seem to feel what you play, Miss Rayne,' he said suddenly.

'Why do you think so?'

A sweet, slight smile played upon her face as she asked the question.

'Your eyes tell me. I never thought there was anything in music till I heard you play. Now it says all sorts of things to me.'

'What sort of things?'

'I couldn't put them in words. I believe you know.'

'I think I do.' She nodded gravely, and her hands glided into a graver, sadder melody, which was even more exquisitely sweet than what went before.

These were dangerous minutes for them both. Mary, glancing once towards them, smiled in spite of her own perturbation of spirit. She fancied she saw a beautiful beginning there, the dawn of a new and exquisite life for these two, whom she loved, perhaps, better than any others on earth.

'Nine o'clock, though, and I must go,' said Herbert, a trifle hurriedly, as the deep tones of the hall clock droned the hour.

'Go where?' asked Madeline.

'I have a confounded engagement, but I'll be back before long. I'm awfully sorry, especially if you care. Do you know, I'm the most miserable wretch on the face of the earth.'

'Why?'

Madeline's colour rose a little, and her eyes dropped towards the keys. But she played on.

'Oh, I daren't tell you, you'd never speak to me again,' he said, still more hurriedly. 'I wish I'd never been born.'

She raised her eyes quickly, with a laugh in them, but, when she saw his face, they became grave again. He seemed really distressed, and again she was deeply puzzled. Of late she had noticed a strange uneasiness about Herbert Hazell. He took moody fits, when he would scarcely speak. At other times he was boisterously merry, and seemed overflowing with good spirits. Neither were natural, and Madeline, though scarcely aware yet how deep was the interest in him, began to dread lest he had got into some serious trouble. And yet outwardly all seemed well, and he and his father had been very friendly, and there had been no late hours to be found fault with.

'I must go. I'll tell you all about it soon. Though I don't know when I'll get the courage. Good bye just now.' So he darted out of the room, without vouchsafing any explanation or apology to the rest. As for Mr. Ford, he was of less account with Herbert Hazell than the dust under his feet. The fellow was perfectly odious to him.

It was a fine winter night, with just a pleasant touch of frost to harden the muddy roads, and make the air clear and bracing. Herbert's steps sounded quick and firm on the terrace under the drawing-room windows. Madeline heard them, and knew he had taken the direction of the upland path. The avenue turned in the opposite way. Herbert walked very quickly, for he was behind time. It was thirteen minutes past nine when he leaped the low hedge into the moorland and reached the grove. And there he found Jane Gregory waiting for him. She was very angry, he knew by the set expression on her face, when she saw him come

'I'm awfully sorry, Janie,' he began eagerly, but she coldly pushed him off when he would have come near her.

'Sorry! very likely,' she said scornfully. 'It's always the same story. I'm not going to stand it any longer, Herbert Hazell.'

'Well, upon my honour, Janie, before dinner gets over, and that, the time's all gone,' he said humbly, for she must be mollified.

'Oh yes, of course; you needn't tell me; I know all about it,' said the girl quietly, but with marked bitterness. 'I'd known, though I'd never been told. You've to hang so long over her while she sings and plays to you, and go walking all over the grounds with her. I know just how it goes on, but it's got to be dropped, that's all.'

'Do you think I'm in love with her, Janie?'

'I don't think it, I know it,' was the sharp and scornful retort.

'Well, I'm not, then. She's Molly's friend, and a jolly nice girl. She can talk so sensibly to a fellow. Can't I have a friend if I like, Janie?'

'No, you can't. You've got me, and if I'm not enough, why it's a poor look-out for the future, that's all, and the sooner you change your mind the better. I've mine made up.'

'What for?'

'I'm going to let the secret out.'

'Oh, you mustn't, Janie. It would be the ruin of me. The governor would just kick me out of the house at once.'

'Well, it wouldn't matter. You could get something to do. If you had a particle of spirit you wouldn't

stay with the old man any longer. I'm sick of your way of going on, Herbert. Pa tells me you're never at the club now, and, as you're not here, I can guess where you are, though Kitty didn't tell me. You never cared enough for me to give up or do anything for my sake, but whenever this dowdy, old-fashioned girl comes, you would go down on your bended knees to serve her. All Medlington says it's to be a match. You can't expect I find that a very pleasant thing to listen to, do you?'

Herbert was silent. He had not a word to say. So they stood for a moment, looking at each other. It would be difficult to say which was the more miserable of the two. Jane Gregory was consumed with a fierce jealousy, Herbert's heart wrung with the pangs of an unavailing regret. Oh, to undo the folly of these past years! Love, the sweet and true and ennobling, had touched him at length; he had obtained a glimpse of what life might and can be for a man who tries to make it a noble and beautiful thing, and when his effort is crowned by the precious sunshine of a good woman's love. Yes; he had obtained his glimpse too late, for he could not now undo the chain of his bitter bondage. And yet the very intensity of his own unhappiness made him feel almost tender towards the girl with whose love he had played. He had begun his love-making with Jane Gregory simply to wile away an idle hour, without a thought of the consequences.

'How much longer is this to go on?' she asked in a hard, bitter tone, which had in it a note of ineffable

weariness. Her face was very pale, her eyes heavy, for her heart was very sore. She had not been well nor justly treated—had she loved him less, she would have resented it more.

'Well, Janie, what are we to do? I suppose I'll have to tell,' he said gloomily. His evident objection stabbed her to the heart.

'Yes,' she said quietly, 'you'll have to tell.'

'If I was only engaged to you, Herbert,' she added at length, 'I'd let you off, though you don't deserve it. I wish now I had died before I went to visit Aunt Tilly at Burnley.'

Herbert never spoke. He was thinking of his father, of Mary, and of Madeline Rayne. How would they look when they heard the story he had to tell.

Just at that moment there was another pair of lovers standing together in the moonlight at the garden gate of Clieveden. They were anxious, too, for they had been discussing a grave problem; but there was a perfect and beautiful trust in the eyes of Lucy Meredith as they were uplifted to the true face of the man whose wife she hoped to be one day. They had much to sadden and perplex them, but there was a perfect confidence between them—no concealment, no distrust, nothing to shadow their happiness except the clouds raised by the selfish hands of others. Their future was uncertain, but they were certain of each other's faith, and that is much.

'My mind's quite made up, then, Lucy,' said Robert Hazell. 'I shall tell my father my intention to apply for that situation at Burnley.'

'Very well, Robert; and if he allows you to go, what a sacrifice you will be making for me! I am not worthy of it.'

'That is for me to prove, Lucy. If it ends in my going to Burnley, you will not let me live long there alone?'

She moved nearer to him and laid her head on his arm. It was her answer, more eloquently given than in words.

'Two hundred a year, Lucy! You will need to be a very economical wife to manage such a princely income,' he said, with gentle banter. 'Do you think we shall get something to eat and drink with it?'

'Surely. I am not afraid, Robert. Mamma has taught me how to spend money. May I tell you, Robert, I think I shall be happier there than I would be at the Priory: you know why.'

'Yes, and that is the only thing which reconciles me to it. But it will make a complete breach between us and Hazelwood, Lucy.'

'It will make no difference to Mary, Robert.'

'Not to Mary; but my father will not permit her to visit us, I feel sure. It is very difficult to know what is right, Lucy. I am not at all sure of our manager. He has acquired of late too great an influence over my father. If I leave the brewery, the only check upon Ford will be removed. I am almost certain that he is presuming to think of Mary.'

'Oh, that vulgar little man! Robert, I cannot believe it.'

'It is true. He is too much at Hazelwood. It is

not his position as a servant I dislike, Lucy, it is the man. He is like Uriah Heep, affects a servile humility which disgusts me. He is at heart ambitious, scheming, and unscrupulous, only my poor father does not see it. He thinks him a paragon. Life is full of troubles and perplexities, dear; it is often difficult to know where or how to turn. But I must not keep you here any longer in the night dews. Whatever happens, my darling will be true.'

Ay, she would be true till death itself should part them for a little while.

They lingered a little over their parting, as lovers will, then Robert Hazell turned to go home, thanking God, as he had often done, for the womanly heart he had won.

It was a fine clear night, and after leaving Clieveden he struck across the moor, which would save him a good half-mile. As he neared the knoll he saw two figures leave the shadow of the trees, and smiled at their attitude. It was not wonderful that he should have sympathy for another pair of lovers. As he looked again, he fancied there was something familiar in the man's figure and gait, and when they emerged into the full moonlight he recognised Herbert. The girl he did not know, but, when he saw them pause at the back gate of Miles Gregory's house, he divined who she was. He had heard a rumour once or twice that Herbert was running after Miss Gregory, but had never credited it. Since Madeline Rayne had come to Hazelwood he had discredited the gossip altogether, Herbert's admiration for and attention to her were so very marked. He

was surprised and disappointed in Herbert, he had so rejoiced in Miss Rayne's influence over the wayward lad. Robert did a most unusual thing for him—he stood still behind the trees at the knoll and watched the lovers part. He wanted to wait for Herbert—they might as well walk home together. After Miss Gregory went into the house, Herbert began to walk dejectedly back towards the knoll. He had his hands in his pockets and his eyes beat on the ground. Robert stepped out from the trees and went to meet him.

'Holloa!' was all that Herbert said; 'where have you been?'

'At Clieveden, and came across the moor. When I saw you I thought I'd wait for you, and we could walk home together. Was that Miss Gregory?'

'Yes.'

Not another word would Herbert speak.

'I heard a while ago that you were paying some attention to Miss Gregory, but I didn't believe it,' said Robert frankly, but there was no answer.

'I hope you are not playing with the girl, Herbert. I don't suppose you would care to marry her,' he continued; but still there was no answer.

'And what about Madeline Rayne, Herbert? Mary and I hoped that your friendship would ripen. She is a sweet and noble woman, whom any man might be proud to win.'

'You mind your own business,' cried Herbert, turning on him like a lion. 'I don't meddle with you. Leave me alone, will you, and let me marry who I like. You and Mary will know all about it soon enough.'

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MOTHERS' MEETING.

'I FEEL so nervous, Lena, I am sure I'll make the thing a failure. If I cannot speak, will you come to the rescue?'

'Yes, but I am not afraid for you; you will behave splendidly, I know,' said Madeline Rayne cheerfully, as she drew on her gloves. They were together in Mary's room dressing for the meeting to be held in the schoolroom at Paradise Row, the first of the series of mothers' meetings which Mary had talked about so long.

'Oh, you always think I shall do splendidly. Wait till you see your own and my miserable discomfiture to-night,' said Mary dolefully. 'Isn't it positively awful of me to have made no preparation for it? But somehow I couldn't, though I have tried several times.'

'You will speak from the heart, and you will touch the heart; don't fear. Are you ready then?'

'Yes. I wish mamma had been able to go. It seems so presumptuous of a girl like me to speak to those

experienced wives and mothers. I hope they will not resent it,' said Mary, as they went out of the room.

'Never fear. Nobody would ever resent anything you do or say. Don't you know you have a smile which would melt the nether millstone?' asked Lena, with a laugh, in which Mary joined.

They looked into the drawing-room on their way down. Mrs. Hazell was on her couch, still frail, but sweet and bright, and interested in everything and everybody. Mr. Hazell had just come up from his wine, and Herbert was lying back in a rocking-chair, twirling his thumbs and looking gloomily at the fire. He sat up when the girls entered, and cast a keen, swift glance at the face of Madeline Rayne. It seemed to have grown sweeter since she came to Hazelwood; the grey colour had brightened into a faint flush on the cheek, and the careworn lines had vanished from mouth and brow. Had she then enjoyed the rest and ease of Hazelwood? Ay, but there was something more. Robert was not in the drawing-room. His relatives had not seen much of him for a few days. He spent the greater part of his leisure at Clieveden. A cool reserve was maintained between his father and himself. Mary felt uncomfortably conscious that something was going to happen. She did not know, of course, exactly how matters stood between her father and Robert, but she saw that the latter was preoccupied and meditative. There had been several railway journeys of late, too, for which she could not account; but she tried not to anticipate trouble, and hoped her father would yet relent in favour of Lucy Meredith.

'Well, are you all ready?' asked Mrs. Hazell, with a smile.

'Isn't the brougham at the door, papa?'

'Of course; been there for half an hour,' responded Mr. Hazell gruffly, but with a twinkle in his eye, which Madeline met with a smile.

'Not quite, Mr. Hazell, for I heard Thomas drive up as we left Mary's room. You might, too, come and help us, sir.'

'I? they'd soon run home if they saw my face at the door. Well, Mary, see and give them a sensible advice. Are you going to tackle Mrs. Trevor about the upbringing of the twelve?'

'Oh, what nonsense, papa! I am only going to have a friendly chat with them. I shouldn't dare to try and teach them about their children. It is only to brighten their lives a little. Lena is to sing her very sweetest for them. Don't you think they will like that?'

'Well they might,' grunted Mr. Hazell, looking approvingly at Miss Rayne. He liked her very much, and it was at his special request that she had postponed her departure from Hazelwood. It had, indeed, been tacitly agreed that she should remain through the winter. She seemed to have filled a vacant place in the house. They all loved her; even the servants waited upon her for love, and yet she was very quiet and unobtrusive in her ways. But she had constant consideration for others, and was always doing little kindnesses of which few people would have thought. She seemed to step into the breach somehow, and had become indispensable to

the household. And she was so happy in it that she was only too willing to remain.

'I really think, my dears, you ought to have Kitty with you to make and serve the tea,' said Mrs. Hazell presently.

'Oh no, mamma; they wouldn't like that, I assure you. Kitty is a good girl, but she is rather patronizing to the women in the Rows. I found that out when I sent her with Mrs. Trevor's jelly and soup when she was ill. I expect she set it down with the air she assumes when she gives the tramps a piece of bread. I said nothing, but determined Kitty should do no more of my visiting at the Rows. Lena and I shall enjoy making the tea immensely, and the bread is all ready; there is only the cake to cut. I mean to tell them I made it for them with my own hands.'

'Oh yes, you'll be scrubbing their floors and washing their clothes for them immediately. You'll have the whole concern finely spoiled in a month's time,' said Mr. Hazell grumpily; but Mary only laughed.

'Well, when am I to send Thomas for you?' he asked then.

'We can't say, but I think we'd like to walk home, wouldn't we, Lena? Herbert, you lazy boy, what are you dreaming there for? You'll come and escort us home, won't you?'

'Yes, I'll come,' said Herbert, and looked straight at Madeline Rayne, until her colour began to rise. Then a deep, dark shadow crossed the young man's face, and, rising suddenly, he left the room.

'Our boys have really grown too eccentric of late,

Lena,' said Mary, with a sigh, as they went down-stairs. 'I wish you had known them in the old days, they were so different and so jolly.'

'Oh, they will be jolly again, Mary, never fear,' said Madeline cheerfully, as they passed out to the front steps. Herbert was standing at the carriage door, ready to help them in.

'Well, what time shall I turn up?' he asked as he shut the door on them.

'Oh, about half-past nine, eh, Lena? I think we shall be glad enough to disperse then. If we have collapsed sooner, we'll just wait in the school till you come. I hope Nancy Ketterley has the fires on, Lena, or we will have a struggle to get tea. If it is a failure, it will damp our energies all evening.'

'Molly is perfectly dissipated on the tea subject, isn't she?' laughed Madeline. She put up her hand to unloose her wraps as she spoke, and Herbert, leaning over the window, touched her hand as she did so. Why should that sudden touch send a strange thrill through them both? Ah me! had young love, the sweet and true, come to them only to bring with it its bitterest pain?

It was natural that Mary should be excited over her venture. She did not know how the mothers' meeting would turn out, though they had all promised to come. She was truly anxious to benefit and help the dwellers in the Row, and there were a few who appreciated her motive, and loved her for it.

They talked all the way to the Rows; and when they reached the school Mary was in the best of spirits. It was delightful for her to think she was engaged in

some useful work, even though it partook of the nature of an experiment.

The school was lighted, and Nancy Ketterley had the fire on and the kettle boiling ready for the young ladies. She came bustling out when the brougham drove up, and with several scathing remarks attempted to disperse the crowd of open-mouthed urchins congregated about the door. Nancy Ketterley was a great character. Opinion was divided as to whether she was a trifle demented or only exceptionally shrewd. She cleaned the offices at the brewery, and looked after the school cleaning and firing, and had a one-roomed house at the Rows. She was not well liked by the neighbours, as her tongue wagged very freely, and she had a way of laying her finger on their weaknesses. But it is to be supposed that Mr. Hazell found in her a good servant, as she had been in his employment for nearly thirty years. Perhaps her long service had given her a privilege; at least she was not in the least particular in her remarks to her master or the members of his family. She didn't approve of the mothers' meetings, and had obeyed Miss Hazell's orders with grudging willingness.

'I don't wonder that the lads gape, Tummus,' she said, as she took down a hamper from the box. 'It's enough to make older uns gape. What do you think o' this new idee?'

Tummus winked expressively, but didn't venture on a remark, Miss Hazell being quite within hearing.

'Drat 'em, get out o' my way!' said Nancy, elbowing the urchins aside. 'You can't wonder at all, Miss Mary. They think it's a swarry, an' their mouths is waterin'.'

'Poor little mortals! We must have a night for the children soon,' said Miss Hazell, with a smile. 'That's all now, Nancy; shut the door. Oh, what a splendid fire! Isn't it cosy, Lena?'

Certainly there was an air of comfort and a pleasant glow of light and heat in the school that evening. It was not a very large room, and, though Nancy Ketterley did not approve at all of the new innovation, she had done her best to make the place comfortable. It was, of course, for love of the sweet young lady, who had a way of winning every heart. With her own hands Miss Hazell spread a cloth on the schoolmaster's table, and set in the middle a prettily shaded lamp and two beautiful plants she had purloined from the greenhouse for the occasion. Then Madeline Rayne and she proceeded to cut the cake and set out the cups and saucers. They provided for forty; there were almost sixty women at the Rows, but Mary could only count on little more than the half of these. Some were ill, and some too much occupied to come, and a few had surlily declined to accept her invitation. There are always in such things some cross-grained mortals who try the cold water cure for any new enthusiasm. But, on the whole, Mary Hazell's invitation had been very cordially responded to. The majority were glad at the prospect of having a little brightness infused into their monotonous lives. Half-past seven was the hour of meeting, and a few minutes before the time the first knock came to the door, and in answer to Miss Hazell's hearty 'come in,' three women entered. They looked round the place in pleasant surprise. The desks had been removed, and some forms

set in a kind of circle round the fire, and every available chair had been brought into use to take away from the formal look of the place. The bright light and warmth, the pretty table, the piano with its shaded candles and bunches of flowers, and the smiling, welcoming face of the master's daughter, sent a glow to their hearts, and their faces brightened into smiles.

'Come away, Mrs. Trevor, and Sally too,' said Mary in her pleasant way. 'I am so glad to see you, Mrs. Brown. You know you wouldn't promise. Take off your bonnets and shawls. Nancy will take care of them. Isn't it bright and cosy here?'

'It is indeed, Miss Mary; it's jes' fine,' said Mrs. Brown, a dull-eyed, stolid-looking woman. 'It's like the thing. Eh, I smell the muffins! 'Tain't every day *we* get hot muffins, eh, Sally Trevor?'

In about ten minutes the whole of the expected guests arrived. All seemed pleased with their reception, and some bright faces grew brighter under the influence of Mary Hazell's smile.

'I think we must begin with a hymn. I wonder what one you know best. I think everybody knows "Nearer, my God, to Thee." Lena, will you play it over?'

Lena did so, and then began to sing, her exquisite voice sounding through the room with such a melody that some of them, in their amazement, forgot to join in.

But at the second verse they all sang, and some voices which had not been so raised for years joined falteringly in the sweet, familiar strains. There were some discords perhaps, but to Mary Hazell the singing sounded wholly sweet. When it was over, she reverently

closed her eyes, and, folding her hands, asked in a few simple, earnest words for a blessing on their meeting. Then the tea began.

The two girls had purposely come down in their quiet dinner-dresses, and wore pretty aprons above them. They wanted, they said, to do honour to their guests. I am quite sure there never was anywhere a pleasanter meal than that tea. That the guests thoroughly enjoyed it was evident by the constant replenishing of cups, and passing of bread and muffin plates.

Mary Hazell, with her own tea-cup in one hand and the kettle in the other, flitted about from one to another in great glee. The tea was of the best quality; and the cake was pronounced splendid. The first part of the entertainment was, without doubt, a success. While Nancy Ketterley, with as little noise as possible, carried the cups into the anteroom, Madeline Rayne sang an old English ballad, with which most of them had been familiar since their childhood.

Then Mary, with a little excited nervousness visible in her flushed cheeks and shining eyes, stood up behind the table to make her little speech. From the piano-stool Madeline Rayne watched her with a loving and fearless pride. She knew she would just say all that was required, and with the best grace and tact. Her confidence was not misplaced. Mary's words were very simple, but they came up earnestly from a loving and unselfish heart. She began by saying that it was the duty of all men and women to do all that lay in their power to make those around them happy. She spoke

of the influence cast by a bright spirit, and tried to show that every human being in the world had an influence to use for good or bad. And thus she gradually approached her more immediate subject, and clearly explained the aim of the mothers' meetings. It was to foster a kindly interest, she said, in each other, as well as to make a little break in the round of the work of life. She spoke of her own earnest desire to be of some use among her father's people; and as she uttered her true-hearted words Lena Rayne saw several eyes fill with tears. She concluded by thanking them all for coming, and hoped that that evening was to only be the beginning of many happy ones to follow. She was listened to with the closest attention, and there was a murmur of applause when she sat down. Then their sewing and knitting was brought out, and Madeline Rayne read a short chapter from a most interesting story, which Mary proposed to continue from week to week. At ten minutes to nine another hymn was sung, and the first mothers' meeting was at an end. Mary went over to the door and shook hands with each one as she retired.

'God bless you, Miss Mary! I haven't had a night like it for years,' said one, as she pressed the slim hand close in her toil-hardened palm.

'Nor I, Miss Mary,' said Mrs. Trevor heartily; 'and if Trevor 'nd mind the children I'd be glad o' sich a treat every night.'

'That wouldn't pay, mother,' said Sally next. 'Eh, Miss Mary, the singing was splendid!'

Some never spoke, only gripped her hand firm and

fast, and answered her by their tears. Mary's own eyes were not dry when she went back to Lena's side.

'Hasn't it been splendid? I never thought it would be half so nice. What did I say, Lena? I felt so nervous, and yet I could hardly get the words out fast enough.'

'Say, my darling! just what was best and most beautiful,' said Lena softly. 'God bless you, Mary! You have a great work lying to your hand.'

'Do you think so? I feel so uncertain always. I sometimes wish God would mark out the way very plainly. I seem to need it so. I have not confidence enough. Thank you for your singing, Lena. They liked that. You must never leave us now, you know; you are a fixture among us.'

Madeline smiled, and just then the school door opened, and Herbert looked inquiringly in. Then he entered, and some one else followed him closely. It was Mr. Michael Ford.

'Oh, Lena!' whispered Mary, with a sudden shiver and tremble of the hand in her friend's arm. 'Let us get away home quickly. I cannot suffer that man!'

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WALK HOME.

MICHAEL FORD was in many respects a shrewd man; but his confidence in, and admiration for, his own personal qualities blinded him to things which even an uninterested observer could plainly see. Nothing could be more patent than Miss Hazell's dislike of his attentions. Mary, indeed, came nearer being rude to her father's manager than she had ever been in her life to any one, and yet Mr. Ford fancied himself getting on. He took Miss Hazell's cold courtesy for shyness, her reserve for the dignity of good breeding, of which Mr. Ford, of course, knew nothing. She certainly treated him in a very different manner from what he was accustomed to among certain young ladies in Medlington, but he was not disconcerted. He considered himself good-looking, smart, and attractive, and his position in the brewery was very well assured. His heart had leaped at the mere prospect of getting rid of Robert Hazell, of whom he stood considerably in awe. If he should leave, then an incubus would be removed from Mr. Ford's actions, and he would have a greater liberty to prosecute his own ideas and further his own

interests. Robert Hazell had, in reality, no idea of the power and influence exercised by Ford over his father, or most assuredly he would never have contemplated leaving the brewery, at least until Ford had been removed or reduced to his proper place. Mr. Ford's face wore a sprightly smile as he came jauntily into the schoolroom behind Herbert Hazell. They had not come up together, but had only met at the door. Herbert could not endure Ford as a rule, but felt that he could tolerate him to-night, seeing that his presence would give him Madeline's company all to himself on the way home. Herbert knew very well that Mary was quite capable of keeping Mr. Ford in his place. To walk home alone with Madeline—perhaps to feel her light touch on his arm! What a thrill the thought sent through him! and yet it was a forbidden joy—nay, now it was a sin, because of the insuperable barrier his folly and rash haste had placed between them.

'Good evening, ladies,' said Michael Ford when he was half across the floor. 'I was in the neighbourhood, and thought I'd look in to see how the affair had gone off. Everything up to the mark, I hope, Miss Hazell? I gave Ann Ketterley a word of comfort about it this morning. I hope she made the place right for you?'

'Ann did all I asked her to do, of course,' returned Mary coldly; 'she had no concern with any other orders. Are you ready, Lena? Is it still fine out of doors, Herbert?'

'Yes; it's a stunning night for a walk. You won't need all these shawls and things. I suppose Ford and I'll need to load ourselves with them?' said Herbert lightly, but looking with melancholy eyes at Madeline

Rayne. She had wound a bright scarlet scarf about her throat, and it seemed as if the vivid hue had lent a faint reflection to her face; or perhaps her colour had arisen by her effort to still the beating of her heart.

'We can carry our things ourselves,' said Mary almost snappishly. 'There's no need to trouble any one. You need not wait unless you wish, Mr. Ford. Ann will lock up all right; she has done it too often to make any mistake about it.'

'Oh, I'm not in any hurry. I'd like the walk as far as the bridge anyway, Miss Hazell,' said Mr. Ford affably. 'Let me take your shawls.'

Mary hesitated a moment. She saw unmistakable pleading in her brother's eyes, and for the sake of him and Madeline she was willing to sacrifice herself. If she had but known how vain was her kindly deed—nay, how it but made more bitter the pain in Herbert's heart!

'Very well, come along then,' she said briskly, greatly to the delight of Mr. Ford, who made haste to burden himself with the ladies' wraps. So they all passed out. Ann Ketterley marched to the door after them, and watched them out of sight, muttering to herself and making the most extraordinary grimaces all the while. A light had suddenly dawned upon her, and her mind was in a curious state. It would not have been safe at that moment to have asked Ann Ketterley for her opinion of Michael Ford.

As was to be expected, Mary and Mr. Ford took the lead, and the other pair came up more leisurely behind. Perhaps it was no object for them to hurry. The moments were too dangerously sweet for them to wish them over.

And they were to be the last, Herbert told himself. His story must be told to-night to Madeline Rayne. Mr. Ford tried hard to induce Miss Hazell to walk through the town, which was really the nearer way. Of course it was natural he should wish Medlington to be a witness to his triumph, but Mary chose otherwise, and insisted on going the more unfrequented though longer way.

'And how did the meeting go off, Miss Hazell? You've never told me yet,' he ventured to say, encouraged by Mary's remarks on the weather and other commonplace topics.

'Oh, very well, thank you,' said Mary briefly.

'How many turned out? I was in the Rows this morning, and there was quite an excitement over it. You are very kind to them, Miss Hazell, and I told them I hoped they'd be grateful.'

'They would resent that. I do not work for gratitude, Mr. Ford, but to try and brighten the lives of my father's people. I should prefer that you did not speak to them about me at all, if you please,' said Mary hotly, for she was very angry.

'I beg your pardon. I meant no offence,' said Mr. Ford readily. 'I am as anxious as you can be for their welfare, I assure you.'

Mary bit her lip. Her pride was rebelling. How dared he speak of himself and her in that fashion, coupling their names, as if it could be possible for them ever to have a single thought in common.

'Have they been complaining to you lately about their houses, Miss Mary?' asked Michael Ford, changing the subject, and speaking very respectfully. 'Don't you think their houses very good of their kind?'

'They may be good of their kind,' said Mary, with a sigh, 'but they seem to me to need a great deal done to them. Some of them are very damp. The little room in Trevor's house had water trickling down the walls while Mrs. Trevor was lying ill. I wonder she ever recovered.'

'Oh, it was damp, murky weather at the time, Miss Hazell. I think the houses are splendid. Compare them with other working people's houses, and you'll agree with me. But there's no satisfying work-folks, Miss Mary, as you'll soon find when you've been among them a little while.'

Mary's lips curled in the darkness, and her fine eyes flashed with scornful amusement. She knew enough about Michael Ford's antecedents to feel that his remarks about working folk and their needs were much out of taste. But it suited him to forget that his father had been a miner at Burnley, and that his mother had wrought at the pithead at Wigan. It was creditable to him that he had got on so well, but his desire and attempts to act the fine gentleman, and to affect a contempt for the labouring poor, made him despicable in the eyes of Mary Hazell. She had not that foolish pride which despises poverty, and draws a fine line betwixt class and class. Had Michael Ford been a gentleman at heart, and a manly man, he would have found a true friend in Mary Hazell. But he was a sycophant and a time-server, a worshipper of mammon and rank, and Mary's clear eyes had read him through and through.

'What would you like done to the houses then, Miss Hazell?' he continued, when he received no reply to his warning about the ingratitude of the poor.

'I think they should all be drained in the first place,

and larger windows put in,' said Mary quickly enough now, for she was deeply interested in the sanitary condition of the Rows. 'I had a long talk with Doctor Winthorpe one day when I met him in Trevor's cottage. He says light and air are the chief factors in the preservation of good health. To make the Rows quite what they should be, Mr. Ford, the houses would need to be rebuilt, and I am afraid that will never be.'

'If you wished it very much, Miss Hazell, I don't see why it should not be,' said Michael Ford, with eagerness, and turning his head to see her face. But Mary looked straight before her, and made answer quickly.

'Mr. Hazell does not see the necessity for it. He says the people have lived for over thirty years in them, and brought up healthy families, and perhaps he is right. All this talk about sanitary precautions now-a-days only makes folk uncomfortable. It is the old story. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Now here we are at the bridge, so I shall say good-night, Mr. Ford. Herbert can carry the things the rest of the way.'

Mary looked back as she paused at the parapet, and saw the pair sauntering along arm in arm. A smile dawned on her lips, but she quickly banished it when she saw it reflected on Mr. Ford's face.

'It is not far to Hazelwood gates, Miss Mary,' he pleaded. 'Let us walk on. It is a pity to disturb them.' Mary walked on then without a word.

'Miss Rayne is a charming young lady. No doubt you will be delighted to have her for a sister. Medlington says it's to be soon,' said Michael Ford, thinking it no breach of good manners to allude to family matters to his master's daughter.

'Medlington is in too great a hurry as usual' returned Mary curtly. 'There is nothing between my brother and Miss Rayne.'

'But there will be, or both our eyes have deceived us, Miss Mary,' said Ford facetiously. 'There's one not far off who won't like the news. It vexed me when Mr Herbert ran so much here. It wasn't the thing for him.'

They were within sight of Mileswood, and Mary knew quite well that he was alluding to Jane Gregory, but she gave him no answer.

'You'll be losing both your brothers soon, Miss Hazell. Mr. Hazell has been good enough to tell me that Mr. Robert is to be married soon. Will you allow me to urge something on you, Miss Mary?'

'What?'

'Advise Mr. Robert not to press for too big an income just now. The firm has sustained several losses, and it irritates Mr. Hazell to be continually asked for money. Mr. Robert has spoken about taking the Priory for Miss Meredith. Your father will never consent to it. But if they would be content with a little less just now, they might get it by and by. Advise him to it, Miss Mary. I know Mr. Hazell's mind on the subject, and he won't change it.'

'I should never presume to advise my brother,' said Mary in a voice as cold as ice. 'He is never wrong, and he will not ask too much. Will you excuse me, Mr. Ford, if I say I cannot possibly discuss family matters with you. If you persist, I must turn and rejoin Herbert and Miss Rayne.'

'Now, you are not understanding me, Miss Mary. I don't want to presume. I have the good of the family

at heart, and, if you'd believe it, I'd do anything for you,' he said, with a passionate ring in his voice. 'If you'll only be kinder to me I'll use all my influence with Mr. Hazell to have the Rows sorted. Only just say the word.'

Mary turned her back on Michael Ford and began rapidly to retrace her steps, he following rather dejectedly behind. Certainly the first hint of his intention had not been very encouragingly received.

'Hollo! have you fallen out?' queried Herbert rather banteringly; but when he saw Mary's face he surmised what had happened.

'Come, Lena, how slowly you have been walking,' said Mary, taking her by the hand. 'Good night, Mr. Ford,' and with a distant bow she marched past that individual, taking Lena with her.

Herbert could only bid the manager good night also, and hasten after the ladies. Mr. Michael Ford, then, had received his first repulse, but he was in no way disconcerted. As he walked back to his lodging over the brewery gates he laid his plans anew, and built up his ambitious hopes once more even on Miss Hazell's coldness and disdain.

Mary chattered incessantly during the rest of the way home. She was excited. Madeline saw, and surmised what had happened. The other two did not speak much, both being occupied with their own thoughts. Mary had interrupted their talk just when it had become very earnest—but Madeline was not sorry. She knew that she loved Herbert Hazell, and that he loved her. But there need be no haste in the telling; there was time enough, and the present was

passing sweet. Ah, dear heart! She did not dream that the last hour of such sweet happiness was past.

'It is not late. Don't let us hurry in, the night is so fine,' said Herbert, as they emerged from the shadow of the avenue trees and went up the open side of the lawn.

'Late! it is ten o'clock, I am sure,' said Mary quickly. 'Quite time we were all in the house.' She disengaged her hand from Madeline's arm as she spoke, and looked curiously at her brother, who had paused in the middle of the gravelled pathway. His face was pale, and Mary saw that he seemed much agitated.

'Will you go into the house, Molly,' he said in a low voice. 'I want to speak to Miss Rayne.'

Mary nodded, a sudden tear started to her eye; she hastily kissed Madeline, and ran up the broad steps to the door.

Madeline stood still, trembling from head to foot.

'I think we must go in too,' she said in a faltering voice. 'It is late, as Mary says.'

'Not yet; come down the low road with me. I must speak to you, Madeline,' said Herbert Hazell hoarsely. 'Oh, my darling, I am the most miserable man on the face of the earth.'

'Why?'

Her sweet face grew radiant in its compassionate tenderness. She slipped her gentle hand through his arm, and led him away from before the lighted windows. He had called her his darling, and, if she was so, had she not the right to comfort and help him if she could.

'Why will you blame yourself so?' she asked in a low, soothing voice. 'You have tried so hard to do

right of late. There is no use brooding over the past, though there may be much to regret in it. It is the future you have to do with now. If you make it noble and true, you will soon forget all that was unworthy.'

Every brave, womanly word she uttered stabbed him to the heart.

'It is not that—it is not that!' he said hoarsely. 'If it were only that, I should be a happy man. I love you, Madeline, as truly as ever man loved woman. You could have made a man of me had I met you sooner. I shall be thankful if you care nothing for me, if you only despise me as I deserve.'

'But I do care for you,' said Madeline Rayne in a low, trembling voice. 'It is not too late; life is all before us, Herbert.'

She looked him full in the face, with eloquent eyes adding weight to her sweet words. He did not meet that look, knowing his own unworthiness. With a groan he turned aside, and, leaning against a gnarled oak trunk, covered his face with his hands.

'It is too late! Don't you understand? There is another—woman, who is an inseparable barrier between us.'

Madeline grew paler, and even drew herself away from him. If he had sought her love, while bound by a tie of honour to another, then he was unworthier even than she had deemed him.

'It is worse even than you think, Madeline. If it had only been a foolish promise or a flirtation it might have been no obstacle,' he said, still keeping his face hidden. 'But there is no hope; for I have married her, Madeline. Jane Gregory is my wife!'

CHAPTER XV.

A TRYING HOUR.

THERE are some strange moments in human life, moments of feeling so intense and keen that they could not long be endured. It is well such do not occur often, or are much prolonged. Years of peace could scarcely atone for one such instant of agony. Madeline Rayne stood absolutely still for a moment, with her eyes fixed on Herbert Hazell. His face, however, was hidden, and he was unconscious of that stony gaze. Had his eyes for a moment met hers, the secret of her heart must have been revealed to him. It is not always easy to keep the feelings absolutely under control; sometimes the tumult of the soul finds silent but unmistakable expression in the face. So it was at that moment with Madeline Rayne. But it passed. She crushed down her pain, though God alone knew how bitter it was to her. She was a lonely woman whom few loved. The very reserve and self-containedness of her nature gave a strange and passionate intensity to her feelings. Love for her could only mean deep, unutterable happiness or the reverse. She held nothing lightly. Her nature

was too earnest to find much pastime in life. She had had a hard experience; neglect, solitude, bitter battling for mere existence she had known, but never anything so unbearable as this. She was like a little boat drifted at ease on sunny seas suddenly overtaken by a cruel storm. But it passed, as I say, in a moment. She drew herself up, one breath, which was almost a sob, escaped her white set lips, and she turned her eyes, full of a compassion which was almost divine, on the bowed figure of the man at her side. He had given her a bitter cup to drink. He had sought her love, if not in word, in the thousand nameless ways to which a woman's heart so quickly responds; but he was weak and needed comfort. She suffered, but she was the stronger of the two. She felt that he waited for her guiding, and it gave her strength to be a ministering angel. It is born of pain, this angelic ministry with which many women bless the lives of others. Is it not true that the sweetest and most precious things of earth are bought by suffering? I think, if you probe into the heart of things, you will find it so.

'Your wife, Herbert!' she repeated in a low voice, but very gently. 'This is a very sad thing, I think, for her.'

'Why for her?'

He flung up his head, and looked at her almost fiercely. He had expected pity for himself, not for the girl whose life his selfishness had blighted. He cared nothing for her, but she was his wife—well might Madeline Rayne pity her.

'Why for her?' he repeated, when she gave him no answer. 'It is a thousand times sadder for me, I think. You know very well I would give my right

hand, Madeline, to undo what I have done; and it was more her blame than mine.'

'Hush, hush!' Madeline's voice rang out almost shrilly in its sharp rebuke. 'Do not make me think you even less worthy than you are. No man, but only a coward, would blame her, and I hope you are not a coward yet.'

'Well, but I must explain,' he said, with the slightest touch of sullenness in his tone. 'I was fond of her, you know, and would have married her right enough if she had waited. The secret marriage was her proposal. She went to Burnley and stayed with her aunt for some weeks, and we were married privately there. It was all over in half an hour, and not a creature knew anything about it.'

'But why should it have been done privately?' asked Madeline coldly and critically, as a judge might have spoken. She had hard work keeping herself from despising him, and she would not spare him, though she saw how anxious he was to keep her good opinion, and to defend himself.

'Oh well, you know, the governor would never have heard of such a thing. You've heard him on Gregory, and'—

'You did not marry Gregory,' put in Madeline quietly. 'The girl is a good girl. I cannot but think she has been badly used by you. A secret marriage is not a token of respect to any woman, Herbert, and there are only solitary instances in which it is justifiable. In your case it was wrong.'

'Well, I don't know. The governor would probably have paid me off had I told him I intended such a

thing. You know how mad he is about Lucy Meredith, and I suppose there is a difference between her and poor Janie, who is a good girl, but not a lady, and never will be.'

Again Madeline caught him up sharply. She thought the tone in which he spoke of his wife most offensive.

'How long is it since your marriage took place?' she asked in the same judge-like way.

'Oh, it's a good while. I forget the date,' he answered carelessly.

'Was it before I came?'

Why did she ask the question, I wonder? Was her aching heart seeking some crumbs of comfort out of the chaos?

'No, it was the week after.'

'It will be ten weeks to-morrow since I came.'

'Is it so long? the time has flown on wings. If you had only been a month sooner, Madeline, this wretched thing would never have happened,' he said gloomily.

'Why should you call it a wretched thing?' she asked, with a forced cheerfulness. 'Few men would think it a misfortune to have such a handsome wife. Well, what are you going to do?'

'I don't know. I want you to help me, Madeline.'

For a moment she turned her head away. His very calmness hurt her. Were all men alike selfish? she wondered. Her idol was very poor clay after all. It was a wholesome lesson Madeline was learning even in these bitter moments, and one which would bring healing in its train.

'How can I help you?' she asked. Her voice was cold, but he did not notice it.

'It'll have to come out. She won't keep it any longer. It'll make an awful rumpus, won't it? I wanted Janie to go quietly abroad with me, but she would not.'

'She was quite right. I don't know your wife, Herbert, but I think I admire her more than I admire you.'

'You are very plain spoken, Madeline. You're not half so sympathetic with a fellow in his trouble; and yet you've been so jolly good to me. It's for you I'm so down about this business. What would I not give if you were in Janie's place!'

'You forget who you are talking to, and what you are saying, I think,' said Madeline in a voice as cold as ice. 'There is no profit in such talk. Let us go into the house.'

'I know I'm a brute, but I'm a miserable wretch, Madeline,' he said humbly. 'You've taught me to wish to do right, and be a better man. Don't leave me in this lurch. Tell me what to do, and I'll be guided by you. I am really anxious to do right.'

Again her heart was touched, and she looked at him with a more kindly eye. There *was* good in him, but oh, the fair flowers of noble manhood were choked with the weeds of selfishness and weak indulgence.

'Do you want me to point out your duty to you?' she asked, and a faint smile dawned on her lips. Already she felt herself years older than he, and she spoke almost as a mother might have spoken to an erring son.

'Of course I do. There's nobody else can. The governor would only fly into a terrible passion, and Mary would cry. She always does, and she doesn't like Janie, I know. I've heard her come down awfully on her. As for Bob, he'd shrug his shoulders like the

Levite, and pass on. I suppose he's got enough to do with his own affairs just now. So you're really the only one a fellow can rely upon. Mrs. Hazell is very kind, you know, but, like myself, she hasn't much backbone.'

'Well, I think you know as well as I do what the first part of your duty is. You must acknowledge your marriage at once. You will tell your father to-night.'

'To-night!' Herbert shrugged his shoulders. 'And what if he, figuratively speaking, kicks me out of the house. He hates Gregory like poison, and really he is a presuming little creature.'

'If Mr. Hazell elects not to forgive you, then you must just leave the house, and go and work for your wife. Poor girl, I am sorry for her; you have not acted a man's part, Herbert.'

'So you have said already. You are coming down very heavily on me, Madeline.'

'Not more heavily than you deserve,' she answered quickly, and there was a note of weariness in her voice.

'It'll be an awful job telling the governor, Madeline. Won't you help me? He's so jolly fond of you. You could make him do anything.'

'No, I won't. This is a thing you must do yourself, Herbert. It ought not to be so difficult, for your wife's sake.'

'If she were like you, Madeline,' he said gloomily. 'You don't know the kind of girl she is. She can't help a fellow. She doesn't care a fig whether he does right or not. It's position she wants, though I've told her often enough there won't be much position as my wife. It's a miserable business from beginning to end.'

Madeline was silent. It was a miserable business; she could not but pity the foolish pair who had bound the matrimonial chain about them without even the basis of mutual respect on which to build their family happiness.

'What do *you* suppose Molly will say to this?' asked Herbert presently.

'Mary will say and do all that is good and right and kind,' responded Madeline quickly. 'You need not be afraid of *her*. It is to yourself you must look. You have a great deal to make up to your wife, Herbert. If she cares for you, this may only be the beginning of a happy and useful life for you both.'

It cost her something to utter these words. But Madeline Rayne was nothing, if not unselfish. All her life she had been accustomed to set herself aside for others. But no sacrifice had ever touched her so nearly as this. She pled Jane Gregory's cause at serious cost to herself.

'If you'd be a friend to Janie, Madeline,' Herbert began eagerly, 'she might get to be a little like you. If Mary goes to see her, will you go with her?'

'Not just at first; Mary will want to go alone; but by and by, Herbert, I shall go and see your wife,' said Madeline gently, and began as she spoke to move away from the shrubbery. The first excitement over, she felt very tired. She felt as if she could creep into some quiet corner, and sleep away the ache at her heart.

'Am I to tell the governor to-night, then, Madeline?'

'Yes, and if you like I shall speak to Mary. The sooner it is done the better now.'

'All right; I'll do it,' said Herbert, and drew himself up as he spoke, as if with a new courage. 'After all,

anything will be better than the misery of the last two months. You have been awfully good to me, Madeline. I'll never forget it as long as I live.'

His eyes dwelt hungeringly on her sweet, pale face. He was to be pitied, as well as blamed, for that face was a thousand times dearer to him than Jane Gregory's, with all its meretricious beauty. He could hardly restrain himself as he looked, for he knew that, but for that inseparable barrier, he should have had the right to kiss that face, and to call Madeline Rayne his wife.

'What do you suppose shall be the upshot of all this, Madeline? Do you think it'll make a complete earthquake in the house? You see, Janie will be even more undesirable in the governor's eyes than Lucy Meredith.'

'It seems to me, Herbert, that you are more concerned about what is to happen to you than about doing right in this matter,' said Madeline wearily. 'I shall tell you what I think—that if your father were to cut you off with a shilling, as the saying goes, it would be the making of you. Your life has been too easy hitherto. A little hardship would do you good.'

They walked in silence then back to the house. On the steps Madeline turned and laid her hand on his arm. Her face was very earnest as she uplifted it to his—very earnest, and very sad.

'Herbert, God will help you, even yet, to live a noble life. You have had many mistakes; let this be the last willingly made. Come out of this ordeal as a man, and let me be proud of my friend.'

Her words went quick to the young man's impulsive heart.

'God bless you, Madeline Rayne,' he said warmly;

'there is nothing in the world I would not dare for your sake.'

'Not for my sake; for the sake of what is good and right, and for *her* sake who has loved you well enough to become your wife. We must be very kind and loving to her, Herbert: that is our first duty.'

So she left him, and stole away up-stairs past the drawing-room, where Mary was singing the evening hymn quietly to herself—

> 'I need Thy presence every passing hour—
> What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
> Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be?
> Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me!'

Madeline Rayne pressed her hand to her throbbing heart, and her lips quivered as she repeated the words quickly and falteringly to herself. She did not wait a moment in her own room—only hung up her hat and wrap and hurried down-stairs. She was surprised to find Mary alone in the drawing-room, and to see by the clock that it was ten minutes to eleven.

'Mamma has gone to bed, Lena, and papa is in the library. You know Robert is not to be home to-night. Will you have anything to eat?' said Mary, jumping up.

'No, thank you.'

As Madeline softly closed the door she heard the opening and shutting of a door down-stairs. Herbert had gone straight to the library. Mary cast a keen glance at her friend as she advanced into the room, but was disappointed at the expressionless face of Lena Rayne. It was colourless and tired, but there was no flush, no brightening eye, nothing to tell of anything but extreme weariness.

'How utterly forlorn you look! Are you cold, dear? Come to mamma's chair. You have stayed star-gazing too long.'

'Have I? I am not cold. Sit down beside me here, Mary, quite close, and let us talk. This is how we used to sit at school.'

Mary had flung herself down on a cushion on the rug, and laid her head on Lena's knee. Her soft, large eyes were uplifted to her friend's sweet face, and there was a silent questioning in their depths.

'Well, had you a pleasant walk?' Mary asked, with the very slightest twinkle in her eye.

'We did not walk; we stood most of the time,' said Lena, laying her soft hand on Mary's bright head.

Oh, her heart went out to her! She could pray for ever on Mary's faithful love. But once more she must forget herself and do her best to smooth a thorny way for another. She knew that Mary had a certain pride of her own which would receive a blow to-night.

'I have a surprise for you, Mary.'

'Yes! I hoped so, and yet not quite a surprise. It is what I have been looking for,' Mary answered, with a most beautiful smile.

'I think not, dear, and I am afraid this surprise will not be quite pleasant. It concerns your brother Herbert.'

'And you, eh?' said Mary saucily. 'Come, I am quite ready to be father confessor.'

'No, it does not concern me, Mary. I cannot beat about the bush. You are to have a new sister, Mary.'

'Yes, my darling, the sister I have so long loved,' said Mary, and her arm stole round Madeline's waist.

'No, no!' Madeline withdrew herself almost rudely, but, remember, she had something to bear. 'No, no, you have made a great mistake, Mary. I shall always be your dear friend. If there is any little disappointment in your heart, Mary, you will not visit it on her.'

'On who?'

Mary drew herself back, and her eyes even flashed.

'On the girl who is to be your sister. Can you not guess?'

'Not that odious girl at Mileswood. Oh, surely Herbert has never been so imprudent as to speak or think seriously of her.'

'Yes, he has,' said Madeline softly, and she laid her hand again on Mary's head as if to still the tumult. 'And you are going to be to her what you have been to me, dearest, truest sister and friend, Mary. Don't be bitter, for I won't listen. You *must* do it all, Mary.'

'Why must I?' Mary would have risen, but for Lena's gentle detaining hand. 'Did he keep you out there to tell you he was in love with Jane Gregory?'

'Yes, and something more. They are married, Mary, and have been for two months.'

'Married!'

That was all Mary said. She looked straight at Madeline for a moment, then dropped her eyes, and for a long time not another word was spoken. She caught Lena's hand, and, pressing her hot cheek against it, held it there for a long time. These two understood each other; and when they rose at last, Mary had forgiven Jane Gregory for Madeline's sake.

CHAPTER XVI.

AT DAGGERS DRAWN.

WHEN Herbert Hazell went into the library that night, he found his father fast asleep in his chair. The flushed face and heavy breathing told what had caused that sleep, even had the door of the cabinet not revealed the secret store. He hesitated a moment, and then tried to awaken his father. It was not an easy task; the sleep of intoxication is more like a stupor than a natural slumber.

'Hey, what is it? It can't be morning already,' said the old man, at length opening his half-dazed eyes. 'That you, Ford? Ay, keep down the expenses. The lads must be taught to work before they spend. Holloa! it's you, Herbert. What do you want?' he asked, sitting up, as he gradually awakened.

'I wanted to speak to you, father.'

'Ay, what about? Money, I suppose — always money. I can't give you any. Ask Ford. He knows all about it. He says we can't afford to let Bob have the Priory. Something less will need to do him.

They'd eat me out of house and home, he says, and he's right. He's a shrewd chap, Ford. You hate him because he clips your wings. But he'll keep the old man right—ay, ay.'

A maudlin smile overspread the brewer's florid face, and his head began to droop again on his breast. Herbert looked on in pity and amazement. He had really no idea that his father ever indulged too freely. He had thought lightly of the sin of drunkenness, but it was a different matter to have it brought home in this fashion. Involuntarily he stepped back, shut the cabinet, and then turned the key in the library door. He felt that it would be a bitter humiliation to have any of the servants see the master in such a state. He hesitated then, not knowing what to do. He thought of Mrs. Hazell, of Mary, and of Madeline. He would keep it from them all if he could.

Mr. Hazell was not asleep, at least he kept muttering to himself, and his eyes were partially open. He was helplessly drunk.

Herbert sat down by the fire, wondering what to do. If only Robert were at home, he thought. Robert was never at a loss in any emergency. He did not know how long he sat in silence watching his father's troubled sleep, but at last the opening of a door up-stairs roused him. He rose, and went out into the hall, and met Madeline Rayne at the foot of the stair.

'Well?' she said, and a tremulous smile touched her lips. But he saw that she had been weeping.

'Where's Mary?' he asked.

'Just gone up-stairs. I came down for my book; I

He . . . met Madeline Rayne at the foot of the stair.—*Page* 138.

want to finish it before I sleep. It is Heine's poems. Will you bring it out of the library for me?'

For answer Herbert stepped back to the library door and turned the key, then motioned her to the dining-room.

'It seems as if you were made to help in every trouble,' he said, with visible agitation. 'My father has had too much wine. He is not fit to go up-stairs. I wonder if Mrs. Hazell is asleep?'

'I can go up and see. She generally sleeps very soundly in the early part of the night. What is Mr. Hazell doing?'

'He is dozing in his chair. If Mrs. Hazell is asleep, and would not be alarming herself about him, I would get him to lie down on the library couch. Wouldn't that be best?'

'Yes; I'll run up-stairs.'

She was gone as she spoke. With noiseless step she crept into Mrs. Hazell's room, and over to the bed. Yes, she was sound asleep, and there was a sweet smile on her face, as if pleasant dreams haunted her.

Very softly Madeline closed the door and ran down-stairs again.

'It would be a pity to awake her, she is sleeping so sweetly. I think you should try and get Mr. Hazell to lie down in the library.'

She spoke decidedly. Like Robert, she had always her wits about her in an emergency.

'Very well, I will do that; and if he sleeps till morning the servants will think he never awakened in the night. We need not tell. A little deception is

sometimes justifiable. What a queer household we are! There is nothing hid from you, Madeline. Do you not despise us?'

Madeline shook her head; she did not say what she thought and felt—that she loved them all, perhaps, too well.

'Did you tell Mary, then?' Herbert asked.

'Yes, I told Mary. She will be your friend and your wife's, Herbert. Did I not tell you that Mary always says and does just what is truest and best!'

'Yes, she is a good girl. I am not worthy such a sister and such a friend. When I think of what might have been I am unmanned.'

She waved her hand deprecatingly. Of what avail were such words now? She felt that they were not loyal to the absent wife, and yet she could not stem them. She was very tired, and her heart riven with its own pain. 'Good-night,' she said almost in a whisper, and glided from the room. She was yearning to be alone, but it seemed as if solitude were to be denied her, for Mary, with her dressing-gown on, was waiting anxiously at the top of the stairs.

'What an age you have been, Lena. What have you been doing?'

'Talking to Herbert for a moment. I am tired, Mary; I think I shall go to bed. Will you say good-night?'

'Poor Lena. I am very selfish, but I want to talk yet. There is something I want to say before I sleep. Let me come to your room just for a moment. The fire is out in mine. If I were the least inclined to

jealousy, Lena, I should be jealous of the attention the servants pay to you.'

'Come then,' Madeline answered, with a smile.

Mary did not sit down when they entered the room. She had her hair-brush in her hand, and began to brush out her hair before the mirror, with her back to her friend.

'Well, what is it you have to say yet?' asked Madeline at length. 'I am sure your hair does not need so much brushing.'

'Perhaps not,' said Mary absently. 'Lena, can you explain to me why Michael Ford should presume to propose to me.'

'Has he done so?'

'Well, he was very near it to-night, but I nipped him in the bud. He was not in the least disconcerted, Lena. It was the way he talked which I can't forget —one would have thought that the brewery was his instead of papa's. Do you think there is anything in him except conceit and presumption?'

'Yes, a good deal. He is not to be trusted, Mary, since you ask me for a plain opinion.'

'What do you think I should do?'

'Tell your brother Robert about it.'

Mary smiled.

'Ah! I see you know which of the boys is to be relied on in the day of trouble. Do you know, I feel just as if we were living on the top of a mine which may explode about us any day. There has been no lack of excitement lately. Do you know, I am very sorry for that poor girl, Lena. I shall go and see her to-morrow.'

'Herbert's wife?'

'Yes. How odd! and what a shame to think that he should have a wife unacknowledged by us! I have not been kind often in speaking about her. I shall try and make up for it now. Perhaps it will not be very difficult to love her.'

'There is something lovable in every one, Mary, and she is very pretty. You are very good and kind, my dear.'

'Am I? You don't know me. I am full of pride. You don't know the trial it will be to me to stop my ponies at Mileswood and go through the necessary ordeal. It will cost me more than you think to acknowledge Mrs. Herbert Hazell; but it will do me good. What pitiful creatures we are, Lena, setting ourselves up above each other! This may be a very wholesome lesson to me, Lena.'

'Perhaps. But I cannot say I think you needed it,' said Madeline.

'Oh, you don't know me. But there, I must have some humanity, and let you to bed. Why, how worn out you look! We forget you, my darling, in our selfish troubles. Good-night!'

She took the white, worn face in her hands and kissed it with peculiar tenderness. Perhaps she guessed something of the heartache underneath that sweet, calm exterior, but Mary Hazell had a delicacy too fine to hint at such a thing. But she did feel that her brother had not done fairly by Madeline Rayne, and she intended to tell him so when the fitting opportunity occurred.

Madeline Rayne sat still when Mary left her—very

still—with her hands clasped on her knee, and her deep eyes fixed on the dying fire. Her expression never changed, but it seemed to her that once more she had to set aside the sunny gleams which had been shed across her way of life, and take up the sober grey threads which were evidently destined to make the web of her existence. A helper of others; a witness, but not a partaker, of their joys; a sharer, mayhap, in their sorrows; a bearer of their burdens if she willed: must that be her destiny on earth? Perhaps her woman's heart failed her just a little, and yet she reproached herself for her complaining and her discontent.

'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.' To fulfil the law of Christ! Could she desire any higher aim in life? With these words ringing their changes in her ears, she fell asleep.

As was to be expected, Mr. Hazell was conspicuously irritable next morning. He explained that he had fallen asleep in the library, and seemed to feel aggrieved that no one had taken the trouble to arouse him. He seemed quite to have forgotten all about Herbert coming into the library and persuading him to lie down.

They went down to the brewery together. Herbert made up his mind that he would tell his father his momentous secret in the course of the day, though he saw well enough that, unless the master's temper was smoothed and softened, things were likely to go hard with him.

Robert had gone to Wigan to stay the night, without giving any explanation of his business there; but he

arrived at the brewery before eleven o'clock. He nodded to Herbert as he passed through the counting-house, and went straight into his father's room.

Mr. Hazell, suffering from a racking headache, was in one of his worst moods. He was angry with Robert for not being at hand to attend to the morning's correspondence, and turned upon him like a lion.

'Well, sir, if it suits you to come to business at midday, it doesn't suit me, and the sooner you learn that the better. What excuse or apology have you to make for yourself?'

'None, father. I am sorry if I have annoyed you. I don't take many holidays. I can still have the letters ready for the mail. Let me look at them,' said Robert in his quiet way, as he advanced to the table.

But Mr. Hazell's hand closed over the bundle of letters at his side.

'Ford can attend to them. He is always at his post. You must not think we can't dispense with your valuable services,' said Mr. Hazell, with a sneer.

Robert bit his lip. He did not often lose his temper, but he could not tolerate the very name of Michael Ford.

'I am glad you think so little of my services,' he said, with a lightness he was far from feeling. 'It makes my task easier. I resign my post in the brewery from to-day, though it is not very easy to define that post, sir.'

'Oh, you do, do you? Very well; and where do you suppose you are going to get a living now?'

'That is my concern, and I cannot expect that you

will take any interest in my welfare. You have so repeatedly repelled any confidence I offered to place in you,' said Robert, with a touch of sadness in his manly face.

'Oh, indeed!'

Mr. Hazell wheeled round in his chair, and turned his angry eyes full on his son's face.

'Pray, what confidence did you place in me? You asked me for an extravagant income, which I refused. There is time enough yet for you to marry, and if the girl really cares about you, she'll wait for you. She'll need to wait long enough now, in all conscience.'

'You are mistaken, sir. We intend to be married before Easter.'

'Oh!'

Mr. Hazell was thunderstruck.

'I have applied and obtained the situation of cashier at the Ladywell pits at Burnley. I went to Wigan last night, at Mr. Edwardes' request, and he has appointed me to the vacant place.'

'And I suppose you posed before Mr. Edwardes as an injured innocent, persecuted by a hard-hearted, tyrannical father? but'—

'You are mistaken, father. I told him nothing, except that I wished to leave the brewery.'

'And what salary are you to get?'

'Two hundred a year, and the house. It will do in the meantime.'

'It's a downcome from the Priory,' said Mr. Hazell drily. 'Well, you'll perhaps learn to regret your mercies there. It is just as they say,—as Ford has

often said,—a man toils to bring up a family, who give him only ingratitude in return. If I could see Edwardes, I'd give him the true version of the affair.'

Robert was silent a moment. There was something he was very anxious to speak about, yet he hesitated. He was no coward, but he had never quite overcome his childish fear and awe of his father. And yet he felt it his duty to speak.

'I hardly know how to word what I am going to say, I feel so certain you will misunderstand me,' he began. 'But I do think Ford has more influence here than any servant ought to have. I don't trust him. Father, you will be careful with him. Don't let him know your affairs too intimately.'

Mr. Hazell's lip curled.

'Leave me to manage my own business, if you please; I am not in my dotage,' he said cuttingly. 'I am thankful I have such a friend and counsellor as Michael Ford. He'll do more for me than my own flesh and blood.'

'Ay, in the meantime, but it is to serve his own ends,' said Robert, with more passion than he usually exhibited. 'I see what he is aiming at well enough. Do you know that he is actually aspiring to Mary's hand, father?'

'And why not? She might go farther and fare worse. A good, honest, gentlemanly fellow, who has brains to help him on. I tell you, Ford 'll be at the top of the tree yet.'

'Maybe, but it will be at your expense,' said Robert hotly. 'It is impossible to listen to you, sir, and be

calm. Give our Mary to that ignorant, self-conceited fellow! Oh, surely, sir, you will stop short of that!'

'I wish you'd stop short of impertinence, and get out of here, since you have resigned your post,' said Mr. Hazell testily, and pointing to the door as he spoke. 'You've had your say, you've tried your best to black-ball an honest fellow's character, and you haven't succeeded. I don't think any more of you for it, and you can tell Miss Meredith, with my compliments, that I wish her joy of her bargain.'

It was Mr. Hazell's habit often to speak without thinking; in moments of anger, indeed, he was hardly responsible; but every word stabbed his son to the heart. He turned on his heel without a word, and walked through the counting-house with his eyes on the ground. In the yard outside he met Michael Ford, who touched his hat to him with a bland smile.

'Fine morning, Mr. Robert. Hope you had a pleasant little trip.'

'Get out of my sight,' was the unexpected reply to Mr. Ford's friendly greeting, and without another word Robert Hazell passed out of the gates into the street.

CHAPTER XVII.

GATHERING CLOUDS.

'WHAT'S become o' Herbert this long time, Janie? He hasn't been here, I'm sure, for nigh a week.'

Mrs. Gregory was preparing the flour for her weekly baking, and the little kitchen at Mileswood was pleasantly warm with the heat from the oven. Jane was sitting on a low chair with her idle hands folded behind her head, and her eyes fixed on the fire. Her morning dress was not particularly tidy, and she had a little row of curl-papers along her brow. Her face was pale and sallow, and wore a discontented, anxious look.

'I'm sure I don't know, ma,' was all she answered; but she gave the cat a push with her foot as if the question irritated her.

'Your da's got worked up, Janie, till he's real mad,' continued Mrs. Gregory, as she vigorously mixed her flour. 'I shouldn't wonder if he goes up to Hazelwood himself. It was a mistake, Janie, and I wish I'd never let you go to your Aunt Susan's. It wouldn't have happened if you'd been at home.'

'It might an' it might not,' answered Janie carelessly. But pa needn't bother. It's no business of his, I suppose. It's me that's got the worst of it.'

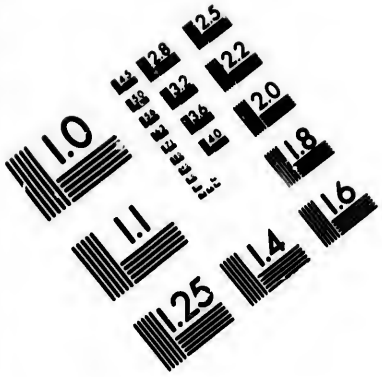
'That isn't a way to speak, my gel,' said Mrs. Gregory severely. 'You know you're the very apple o' your father's eye, let alone mine, an' you might have done better. There's young Higginbotham was quite gone about you, not to speak o' Jonas Butterby at the Bell Inn. Perhaps they aren't fine gentlemen, but they're honest chaps, an' they could ha' given you a good livin', which is more than the one you've got will ever be able to do, I doubt, if folks is to judge from appearances. The old man, of course, has a mint o' money, but will keep a tight hand on it, an' there's the missus 'll get a big haul. I wish it had never been, Janie. I doubt you'll never have peace o' mind about it. There's an awful pride about them Hazell's, I can tell you, and you'll find it out to your cost.'

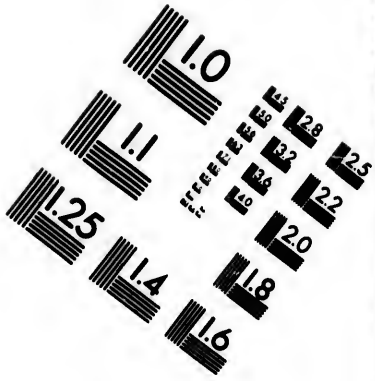
Janie made no reply, except to give the cat another push, which sent her away puffing in a passion.

'It's not easy for a mother to see a man ashamed o' her daughter, even after she's an honest wife,' continued Mrs. Gregory in an aggrieved voice, for it was a sore subject with her, 'an' her might ha' done so well.'

'I wish you'd hold your tongue, mother. I can't help it now. I wish I could recall the vows I said in that old church at Crossthwaite. It seems an awful thing that so little should bind one for life. I suppose I couldn't get out o' it now?'

'No, worse luck. Your father made sure it was all right whenever he knew of it. That's what comes o' doin' things on the sly, my gel, an' without asking an





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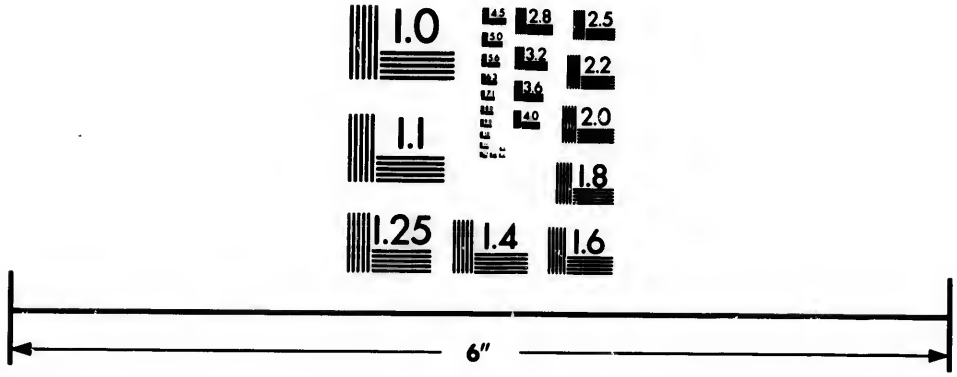

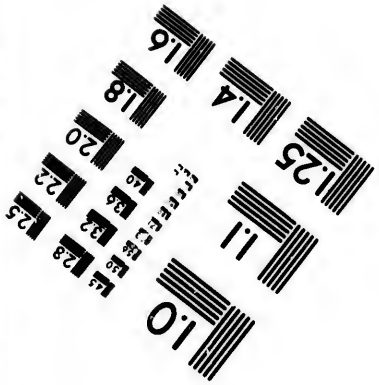

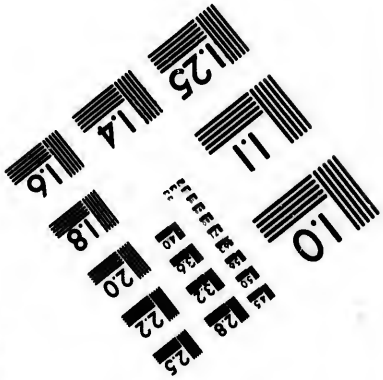

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advice. I suppose he rues it as well as you. I can't for the life o' me see why he should have married you at all; or what difference it has made. It's put an end to your sweetheartin', that's all. If he cared anything about you, Janie, he'd be as anxious to have you aside o' him as other men are. He'd never ha' rested till he got you a home all fair an' square.'

Jane Gregory clenched her hand on her knee, and one bitter tear started to her eye. That was the hardest of it all. She could have borne inattention, neglect even, if she had not been haunted with the thought that, if Herbert Hazell had ever cared for her, his love had died. He was her husband, and yet she scarcely dared think of him as such. The name, so dear to happy and cherished wives, had no meaning for her.

'An' what's to be the upshot o' it?' asked Mrs. Gregory in the same aggrieved voice. 'How long is this to go on? I wish you'd tidy up a bit, an' do summat for your meat, Janie. It's not nice to see a young girl so lazy and indifferent.'

'I wish you'd leave me alone. I wish I'd never been born,' retorted Janie quickly and passionately.

Just then Patty, the little 'help,' who had been washing the front door steps, came rushing in excitedly, and announced that there was a real carriage at the gate and that Miss Hazell was coming up the garden.

Janie jumped up, all her listlessness gone, and Mrs. Gregory instantly flew into a terrible flutter, and tossed off her baking apron. 'I'll take her into the parlour an' set a match to the fire while you make yourself decent. It's you she'll be wanting to see, likely.'

'No, mother, wait here. Now, Patty, there she's knocking. Go to the door, and if she asks for mother or me, take her into the parlour and set a match to the fire. And mind to shut the parlour door after you when you come out, so as I'll get up-stairs to change my dress,' said Janie quietly. 'Do you understand me? don't forget a thing I have told you. See, take off that dirty apron. Now, off you go.'

Patty, quite overwhelmed with a sense of her own importance, proceeded out to the lobby again, and Jane Gregory stationed herself behind the kitchen door, which was a little ajar, so that she could hear what passed at the front door.

Patty delivered her message quite correctly, and, when Miss Hazell asked for Miss Gregory, ushered her straight into the parlour.

'I'd better go in, Janie,' said Mrs. Gregory in a loud whisper. 'I'm quite decent. It's a shocking shame to leave the young lady by herself till you get ready, and very ill-bred as well.'

'Don't go, mother, if you please,' said Janie so earnestly that her mother could not deny her. 'I won't be a minute. I'll just take out my hair, and put on an apron, without changing my frock at all.'

It was not very easy for Mrs. Gregory to keep away from the room where Miss Hazell was, but she saw that Janie was very anxious to meet Miss Hazell alone, so she contented herself with an admiring peep through the glass door at the brougham waiting outside the gate, and then betook herself up-stairs to Janie's room.

'Now, whatever you do, don't let her trample on you.

Remember, she's your own sister-in-law, an' that you're as good as she,' said Mrs. Gregory, seating herself on a trunk, and speaking with energy. 'I really wish you'd let me come in. I'd set her right about that in two minutes.'

'It's because I'm afraid you'll say too much I don't want you to go in,' answered Janie, as she deftly arranged her hair. 'Perhaps she doesn't know anything about it, and, if she doesn't, I won't tell her. I'll maybe come out for you after I see what she wants.'

Jane Gregory was very much excited. There was a red spot on her cheek, and her hands trembled as she fastened on her apron. She did not know what this visit might portend, and she shook with nervous apprehension when she went down-stairs to the parlour.

The door was close, but not shut, so that she entered noiselessly. Mary Hazell was standing at the window with her back to the door. In spite of the intense feeling of the moment, Jane Gregory noted the graceful outline of her figure, the exquisite draping of her tailor-made gown, the perfect fit of the little sealskin jacket. Everything was plain to severity, but most ladylike and becoming. Mary Hazell had a perfect taste in dress.

'You wish to see me, Miss Hazell,' she said timidly. Indeed, her voice sank almost to a whisper.

Instantly Mary turned round, and advanced with extended hand. 'Yes, I wish to see you, my brother's wife. Had I known, I should have come long ago.'

Mary spoke a trifle quickly, for she felt the ordeal keenly; but her eyes were kind, the pressure of her hand firm and true. The greeting was so unexpected that

Jane Gregory burst into tears. Mary drew her gently to the sofa, and made her sit down. She felt nervous herself, and very sorry for the girl.

'Don't be so distressed,' she said in her kind way, and she laid her hand on her shoulder.

'I'm very sorry!' sobbed Jane Gregory. 'I ought never to have done it; but I didn't think. You shouldn't be so kind to me.'

'Why not?' Mary smiled as she asked the question. 'It is we who have been unkind to you. But it will be all right now.'

'Do they all know at Hazelwood? I did not know Herbert meant to tell.'

'Mamma knows. She sent her love to you, and she will come to see you when she is able if you do not come first to see her,' said Mary cheerfully.

'What did Mr. Hazell say? Was he very angry?'

'He doesn't know yet, but he will to-day,' said Mary quickly. 'He may be a little angry, but it will soon pass. But tell me why you didn't marry in the ordinary way. Was there any use for all this secresy?'

Jane Gregory hung her head. She felt ashamed before Mary Hazell's calm, serene eyes.

'I don't know. I wouldn't do it again. How can you speak so kindly to me when I have behaved so badly to you? I know I am not so good as you, nor fit to be friends with you.'

How quickly did Jane Gregory's pride and boastful independence melt away before Mary Hazell's smile. She could have knelt and kissed her feet, she was so grateful for her kind, sweet, womanly words.

'Oh, hush! of course we are going to be very friendly. You and Herbert must set up house at once, and what fun it will be furnishing and setting it in order! I hope you are a trifle more practical than either he or I, or the result will be rather doubtful.'

'How different you are from what I thought!' exclaimed Jane Gregory, or Jane Hazell, as we must now call her.

'Different — how?'

'Oh, just. I used to think you so proud and haughty when I saw you driving past. I was jealous of you, and afraid of you too.'

'Afraid of me! I am very harmless,' said Mary, with a laugh. 'But I am not nearly so good as you think, as you will soon find out, if Herbert has not told you already.'

'He didn't speak much about you. He hated me asking questions about Hazelwood, and I couldn't help being interested, you know. Will it not be a great trial for you all to have everybody know I am his wife?'

'Oh no! Why should we be ashamed of you? I hope Herbert will be good to you, my dear, and that you will be very happy,' said Mary, as she rose.

'Won't you see ma? She'll be dreadfully disappointed if you don't speak to her. She's been awful angry with me about it, and so has father.'

Mary would rather have excused herself, but perhaps she had better go through the whole ordeal at once; so Mrs. Gregory was summoned to the parlour. She had been concocting quite an eloquent speech for Miss Hazell's benefit, but somehow it vanished clean out of

her memory at sight of Mary's sweet face and kind smile. And all that the good mother could do was to clasp the dainty gloved hand in both her own, and repeat, with tears in her eyes, that she was proud and glad to see her.

So the ordeal passed off better than any of them had anticipated, and Mary left the house leaving sunshine behind her. Just as she was about to step into the brougham, she saw Robert in the distance walking quickly up the river-side from the town. She told the man to wait, and walked on to meet him. It was so unusual for Robert to be without the precincts of the brewery in business hours that she felt curious to learn the cause. When she came near him, she saw that his face wore an unusually anxious and troubled look.

'I could hardly believe that it was you, Robert. Are you going home?' she said, when she joined him.

'No, I'm going to Clieveden.'

'Across the moor?'

'Yes. Couldn't you send Pillans home, and walk with me a bit.'

'Yes, I can.'

'What were you doing in at Gregory's?'

'Seeing Jane,' said Mary, and suddenly her eyes overflowed. 'Oh, Robert, such a thing has happened! We seem to be all going wrong. Herbert has been married to her for more than three months.'

'Married to whom?'

'Jane Gregory.'

'Impossible!'

'Quite true. Oh, Pillans, just go into town, and

give Mrs. Hazell's orders without me. Perhaps I shall get you coming back.'

Pillans touched his hat, and drove away. He was puzzling himself over his young mistress's call at Mileswood. Of course he had not a suspicion of the truth.

Arm in arm the brother and sister turned round by Gregory's garden wall, and over the stile into the moor. It was a fine winter morning. The hoar-frost still shone on the short smooth turf, though the sun had melted the scattering on the leafless trees.

'Yes, we're all going wrong, Molly,' said Robert Hazell, with a sigh, as if the thing weighed on his heart. 'Herbert married to Jane Gregory! Oh, impossible!'

'It's quite true. He told Madeline last night. He is to tell papa to-day.'

'I thought, and was hoping, he was learning to care for Madeline, Molly.'

'So was I. Oh, it would have been splendid. But I am sorry for the girl.'

'So you went to see her whenever you found it out. Bless your kind heart, Molly! Papa will not be pleased about it.'

'I am afraid not. Don't you think, Robert, that papa has changed very much of late. He was not always so irritable.'

'He has changed. It has come to an open rupture between us. I have spent my last day in the brewery, Mary.'

Mary never spoke, but her lips trembled. 'I was at Wigan last night seeing Mr. Edwardes, and I have accepted the situation of cashier at the Ladywell Mines at a salary of two hundred a year and a house.'

'And you will go away to Burnley to live, I suppose.'

'Yes, Lucy and I together. We shall be married before Easter.'

'You will be very happy, happier even, I think, than you would have been at the Priory, because your conscience will be clear. It is we who are left who will miss you.'

'I hope papa will not hinder you from coming to see us at Burnley.'

'Oh, I hope not; surely not. Herbert will have to leave the house too, and set up a home for his wife. How changed Hazelwood will be!'

'You will not leave it for a while, Mary?'

'I! Oh, never. Madeline and I will be stationary there for ever,' said Mary lightly. 'I hope this will make no difference to her. Herbert has not acted very fairly by her.'

'No, he hasn't. His conduct has neither been manly nor right. He was true neither to one nor another. He is deplorably weak, Mary. He needs a woman like Miss Rayne to make something of him. What kind of person is his wife?'

'I hardly know. I only saw her for a few minutes.'

There was a moment's silence.

'Mary, do you think father takes too much sometimes?'

'I have been afraid of it,' Mary answered in a low voice, as if she felt ashamed to own it.

'Mrs. Hazell does not suspect it?'

'I don't think it. It would grieve her very much.'

'You might watch, Mary.'

'I'll try.'

'There is another thing. I hate to speak of it to you, dear, but it will ease my mind. I have suspected what brings Ford so much to the house. You don't encourage him, Mary?'

'I?'

Mary's face flushed with indignation.

'It is wrong to hate any one, Robert, but I do hate him. It makes me ill to have him talk to me.'

'Has he ever hinted anything to you?'

'Yes, last night, when we were walking home from the mothers' meeting. I endured him only for Madeline and Herbert's sake. Had I known what I know now, I should have acted differently. But I think I have given Mr. Ford his lesson.'

'He has too much influence with father. I don't know whether I am doing right to leave the brewery. I was a kind of check on Ford. I am confident that it is Ford who has put my father so much against us. But father is very obstinate. It is not easy to have the patience with him that one ought. Won't you come all the way to Clieveden?'

'Not to-day. Give Lucy my love. You will be home as usual to dinner?'

'Oh yes! Surely my father won't grudge me house-room for a day or two in spite of his anger. Good-morning, dear.'

'Good-morning.'

They were beyond the reach of any observant eye, so they kissed each other as they parted. Mary retraced her steps with a heavy heart.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

MRS. HERBERT HAZELL was sitting at the parlour window that afternoon about four o'clock. She was looking her best. Miss Hazell's visit had infused new life into her, and she felt she had something to live for. She had the good opinion of her husband's kindred to earn, and she told herself that she would spare no pains to commend herself to them. She was pleased and happy as she sat there sewing busily, and watching for Herbert to pass. Her face looked sweet and tender as if none but happy thoughts reigned in her heart. She had a more womanly ambition than of yore, an ambition to be a good, true wife, a great desire to be more like Mary Hazell. It was just four, when, lifting her head from her sewing, she saw her husband crossing the bridge. He was walking very fast, and had his head in the air. Even at such a distance she saw that his face was flushed, and that he seemed excited. She began to tremble, fearing that some new complication had arisen. He nodded and smiled to her at the garden gate, and

came striding into the house without knocking. She met him at the parlour door, and looked at him almost imploringly. He put his arm round her, and drew her to his side. The caress was so spontaneous and so affectionate that involuntarily the tears started to her eyes.

As we know, Herbert had not been all he should have been to her of late. 'My wifie,' he said, with real tenderness. 'Never mind, we'll stick together through thick and thin, and show them all yet what stuff we're made of.'

She was unable to speak, but her apprehension vanished when he spoke to her like that. She felt that it would be happiness to beg her bread with him so long as he kept her by his side. She truly loved him — perhaps better than he deserved. But we will hope to see a man made of Herbert yet.

'I told the gov., and there's been an awful row. He says he'll never speak to me again. But I don't care. I'll show him I'm not the useless cad he takes me for. By Jove, Janie, he gave it us hot.'

That was all he told her. He did not say that his father's ungentlemanly abuse of the girl his son had married had roused the latent spark of chivalry in the young man's breast. If Mr. Hazell had spoken plainly, he had also been obliged to listen to some plain speaking, for Herbert had not his brother's self-control, and could sometimes send an arrow straight to the mark.

'He says we'll die in the workhouse. Well, we'll see, my wifie,' repeated Herbert, looking down into the tearful face on his shoulder. 'How nice you are looking!

Do you know, I believe I'm going to fall in love with you again on the head of it—eh?'

'I feel ever so nice. This has been such a delightful day. Your sister came in the morning.'

Herbert whistled.

'Molly! Did she though? And how did you and she get on?'

'Very well. How very nice she is, Herbert! I have misjudged her badly; and she is far more beautiful than I thought her.'

'And what did you get to say to each other? It must have been rather a queer meeting.'

'Oh no, it all came about naturally. She is quite a lady, and so she put me at my ease. I am going to try and be more like her, Herbert.'

'Are you? Molly is a Tartar sometimes, too,' said Herbert, with a smile. 'Well, suppose we sit down here and face this out. We're married, aren't we?'

'Yes, I think so.'

'Well, we're married, point one; we have not a cent in the world, point two; we've got our living to make, point three; how is it to be done? point four. What would you suggest, Janie?'

'I don't know, and I don't care,' was Janie's very unpractical reply to these several questions.

'Well, then, I've got to see about it, and I will,' said Herbert, with a new and delightful decision. 'Shall I tell you what I made up my mind for coming up from the brewery?'

'Yes.'

'Well, in the first place, Jamie, we must have another wedding in St Nicholas.'

'Oh!'

'Yes, a right wedding, with bridesmaids and everything up to the mark. I'm going to show Medlington that I'm not ashamed of my wife, though I have not treated her very well for a while. But you'll forgive me, won't you, Jamie?'

'Yes, oh yes! there's nothing to forgive,' cried the happy girl. 'But what has changed you so, Herbert? You are quite different.'

'I've been a mean sneak, Jamie, but I'll tell you all about it—yes, everything, by and by, when we are right married and away together,' he answered, with a new earnestness. 'Do you think you could trust me now, Jamie, after all the way I've done? Do you think you would go away with me, and believe that I would do the very best for you that I could?'

'I'll go to the end of the earth with you without asking a question if you'll only care for me like this,' cried Jamie, flinging her ambition to the winds.

'I'm not worth it, but I'll show you that I can mean what I say as well as say what I don't mean. Well, after we are married we'll go abroad somewhere and start with all our might. See if I don't make my fortune some day soon, and then we'll come back and give Medlington a surprise.'

'And would you think of doing this soon, Herbert?'

'Yes, it must be done at once, dear, because, you see, I'm paid off, and I don't suppose my father will let me stop on at home. Perhaps I'll need to put up at Bob's

digs at Burnley. I say, Jamie, before very long there'll be a new sign up at the brewery, and do you know what'll be on it? Hazell & Ford. The latter gentleman is the head of the concern as it is.'

'If you think so, I wonder you are both leaving. I wouldn't go off and let that Ford get everything his own way,' said Jamie shrewdly.

'That's uncommon like what I've been thinking myself, but I'm not much use, even if my father would let me have a say in the business. The fact is, I must stand on my own legs now, Jamie, if I've ever to do any good. That's the mistake that's been made with us all our lives. We've never been allowed to have the least responsibility in anything. It makes a young fellow very indifferent, and yet Bob has turned out splendidly in spite of it all.'

'Isn't he very solemn and stern, Herbert? He quite looks it.'

'Oh no, he's the best fellow in the world, and, though he is at Burnley, will keep an eye on the brewery, I know. But I have not told you yet that Bob got, or has taken, his leave too, and that he's going to be Edwardes' cashier at Ladywell at two hundred a year. When the governor told me a little ago, it nearly stunned me.'

'Two hundred a year! How will Miss Meredith like that?'

'She'll like it better than the Priory and a big income from the brewery, as you know, and Bob has had his scruples for a while.'

'Well,' said Jamie, with a curious thoughtfulness,

'when one comes to think of it, drink *does* a lot of harm. Why, what a lot I could name among my acquaintances who have gone all wrong together! There is something mean and horrid in making one's living by it.'

Herbert was silent. Perhaps he had never seriously considered it.

'And I don't think, Herbert, that we should begin with it; I mean keeping it in the house. It just brings a lot of folk about for it. I've often heard pa say that, and it's quite true.'

'As you'll have the keeping of the house, you can please yourself about that matter, Janie,' said Herbert lightly, and yet his eye grew grave as he spoke. He remembered suddenly some of Madeline Rayne's earnest pleading. How very often had she urged upon him the duty of total abstinence in the many talks they had had together!

'And you really want another wedding?' said Janie, breaking the silence, and a pleased, happy smile touched her lips. 'My, what a stir it'll make in Medlington! Do you think your folks 'll be pleased?'

'Some of them won't, but Bob will be my best man, I know, and Mary will come if father will let her. Mary and her friend'——

'Miss Rayne. You think a great deal of her, don't you?' asked Janie, with a slight wistfulness which was almost pathetic.

'Think! I'll tell you what I think. She's one of the best women that ever lived,' said Herbert in a low voice. 'But we won't speak about that. I'll tell you everything by and by; but as long as we both live,

Janie, we'll never have a truer friend, nor one who'll wish us better than Madeline Rayne. And now, how soon can you get your finery ready? I want you to look as beautiful as possible that day, you know, because there'll be so many staring eyes.'

Again Janie's vague discontent vanished. The very thought that he was proud of her, that he really wished her to look well, was like a draught of wine to her heart. So they rambled off into a talk about ways and means, and two hours slipped away before they knew where they were. Mr. Gregory came home to tea at six o'clock, and then Herbert rose to go.

'Just go out for a few minutes, Janie, while I speak to your father,' said Herbert, noticing the slight frown on Miles Gregory's face.

Janie was very glad to slip away, and, running into the kitchen, she threw her arms round her mother's neck, and cried that she was the very happiest girl in the whole world.

'Well, sir?' said Miles Gregory shortly and brusquely, for he was inclined to be very angry with Herbert Hazell, who, he considered, had played very idly with his daughter's feelings.

'I want to make an explanation to you, Mr. Gregory,' said Herbert, with a more manly air than the tavern-keeper had ever seen him assume before.

'Well, and it's about time, sir, that something was said. There's a deal to be said on my side at least,' was his significant reply.

'I have to-day told my father that I am married to Janie.'

'Quite time, too,' was his unpromising retort.

'He was, as I expected, frightfully angry, and he has, if I may so put it, given me notice to quit his employment.'

'Very kind of him. And what are you going to do now?'

'That is what I wish to speak about, Mr. Gregory. I ask your pardon for the way in which I have treated your daughter, and I assure you I intend to show by my actions the sincerity of my regret for the past.'

'Fair words, young man; but what do they mean?' said Miles Gregory cautiously. It is probable that he feared some demand on his purse. Remember his past experience of Herbert Hazell. He had not had occasion to form a very high estimate of his character, and could hardly be expected to give him credit for the best motives on immediate notice.

'I have had a long talk with Janie. With your permission and Mrs. Gregory's, we should like to be re-married in St. Nicholas' Church, before the eyes of all Medlington.'

'Oh!'

Mr. Gregory was very much surprised.

'Is this to spite the old un?' he asked, with an unpleasant twinkle in his eye.

Herbert winced.

'Not quite. I wish to atone to Janie for what I did before. She shall have her dues now if she will take them.'

'And after, what are you going to live on?'

'We intend to go abroad.'

Mr. Gregory looked askance.

'I don't approve of that. She's all we've got; and, besides, what guarantee would her mother or me have that you would have a good way for her? She's been well brought up. She can't rough it, and she won't. There!'

'She's my wife, Mr. Gregory,' said Herbert, drawing himself up a little, for the man's tone was very offensive. 'If she is willing to trust me, nobody can come between us, sir.'

Gregory was more amazed than ever. Hitherto young Hazell had been very pliable. He had rather despised him; but there was more in him than had yet been revealed.

'Heigh ho! So we're going to ride our high horse now, are we?' he said jestingly. 'Well, I'll not say but what I like the style of your talk better than I've ever liked anything I've heard you say before. It shows you mean to stand up for the girl. That being so, I'm quite open to reason, and I'll help you all I can. What's the use of the money we've gathered if it wasn't for to make our only child happy. But I set my foot firm on Janie going abroad. *You* may if you like, but she won't.'

Herbert smiled a little. Perhaps he knew that nothing in the world would make Janie stay behind. But he did not say so.

'I'll tell you what I'll do, though,' said Gregory presently. 'I'll keep my eyes open, and when there's a tidy little business in the spirit line for sale I'll stump up. You can pay all back when the profits increase. There's money in the business, Hazell, as you know.'

Herbert was silent a moment, not knowing what to say.

'Just look at Butterby at the Bell Inn. He's worth five or six thousand if he's worth a penny,' continued Miles Gregory, rubbing his hands together. 'And I suppose I don't need to say anything to you about the tidy sum her ladyship up at Mount Pleasant pockets every year out of the "Base-Ball"?

'I wouldn't keep a place like the "Base-Ball," not if it gave me thousands in return,' cried Herbert hotly.

'Oh, indeed! mighty fine! It's not so long since you thought the "Base-Ball" a pretty snug corner. Pray, what *would* you deign to do for a living, since an honest trade's beneath you? It's only another branch of the trade which keeps up Hazelwood and all its pride and style, and if there *is* anything mean or bad in it, why, the brewery 'll get the hardest judgment, because it's the biggest concern. I'm bound to say that as many mother's sons have gone off the straight through Hazell's as at the "Base-Ball." *Is* it going to be all talk with you, then, as it has always been, since the first time we set eyes on you? What I wish is that you'd never set eyes on our gel. She'd have done a thousand times better if you'd let her alone.'

'I see there is no use talking to you just now, Mr. Gregory, so I'll go away home, and see what's to be done. I'll look down to-morrow, and perhaps we'll be able to understand each other better, so good-night.'

CHAPTER XIX.

A CRISIS.

MARY HAZELL was sitting in the library window, idle, with her eyes fixed on the autumn-coloured trees in the park, and the sad sky visible through the thinning boughs. It was the month of October, and the year was on the wane. An open letter, written on sheets of foreign notepaper, lay upon her lap. She had read it through, and she was thinking over what it contained. Her face was paler and thinner than of yore; the past summer had been one of deep anxiety and harassing care for Mary Hazell. Her expression at that moment, however, was bright, for the contents of her Australian letter had pleased her well. It was a good thing to read of others' prosperity and bright happiness when her own heart was so heavy. The shadows were gathering very darkly round Hazelwood, and the night was closing in.

The chiming of the clock warned her that the dinner hour was approaching, so, gathering up her letter, she left the room, and proceeded up-stairs. She looked into

the drawing-room, expecting to find Madeline there, but it was empty. Opening the door of Mrs. Hazell's dressing-room, she found both ladies sitting by the fire. Mrs. Hazell was in her easy chair, looking very frail; Madeline Rayne, still an inmate, nay, now like a dear daughter of the house, had been reading aloud, but the light had stolen away from the room, already the shadows of an early twilight were falling about them where they sat.

'Come in, dear. We were wondering, Lena and I, where you had flown,' said Mrs. Hazell, looking round with her sweet, kind, patient smile. But for these two girls Eleanor Hazell's life had been one of curious trial. But there was love, and trust, and sweet companionship always between these three.

'I am very selfish. Instead of bringing Bertie's long letter up here, I stole away to the library to enjoy it all by myself,' said Mary brightly. 'We have half an hour to talk about it here. He writes in such splendid spirits, dear boy.'

'I forgot this was the mail day,' said Mrs. Hazell. 'And they are getting on very nicely still, are they?'

'Yes, mamma. Your cousin has raised Herbert's salary fifty pounds, and as a consequence he has bought Janie a new piano. It is delightful to read their letter. They are so happy and proud of each other. Who would ever have thought it was our ne'er-do-weel turning into such a splendid fellow? Lena, here is your little bit marked private, but I am not going to be in the least bit jealous.'

As she spoke she handed Madeline the tiny square

envelope which had been enclosed in hers. Madeline smiled and slipped it into her pocket. She would read it by and by.

'Bertie says he never was so well off nor so happy in his life, mamma,' said Mary presently. 'He also says Janie is a trump, and the best wife any man ever had. To think that they are so much to each other, and doing so well in Victoria! Isn't it delightful, dear mamma?'

'It is indeed,' returned Mrs. Hazell, and her eyes filled with tears.

'He cannot write sufficiently about Mr. Latrobe's kindness. He could not have got on so fast, nor so well, had he not had your introduction. Altogether, circumstances have made a man of our Bertie.'

'I wonder if papa would let me read this letter to him,' said Mary after a moment's silence. 'I mean to speak to him about the boys this very night. Mamma, I am just dying to see Bob and Lucy. I am going to tell papa to-night that I am going over to Burnley to-morrow.'

'My dear, he will be very angry,' said Mrs. Hazell timidly, and her face flushed with nervousness.

Mary laid down Herbert's letter and came nearer Mrs. Hazell's chair. Her face was flushed a little, too, but her mouth was very resolute.

'Mamma, I have been thinking a great deal about things lately, and praying over them too,' she said, with a little sob in her voice. 'And I do think that we give in far too much to papa. It cannot be right to be so obedient, when one's conscience tells one what is right.

Robert has done no harm; he has always been the best son ever any man had. And, mamma, it is not papa's real self who is so tyrannical and angry with us. It is the evil influence which is always bear. ; on him that we have to deal with, and I have made up my mind that I am not going to stand by in silence any more. Listen, mamma and Lena: I am going to fight now, and I mean to be the victor.'

She smiled then, but it was a melancholy and tremulous smile, from which tears were not far removed.

'Oh, my darling, we have had a great deal of fighting already,' said Mrs. Hazell quickly. 'What if your father were to put you away too. He made very short work of the boys.'

'Yes, but he'll find me a tougher subject to deal with,' said Mary grimly. 'There is one human being in the world with whom I would like to be even before I die, and I'm going to begin my campaign to-night. It is perfectly awful to me to stand by and see papa becoming such a wreck. I am going to save him if I can.'

There was something noble and sweet in Mary's whole bearing as she said this. She stood up, held back her dainty head, and her eyes flashed. Her listeners knew right well what she meant, and an admiring gleam shone in the eyes of Madeline Rayne. She had waited in hope for this awakening. Mary alone could save Hazelwood. Perhaps the time had now come.

'Something must be done, and that soon,' said Mary,

speaking more quickly, but with equal decision. 'The feeling among the people has reached a terrible height. I am afraid to go to the Rows now. We shall have a strike soon, or something worse. I could not blame them, they are so terribly oppressed.'

'I have wondered,' said Madeline, speaking for the first time, 'that it is safe for the manager to go abroad. They hate him so much that it is a marvel they have done him no harm.'

'He may go a step beyond,' said Mary, and her fair face flushed. 'There will come a day when Medlington will not be a safe place for Mr. Michael Ford.'

At that moment a servant knocked at the door.

'The master has come in, Miss Mary, and wishes to speak to you,' she said.

Mary smiled, and bent over Mrs. Hazell's chair.

'Keep up your courage, dear mamma. I feel as if this crisis were nearly past. Brighter days are in store, I am sure, for Hazelwood, and for us all.'

So saying, she left the room.

'Dear, bright, brave Mary!' said Mrs. Hazell, when the door closed upon her. 'Oh, Lena, if her father should sacrifice her would it not be a cruel shame?'

'Sacrifice her! Do not fear, dear Mrs. Hazell,' said Madeline cheerfully. 'Mary will never sacrifice herself to Michael Ford.'

'Oh, this cruel drink!' sighed Mrs. Hazell. 'It has utterly ruined Mr. Hazell. Don't you remember, Lena, even when you came to us first, what a clear intellect and strong, sound judgment he had. He is terribly changed. I hope we are not too hard on that man.

Mr. Hazell constantly tells me how invaluable he is to him, but I do suspect sometimes that Mr. Ford encourages him in his secret sin. Mr. Hazell drinks at the office now, Lena, and we cannot keep it from him there!'

It had come to this, then. Mr. Hazell's fall was discussed by the women of his household as an established fact. It was, alas! no longer a secret.

'It is nearly six, Mrs. Hazell; dinner will be served immediately,' said Madeline, after a moment's silence. She had nothing to say in reply to the suspicion uttered by the anxious wife. She knew it was only too well founded. 'Will you come down to-night?' she added, looking affectionately at her pale, sad face.

'I think not. I am very tired. But never mind me. Run and get ready. Mr. Hazell does not like to wait.'

'He never has to wait for me. Mary is the delinquent,' laughed Madeline, as she left the room. She took her letter from her pocket, and, creeping to a little corner window in the corridor, sat down on the broad ledge to read it by the last feeble light from the yellow west. It was very short, but it brought a very sweet and tender smile to her lips as she read it.

'Dear Madeline,' it began, in Herbert's clear, bold handwriting, 'you will be hearing the good news from Mary, but Janie and I feel that we would like to write one little line just to tell you how happy we are, and how we bless God for His goodness to us. When I look back, Madeline, I am amazed that so much goodness and mercy should have followed me here. Janie

and I have long talks now, and I have told her how you used to speak to me, my first, best friend. It was you (and Janie knows and loves you for it) who first awakened in me the desire to live a better life. I think you will be glad to know that I have remembered every word you ever said to me, and that I am trying, as you so often urged me, to make a man of myself. I could write a great deal more, but Janie (bless her! the dearest wife in the world) is at my elbow, and she says I am using up all the paper before she has written a single word. So the next sentence will be hers.'

'Dear Miss Rayne,—I have read what Herbert says, and I only want to add that every word is in my heart too. I thank you over and over for what you did for him. It was after you came to Hazelwood he began to change. He is so kind and good to me, and makes me so happy. I fear I am not so good a wife as he says, though it is very sweet to know he thinks I am. But I do try, dear Miss Rayne, to be a good woman. I am so grateful for the happiness I have in my home. God bless you. Some day, perhaps, you will come here and see us. Oh, what a day that would be for Herbert and me!—Your true friend,

'JANE HAZELL.'

So that was Madeline Rayne's reward, and it sent her to her own room with a song in her heart.

Meanwhile, a very different scene was being enacted in the library.

Mary found her father there, walking up and down in that nervous, excited way which had characterized

him of late. Yes, the master of Hazelwood was much changed. He had grown very stout, but the vigour of health had left him. His eyes were bleared and dim, his mouth had an unsteady twitching, his hands trembled, even while he made an effort to keep them still. Two years' continuous secret drinking had left its mark on the master of Hazelwood. Mary saw at once that he was more excited than usual, and a curious calmness took possession of her.

'Well, papa,' she said cheerfully, 'what is it? Could it wait till after dinner? It is close on six o'clock.'

'No, it can't wait—dinner can. Ford is coming up. I hope you have something decent to set before him,' said Mr. Hazell irritably.

'Shall I tell you what I ordered?' asked Mary banteringly. 'Kidney-soup, beefsteak pie, and mutton-cutlets, cabinet pudding and apple tart. I believe that is our bill of fare for to-day.'

She spoke lightly to hide her deep, almost painful anxiety. She felt that a crisis was indeed at hand.

'Humph! it'll need to do, I suppose,' said Mr. Hazell. Then he fixed his unsteady eyes keenly on his daughter's sweet, flushed face. 'You'd better put a silk gown on. I suppose you have one.'

'Yes, I have two; but I shall not put on either to-night, papa,' said Mary. 'If Mr. Ford doesn't like to sit down with us as we are, he can just go away home. I don't suppose he is accustomed to dine every evening in full dress.'

Mr. Hazell frowned.

'You have never been civil to Michael Ford, Mary, though I have repeatedly enjoined you to be attentive to him. He has been invaluable to me, and I have now in a measure rewarded him. I have signed a deed of co-partnery with Mr. Ford to-day, Mary, so you will please to remember that it is my partner you are to entertain.'

Mary curled her lip, but spoke not a word. She was afraid to trust her voice lest she should say something unbecoming to her father.

'I had better go and tell mamma and Lena to dress also then, papa, and tell the cook to keep dinner back half an hour. Will that do?'

'Yes. Is your mother coming down to-night?'

'Not to the dining-room; Mr. Ford will see her upstairs,' said Mary, beginning to move towards the door.

'Wait a moment,' said Mr. Hazell, with a visible increase of nervousness; 'there is another thing I want to speak to you about. Of course, you know well enough it is you Ford comes here to see?'

'I have not given it a thought,' said Mary, with her hand on the door.

'Well, you'll need to think about it now. He has asked and obtained my permission to pay his addresses to you, and I beg of you to be sensible about it. You'll never get a better husband, nor one more devoted, than him. In fact, he thinks far too much of you.

Again Mary's lip curled in matchless scorn.

'Do I understand you to say, papa, that Mr. Ford intends asking me to marry him, and that you wish me to accept him?'

'Yes; and why not? Where would you get a better?'

'I won't do it,' said Mary quite quietly, but with unmistakable decision.

'You won't! But you must! Ford's my partner, and a most worthy—in fact, a splendid—fellow! You don't know what you're doing, girl. Why, you're nearly five-and-twenty, and you've never had an offer.'

'I don't mind though I were five-and-fifty, papa,' said Mary, with a swift, indignant smile. 'If there is a man in the world I despise and detest, it is Michael Ford; and very well he knows it. I don't think he can have forgotten what I said to him two years ago on the road from Medlington. I remember it, at any rate, and it will save trouble, papa, if you tell him that my sentiments are unchanged.'

Mr. Hazell's face grew purple with anger.

'You're a fool, girl, and you don't know what you're doing,' he said hoarsely. 'You must marry Ford; there's no other way out of it. I can't do without him. I've offered him money, and I thought that this partnership would satisfy him; but it's you he wants, and you must have him.'

'Refer him to me, papa,' said Mary in cold, calm tones, 'and I'll let him have the benefit of a few plain truths.'

'If you do—if you dare,' cried Mr. Hazell hoarsely, 'I—I don't know what he'll do! He has the power to ruin us, I believe! He's got everything into his hands since the boys left here, and he can do what he likes with the whole concern.'

It was a pitiable confession, and Mary, even in her horror and indignation, could not but be touched by her father's appearance. He had aged of late, and had grown very helpless.

'I haven't the head I used to have for business, Mary, and I don't understand things as I should. But I know Ford is invaluable. He has made the thing pay. Of course he has pocketed a big share, but he deserved it. I believe if we were to quarrel with him he'd make the thing a smash, and I shouldn't have a penny left. He's that kind of man, Mary. I believe it would be to our advantage to keep him right. Could you try and tolerate him? He's afraid of you, I know. You might make him a better fellow, and keep the thing all right, and it isn't much I'm asking you to do for me.'

Mary shivered. Not much? Only to sacrifice herself to a man she loathed and despised. Perhaps to the distorted vision of Mr. Hazell that seemed a very little thing, but to Mary it was awful indeed.

She covered her face with her hands, and uttered a low, passionate cry.

'Oh, papa, papa! why did you drive the boys away, and let that evil man gain such an influence over you. I will go to Robert. He is wise, and kind, and good. He will put this evil man in his right place. I shall go this very night.'

But Mr. Hazell only mournfully and hopelessly shook his grey head, and wrung his nerveless hands as if he had neither heart nor strength to fight against his fate.

CHAPTER XX.

DEFIED.

MICHAEL FORD came whistling up the avenue to Hazelwood in the grey dusk of that October night. He was in a very complacent mood—well satisfied with himself, as he might be. He had done a good stroke of business in his own interests at the brewery that day. But one thing remained uncertain, and unless he could make himself of some account in the eyes of his master's—nay, his partner's—daughter, all the rest would be but as Dead Sea fruit. He congratulated himself on his success as the twinkling lights of Hazelwood came in sight. It was not so many years since he had entered the brewery a nameless servant at a small wage, and what had he done in these years? Driven both the sons from the house—for in an insidious and scarcely discernible fashion he had poisoned the old man's mind, flattered his weaknesses, given him encouragement in his besetting sin, and, by slow but sure degrees, made himself indispensable to him. And now there was a round sum in the Bradford Bank to the credit of

Michael Ford, and the Hazell brewery was practically in his hands. Such was his work: perhaps he had reason to be proud of it. And yet he still wore the garb of that mock humility which is the devil's darling sin. In spite of his undoubted success, he did not hold up his head before his fellow-men with the assurance which an upright life and honourable business transactions can give. There was nothing honourable about Michael Ford. He was a sneak, and yet he dared to lift his eyes to Mary Hazell. Did he think her proud, pure soul could find any affinity in his? Mr. Ford was not only complacent and self-satisfied, he was also vain. His diminutive figure was attired in evening dress, he had diamond studs in his shirt-front, and a handsome ring on his finger. He was a dandy, but not manly in his appearance.

It was twenty minutes past six when he entered the house. The servant, concealing her dislike of him, politely waited until he had removed his overcoat, and then showed him up to a dressing-room to change his boots. He did not take long to make ready, and, with that familiar freedom which aggravated every servant in the house, sought his own way to the drawing-room. He flourished a dainty pink silk handkerchief on the landing, and filled the corridors with choice perfume. He had omitted none of the accessories of the dandy's toilet.

The drawing-room was empty, for the ladies had not hurried over their dressing. Mr. Hazell was the first to enter. Out of deference to his guest, he had made a more elaborate toilet than usual, but he looked ill and

out of sorts. His interview with Mary had not been very satisfactory. She was not at all pliable, but possessed very decided opinions of her own.

'Well, have you got up?' said the brewer, with a feeble smile. 'Sit down. The ladies will be here presently.'

'All well, I hope?' said Mr. Ford blandly.

'As usual, thank you. Mrs. Hazell is not strong. Well, I have spoken to my daughter, and prepared her for what is coming.'

'Ah!' Mr. Ford's interest suddenly increased, and he looked rather anxiously into his partner's face.

Mr. Hazell shook his head.

'I can't give you much encouragement, I fear,' he said, and one might almost have thought he had a certain pride in saying it.

'My daughter has a proud spirit. In cases like these no third person can do much good. But she knows you have my permission to address her, and she also knows my wishes on the matter. But you must do the rest; you must make the best of your opportunities.'

'I hope I shall have an opportunity of speaking to Miss Hazell alone, then,' said Mr. Ford rather snappishly. 'Miss Rayne sticks to her like a burr, and it's not likely that I'm going to make a fool of myself before two of 'em.'

His tone was even more offensive than his words. Though Mr. Hazell's senses were already partially dazed by his potations, he felt a strong desire to kick the man down-stairs. Had he put that desire into execution

long before, it would have been better for Hazelwood that day.

'I shall see that you have opportunity, but I am not responsible, as I told you, for what my daughter may say to you. I have laid my commands upon her, but she is not obedient, and she is quite of age.'

The door opened, and Mary entered. Her face was very pale, but exquisitely beautiful. She had made a careful toilet—a black lace gown set off by bows of bright ribbons became her rarely well. The bodice was open a little at the throat, revealing its sweet white contour, a bunch of bright ash berries and autumn leaves making the face shine almost dazzling in its whiteness. A handsome, aristocratic-looking girl beyond a doubt was Mary Hazell; and it could not be said that her manners were not touched with aristocratic repose. Her greeting to Michael Ford was as cold as ice.

Madeline followed in a few moments, and dinner was announced. Mary had, of course, to go down-stairs on the arm of her father's partner, but her white fingers scarcely touched his sleeve. Had she obeyed her own desire, she would have gathered up her skirts lest they should come in contact with the immaculate dress suit.

Conversation at table was a little strained; Madeline, however, with her usual tact, threw herself into the breach, and tried to thaw the cold atmosphere. Unfortunately for the peace of the host, the talk turned at dessert upon the work-people and their needs. Mary made some remark upon the vexed question of the drainage at the Rows. There had been a prevalence of

low fever in the late autumn in that marshy part of the town.

'I'm going to make a change there soon,' said Mr. Michael Ford, as he cracked his walnuts with the palms of his hands, though Mary had taken the trouble to place the crackers very pointedly before him. 'They've just about wore me out with their grumbling. If I don't raise the rents on every mother's son of them before Michaelmas, I'll know the reason why.'

'They won't pay it,' said Mary quietly, though her eyes glowed. 'The rents are far too high already. Do you mean to say that house of Becker's is worth eight pounds? Eight shillings is more like it. I don't wonder they are discontented. Just look at the cottages the spinners have built for their people at a uniform rent of five pounds. They are palaces in comparison with ours.'

'Excuse me, Miss Mary, but you're carried away on this question. You must remember that Coxon's folks' wages are a third less than ours. It comes to the same thing in the long-run. But the Rows have always been a hot-bed of rebellion and grumbling. But I'll promise you I'll stamp it out.'

'What will you do?'

Mary leaned a little forward. It was a wonder Michael Ford did not quail beneath that look. But he had a splendid opportunity for showing the magnitude of his own power. To hear him speak, one might have thought him the absolute head of the concern, and the old man sitting meekly at his own table a poor subordinate.

'I'll raise the rents and lower the pay, and those who don't like the new rule can quit. I can easily draft a lot of men from the north. That'll set them on their legs.'

'Surely you won't take such strong measures, Michael,' said Mr. Hazell mildly, as he replenished his glass.

Mary looked at him suddenly, and made a movement with her hand towards the decanter. But for Mr. Ford's presence she would have lifted it from the table; but she would not seem to notice her father's infirmity before Ford.

'They've had mild measures too long, it strikes me,' said Mr. Ford gruffly.

Mary's face grew crimson, and she rose from the table.

'You need not be in such haste, Mary. Mr. Ford and I are not nearly done,' said Mr. Hazell irritably, yet with a certain deprecating look towards his partner.

'It is half-past seven, papa. We have been an hour at table. I must go and see whether mamma has had her coffee.'

Mr. Hazell rose and opened the door for the ladies. Mr. Ford apparently did not know what courtesy demanded, and sat still crunching his walnuts rather savagely. Certainly Mary did not give him much encouragement.

'Whatever papa may say, or that creature think, I shall not come to the drawing-room to-night, Lena,' said Mary indignantly, as they went up-stairs.

'Mary, if he has anything to say to you, it might be as well to have it said. I think a talking to him from

you would do him good. It makes me indignant to hear and see his rudeness to Mr. Hazell,' said Lena a little sadly.

Mary said nothing, but her eyes shone. Contrary to her expressed intention, she entered the drawing-room, and Lena, inferring that she had taken a second thought about the matter, silently kissed her, and went away to Mrs. Hazell's room.

The gas was not lighted in the drawing-room, but the wood fire was blazing and crackling merrily on the wide hearth, casting a radiant glow over all the pretty room.

Mary leaned her bare arm on the cold mantelshelf, and dashed away a few angry tears. She felt bitterly humiliated that the man down-stairs should dare to regard her as a possible object for his odious affections. I fear Mary's usual sweet charity was lacking in her judgment of Michael Ford. To her he was perfectly unendurable.

She could hear the sound of the voices ascending from the dining-room, and something told her they were talking of her. Bargaining for her, likely, she told herself, with a little stamp of her dainty foot. Poor Mary, these were trying times for her, and she felt very helpless—almost as if the meshes of a web had closed about her, making her escape impossible. But she could not, would not face even the possibility of being obliged to think seriously of any proposal made by the man down-stairs.

She did not know how long she had been standing thinking bitterly of the present and the future, and regretfully of the past, but it seemed a long, long time.

At length, however, she heard the dining-room door open, and then she gave the bell an angry pull. She wanted lights in the room before they should come up. The subdued, pleasant glow of the firelight is only desirable to talk by when we are with those we love. The maid entered first, and with deft fingers drew blind and curtains close, and lit the candles on the mantel and on the piano.

'Light the chandelier, Kitty. Yes, every jet,' said Miss Hazell quickly, and the girl obeyed, somewhat puzzled. The gas was very seldom lighted at all in the Hazelwood drawing-room, the ladies preferring the soft effects of candles and shaded lamps.

So the gentlemen entered the room in a blaze of light. No sooner did Mr. Hazell observe Mary alone than he turned about quietly and slipped away downstairs, rather shamefacedly, it must be told, for Mary's sake, but he had promised Michael Ford his opportunity.

'This is nice,' said Mr. Ford, advancing into the room and cheerfully rubbing his hands together, 'I like this. Plenty of light and brightness is the thing for me. But all these jets will run up a pretty little gas bill; eh, Miss Mary?'

He spoke affably and familiarly, for a judicious amount of champagne had mellowed his temper and unloosened his tongue.

Mary turned round, but did not remove her arm from the mantel. It was bare to the elbow. Mr. Ford's eyes plainly admired its perfect contour, so she quickly lowered it and clasped her hands before her. But she never spoke a word.

'Won't you sit down, Miss Mary?' he said, then beginning to wheel a low chair towards her.

'No, thank you. Miss Rayne will be here presently, and we shall have some music,' said Mary purposely. If there was anything to be said, the sooner it was over the better. She had wrought herself up to a pitch, and Mr. Ford was about to have some very plain things said to him.

He saw his opportunity, and had no intention of allowing it to slip. 'I hope they won't be in a hurry. It's not often I have the chance of a few words with you,' he said, looking meaningly at her. Her colour rose. It was not easy for her to listen and keep silence.

'I suppose your father has told you what I mean by coming so often here,' he continued, after a brief pause, 'though, of course, you knew well enough yourself. Don't you think I've been patient, and plucky as well? I haven't forgotten the rebuff you gave me two years ago. It was pretty hard on me, though I admired your spirit too; but, of course, I'm here on a different footing now.'

'I suppose so,' said Mary drily. 'I must congratulate you on the change in your prospects and position.'

'So he has told you, has he?' said Mr. Ford easily, and, leaning against the table, he slipped his hands unconcernedly into his pockets. 'Yes, it's pretty fair for me, isn't it? but I'll defy any man to say I haven't earned it. Why, I've toiled in the interests of the firm night and day. I deserve my reward.'

'Yes!' said Mary, with a fine indifference. She had taken the cluster of berries from her corsage and was

picking them off one by one and throwing them into the fire.

'But as the whole thing is to remain in the family, as it were,' said Mr. Ford, making a bold stroke with apparent coolness, though he kept his eye rather nervously on the face of the woman before him. 'The Priory is always in the market still. I've put in an offer for it. It would make a nice home, Miss Mary.'

'It is a beautiful place,' Mary answered quietly.

'Yes; I've put in an offer for it,' said Mr. Ford, drawing himself up with a conscious pride. 'But a man can't live in a house like that himself. It needs a mistress. Are you to be the mistress, Miss Mary?'

Mary picked off the last berry with a little jerk and threw it into the fire. Her colour was high enough now, as red as the glowing heat of the fire.

'It'll all fit in beautiful, Miss Mary,' continued Mr. Ford, encouraged by her silence and her downcast eyes. 'It's quite the thing, you know, for the junior partner to marry the senior's daughter. You're going to give me a different answer now, Miss Mary, I see, and I'm glad of it, because the other way things would be confoundedly uncomfortable all round.'

'Would they? And why?'

Nothing could be more matchless than the quiet scorn in Mary Hazell's fine eyes as she flashed them on her suitor's face.

'Oh, just, you know, the way I'm situated. The thing couldn't go on without me now.'

'It went on, as you term it, before you came, and we were ten thousand times happier,' said Mary, her passion

rising. 'It is my hope and prayer that we will yet be rid of your evil influence, Michael Ford. Are you waiting for your answer? You shall have it. This is the last time you shall have an opportunity of insulting me. I know you have my poor father so far in your power, but that, too, will come to an end. I wish you a very good evening, Mr. Ford.'

'Oh, that's how it's to be, my lady, is it?' said Mr. Ford, rapidly changing his tone, and darkening his brow with a scowl. 'Very well: we'll see. Do you know, I have it in my power to ruin the old man, and bring Hazelwood to the hammer. There isn't a penny in the concern I can't lay my finger on; and I will, to pay you out for the way you've tramped on me. You're looking at me now as if I were the dirt beneath your feet, but I'll humble you yet.'

'Do your worst,' said Mary, and a sweet, cold smile dawned on her face. 'There is justice and mercy in Heaven. I am only a poor weak girl, but I defy you, Mr. Michael Ford. If you have robbed us of our all, it will bring you no blessing, but a curse. So now you know my opinion of you. There has been no day within the last two years, since you drove my brothers from home, when I have not longed to tell you what I felt towards you. I have told you now, and I'll sleep the sounder for it to-night.'

He had no opportunity to reply to these scathing words, spoken with a haughty and contemptuous demeanour, which gave them a double sting.

Such was the final issue of the wooing of Michael Ford.

CHAPTER XXI.

FANNING THE FIRE.

THERE seemed to be a kind of excitement abroad in Paradise Row and Back Row. It was a cold, hard night, and there was a high north wind blowing. Some ominous black clouds were scudding across the sky, and seemed to give a promise of snow. Winter was to fall early that year by all indications; every leaf was stripped from the trees, a most unusual thing so early in November. That day was the fifth of the month, the Guy Fawkes Day, dear to the heart of every schoolboy. It was pitch dark. There was no moon, and the stars were few. But the folks at the Rows could make light for themselves, for there was a bonfire lit in the ground attached to the school, and on the window-sills there were fastened some rude lamps of wick dipped in naphtha, which made a flare in the darkness. There were people hurrying about the place, and, of course, a ring of excited children gathered round the bonfire, which was being replenished constantly with all sorts of combustible stuff. Had Mr. Hazell or his manager been on the

spot, they would have been amazed and horrified. It was the woodwork of the outhouses pertaining to the dwellings at the Rows which was being pulled down to keep up a merry blaze.

When eight o'clock came pealing from the town clock, the scattered folks began to gather in the school enclosure. Near the door there were two huge upturned boxes, which made a kind of platform, and about which the folks thronged most.

There was a meeting in contemplation evidently, and eight o'clock seemed to be the hour at which the proceedings were to commence.

While they waited, presumably, for the speakers, a constant hum of talk was kept up. There were angry voices heard occasionally, and all faces wore a kind of reckless look. Perhaps they were about to take the law into their own hands at the Rows.

The women were all out, some with infants wrapped in shawls, and little things scarcely able to walk clinging to their skirts. It was a woman's question as much as a man's that was to be discussed that night,—a question affecting fire, food, and clothing; in a word, the question of existence was to be looked into. Existence had of late become a hard matter for the employees at Hazell & Ford's.

The men were all in their working garb, so were the leaders, or speakers, who came forward presently and got up on the box. There were three of them, Jem Becker, Joe Tufnell, and Tim Pilkins. Becker was the ringleader, and the prime agitator in this movement. Perhaps, as the father of twelve, he found existence a degree harder than the majority. Susan, eager-eyed,

pinched, and hollow-cheeked, with the inevitable baby at her breast, was in the very forefront of the crowd. The flickering light from the naphtha lamps shining on her haggard face gave her a strange, wild look. Altogether, it was a strange, wild scene, which might well have puzzled any uninitiated onlooker. 'Go on, Becker,' cried one or two voices from the crowd, growing impatient for the proceedings to commence. 'Go on, Jemmy, an' give it 'em 'ot, specially the black 'un,' cried another. 'Lay the motions afore the meetin'.'

Becker was in close conversation with two beside him on the box, and the faces of the trio wore a look of dogged determination.

'Well, men,' said Becker, giving a short rap on the box with a stick in order to command attention. 'I s'pose the meetin' had better begin. We've met here for to consider the state o' things at Hazell's, aren't we?'

'Yes, we are, an' we will consider 'em, ay, an' maybe act on 'em too,' cried two or three in response, a statement which was received with general tokens of approbation.

'Well, we're agreed on that point, an' on another as well, I guess,' continued Becker. 'It's the general opinion of this meetin' that things is not as they should be at Hazell's. I don't s'pose any ov ye wishes me to say Hazell an' Ford.'

A deep groan, not unmingled with a few curses, was the verdict on this question.

'There was a time,' said Becker, when the noise had again subsided, 'when 'twarn't no bad thing to be a drayman or workman of any kind at Hazell's. That was in Mr. Robert's time, at the beginning ov it, afore the black un got his finger in the pie. Three cheers for Mr. Robert.'

The cheers were heartily given, for the memory of Robert Hazell was still green and sweet among the brewery hands.

'Ay, 'twas good enough then for any man ov us. There warn't no grumblin' at pay-days, nor no meddlin' wi' folks' rent an' sich-like, an' always a kind word an' smile to help us on. 'Twas a bad day for us all, mates, when the black 'un got the young master turned away. It's gone on from bad to worse. We growled when the pays was all tuk down, ay, twice over, but we stopped on, an' didn't make no difference for the old name's sake. But now it's got to be more than flesh and blood can stand. We've been put upon till we ain't fit to stand it, an' we won't. There ain't nothing bad or mean, or stingy, that the black 'un hasn't done to us; an' what we've mainly met 'ere to consider is how many ov us is goin' to serve under the new rule. How many ov ye, mates, are goin' to lift yer caps and bow down to the new partner, Mr. Michael Ford, Esquire, the new member of the firm?'

This ironical question was received with grim laughter, and with a general cry of 'Not one ov us, Jemmy—not one ov us!'

'P'raps you'd all like to know who the new partner is?' continued Becker in the same sarcastic tone. 'He belongs to a very haristocratic family—one ov the oldest families in Wiggin! All the ladies ov the family 'ave been famed for their strong arms an' their long tongues at the pithead. We ought to give three cheers, mates, for the pithead girl's son, who is our revered master, as we are his 'umble servants. But I must leave them 'ighly interestin' items a be, my mates, an'

get to business. Well, we all know wot has 'appened while the black 'un 'as been 'ere among us. He began wery 'umble—he was the under clerk as you'll all remember, an' because he's been a sneak an' a coward, he wormed himself round the old master until he knew a sight too much. To begin at the beginnin', who kept Mr. Robert out ov his own, an' preventit him a-takin' ov the Priory for his young wife, as sweet a young lady as ever stepped? Who druv him away from the brewery? Who made him take that beggarly situation at Burnley? an' who keeps him there at a servant's wage? Isn't it our new master, mates, the black 'un, as we've christened 'im, an' the name's a sight too good for him yet?

'Who kept the old master's anger hot agin Mister Herbert when he married Gregory's girl, an' never rested till he got 'im sent across the seas? That was the black 'un too, an' then he got the field to hisself; an' wot we've got to consider now, mates, is what he's done in that time down to now. It's a pretty story, the pity as we've got it so well by 'eart, an' that our wives an' chillin 'ave got it so well by 'eart through their empty stomachs. You'll all remember just afore the time when Mister Robert got his leave there wur a talk o' drainin' the land all about the houses an' a-givin' us healthy air to breathe an' dry places to sleep in. That was Miss Mary's doin', an' but for the black 'un she'd 'a carried it through. She 'ad a woman's 'eart to feel for us an' the children. I'll never forget how she came to see Susan there when little Dick was born, an' the wine an' stuff she sent from the house; but the black 'un has put an end to all that. I s'pose he talked to the

old master, an' told him we were a set o' ungrateful, discontented dogs, as he has told us to our faces many a time; an' so the drains were never made, an' the chillin kept on pinin' away, and we get rheumatics in all our joints, an' everything was bad an' wrong, an' there's no redress. And now we come to the crownin' point, which is that our rents has been riz for the third time in two year. Mates, are we or are we not goin' to put another hard-earned sixpence a week into the black 'un's pocket? The motion afore the meetin' is that we refuse to pay the increase.'

'Yes, yes, we won't pay, curse him! the houses is too dear already. Holes fit for pigs, with the rain running down the walls, an' the damp oozin' up through the floors like to choke us. No, no, we won't pay another halfpenny! we'll quit first.'

'Show hands, all that's for holdin' out, then,' said Becker, and in an instant one hundred were uplifted, foremost among them poor Susan's skinny right arm, for this question was one of life or death to her. Her children, a sickly, puny lot, were dwining away before her very eyes into the grave. She herself had a hollow chest with a pain and a cough in it, which racked her feeble frame beyond its endurance. Her many cares, and brooding over her wrongs, had weakened her mind, and she was ready to join in any revolt.

'The black 'un hates me, mates, an' always has, since Miss Mary got the master to take me on again. The pit was bad enough, and little pay, but it wasn't no worse than this, an' a man had freedom to do his work. What do we get now for our work, mates? Nothin' but growls and scowls, an' a good swearin' for the least

trifle. The very horses at Hazell's knows the difference, an' don't step out as they used. I've watched 'em mysel' walkin' wi' their heads hangin', just as if they knew times was changed. In the old days Hazell's drays were a sight, there were none handsomer stepped; but now'— Here Becker gave his head a melancholy shake.

'You're away from the pint, Jemmy. It's whether we're to quit or not?' cried an impatient voice from the crowd.

'Well, to-day, as you know, Tim here an' Joey an' me went to the hoffice to make our complaint. We axed for the old master, but do you think we saw 'im? No, the black 'un took care o' that. So we said our say pretty strong, lads, Tim an' me, to the black 'un, an' without much show of humbleness. An' now for what he said. I guess that's wot we're gathered together to hear, an' decide upon.'

The crowd was now worked up into a state of breathless excitement and suspense.

'He said that if we weren't pleased with our houses an' our wages, mates, that we could clear out as fast's we liked, for he had a band o' new hands waitin' on the job. He said we'd been wasted an' spiled with too much indulgence, an' that he was a-goin' to set his foot down on us now firm. Tim an' Joey, warn't these the words?'

'They were, curse 'im!' responded Tim, with a scowl, and a general exclamation of rage broke from the crowd. Could the new member of the firm only have heard what was being said about him, he might have trembled in his shoes.

'It's been like's if the devil himself had entered into the black 'un this week,' continued Becker grimly, 'an' I'm goin' to tell ye wot it means. Rosanna Keeling, wot is under-'ousemaid at the Hall, 'appened to overhear summat wot passed atween the black 'un an' Miss Mary. He has got the right-about-face fra Miss Mary, mates, an' Rosanna says all the things she said to him were just awful. She was as mad as mad could be; an' so, becos Miss Mary knows wot he is, an' has told him without any varnish, he's goin' to do for the whole concern. Suppose we do for him instead, an' save the old name an' the old master!'

'Hurrah!'

The approbation with which this proposition was received was not to be mistaken nor misunderstood. Michael Ford was hated with a deep, black, bitter hatred by the men whose master he had become.

'If we're to quit,—an' I guess though we stayed on we'd find the new rule as bad as slavery,—but if we're to quit we'd better show the black 'un wot we think o' him. Shall we make a polite evenin' call on Mr. Michael Ford, Esquire, of Hazell an' Ford, at his residence in Mill Street?'

Becker had a command of sarcasm which his listeners greatly relished. Before the merriment occasioned by this sally had subsided, a new feature was introduced into the proceedings. Susan Becker, with a sudden gesture, stepped up on the platform beside her husband, and, throwing back her shawl, showed her sleeping infant to the crowd.

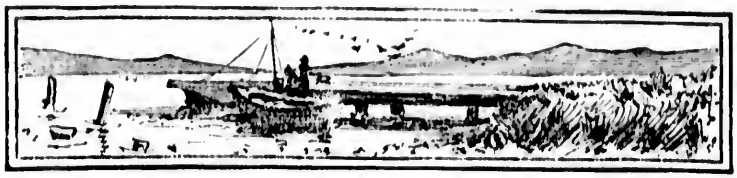
'There hasn't been half enough said,' she cried shrilly. 'You wants a woman to call things by their

right name. It's the women folk, anyway, who 'ave the worst of it. When I sees my babbies dyin' by inches afore my eyes, an' know I've one fut in the grave, all through livin' in sech a hole, I calls it murder, an' I axes, what's done to the man wot commits murder? Isn't he hanged by the law? An' if it is sech that the law can't touch Ford, then, if you're men, you'll take law into yer own hands. Let's give 'im a fright he won't forget. Pull 'im through the river fra the brewery to here, an' ax him how he likes the taste o' the bad drainage—that's wot I say.'

It was like pouring oil on the flames. As Susan stepped down a fearful hubbub arose. There was the sound of loud, excited voices, and bitter threats of revenge passed from mouth to mouth. Nobody could ever tell who suggested it first, but it was really Susan, who put a torch into one of her sons' hands and bade him lead the way to the brewery. The thing was understood at once, and the heated imaginations were easily fired. Almost in an instant the crowd turned, as if by one accord, round by the head of the Rows to cross the piece of waste land behind the brewery. It was a beaten path which Hazell's men, passing and repassing to their homes, had made a kind of right-of-way, though in reality the ground belonged to the town. It was a short cut; the distance between the brewery and the Rows could be covered in four or five minutes. When the proceedings of that night came to be investigated, it was asked where the police were that such a riot could take place out of their knowledge. It was then shown that the Rows, being outside the town, were not under surveillance, and also that the

rioters had taken the back road to the brewery, on which they were absolutely screened from observation. The pile of buildings was so extensive and so high that they made a perfect screen for any operations being carried on at the back premises. The policeman on his beat in Mill Street said he heard nothing, but it transpired afterwards that he had been enjoying a drink of beer in the 'Base-Ball' at the very time when the rioters arrived at the brewery. Michael Ford was still living in the house above the offices, though the negotiations for the purchase of the Priory were still in motion. He was from home that night, but his housekeeper, alarmed by the barking of the watchdog, came hurrying down to see what was the matter; and the night-watchman, smoking in his box, also peered out anxiously, and hearing the hubbub over the back-wall, went and opened the workmen's door; and then there was a brief space of unutterable confusion, as the men, women, and children poured into the enclosure. Nobody knew how or when or by what hand it had been done; but not long after that smoke began to curl up to the dark night sky, and immediately one fierce flame made a lurid glare over the sea of faces in the place.

'The black 'un will have to pay dear for his right to the brewery,' whispered Becker, with a grim smile, as he pointed to the flames. The fierce wind sweeping across the open common fanned the fire, and within an hour, before any preventive measures could be taken, wind and flames together made the ruin of Hazell's a certainty which no man could set aside.



CHAPTER XXII.

THE CASHIER'S HOME.

IT was a pretty little room, the drawing-room of the cashier's house at the Ladywell mines. Certainly the view from the windows was not particularly beautiful, for it was a great mining district, and instead of green, low hills, there were mountains of black refuse to look out upon, varied by the tall chimneys and the clusters of works at the summits of the various shafts. There was a bit of garden attached to the house. There was nothing in it, however, but some blackened, stunted grass, which was an eyesore to the cashier and his wife. The house was commodious for a small family, and was well-finished within. The drawing-room was all that a tasteful woman's skilful hands could make it, and was like a little picture, especially when a cheerful fire burned in the pretty tiled grate, which was an improvement they had added at their own expense. There were two windows draped in oriental muslin of negative tints,—Lucy Hazell was too good a housewife to attempt white lace or muslin in the atmosphere of Burnley,—but the

effect was novel and artistic. The prevailing colour of the room was a delicate but serviceable shade of sage-green; but it was relieved by many bright spots, and the pictures and ornaments were of the very best. There were a few sensible sorts of plants about, graceful palms and hardy ferns from the Clieveden greenhouse —no delicate flower survived long in Burnley. Lucy very much missed the wealth of cut flowers to which she had been accustomed at Clieveden, but she made the best of what she had.

She was sitting embroidering a child's frock towards the close of a November afternoon. The light was rapidly failing, and she had gone over to the window to catch the pale sunset glow for the last stitches of her work. The basinette, with her first-born son asleep in it, was standing on the hearthrug. As yet there was not a nursery in the cashier's house, nor a nursemaid. One servant—a capable, energetic woman—was all their means would admit; but Mrs. Robert Hazell had been taught to use her hands. She looked very sweet and happy as she sewed on, weaving a mother's fond hopes into her work. She *was* happy: her life was without a care. Their income was not large; certainly it required skilful management to make it cover expenses and leave a margin, but what is hardly earned is always sweet, and the spending of it gives a peculiar pleasure. Robert Hazell was doing a good work at Burnley, and the influence of the young couple, who had given up something for conscience' sake, was making itself felt among the miners. The sunset glory was very short-lived, and at length Mrs. Hazell had to lay her work down. She leaned back in her chair and watched for the sight of

her husband coming down the cinder path between the shafts. It wanted but a few minutes of their dinner-hour. While she was watching, she caught sight of another figure coming in the opposite direction from the railway station—a young lady walking very smartly apparently towards their house. The light had grown so uncertain that Lucy did not recognise the lady at all, and waited with some curiosity until she rang the bell. She heard some one running up-stairs, two steps at a time, and the next minute Mary burst into the room with her face all aglow.

'Mary, is it really, really you? My darling, I am so glad to see you!'

They kissed each other and cried a little, as was natural. Remember, they had not seen each other for more than a year, and that a great deal had happened in the interval.

'How did you come? Did Mr. Hazell say you might?'

'No, he didn't. He'll be mad when he knows. But he's in bed to-day, ill, and I didn't ask him. Oh, Lucy Hazell, I'm so wretched I think I'll die. I had to come and see Robert. Where is he? I *hope* he isn't away from home, because I can't stay long, and I may never have the chance to come back.'

'He will be in almost immediately, Mary. Dinner is just ready. Let me take off your hat. No, you shall not be bothered to go up-stairs. There now. Let me show you baby. Just think, you have never seen the darling.'

Lucy Hazell was a wise woman. Instead of asking a string of questions about what was troubling her

sister-in-law, she tried to divert her mind at once. Mary had never seen the new member of her brother's household, and, catching sight of the cradle at that moment, she darted forward and knelt down beside it. Of course, it behoved the precious baby to wake up instantly and reveal his lovely eyes. Mary lifted him very tenderly from his warm nest, and her tears fell on his head.

'So this is Robert Meredith Hazell. God bless him and his dear mother for evermore,' she said, and, leaning forward, she kissed Lucy with a sister's kiss. Then she sat down by the fire with the little one on her lap, and the two women fell into a womanly talk, and for a moment Mary forgot her own harassing care. So Robert found them when he came in nearly half an hour late for dinner.

'Mary, Mary, is it really you?' His voice had a tremor in it as he took his sister to his heart. Even Lucy did not know how much he had felt the complete breach between him and his own kindred. It had been a trial of no ordinary kind for Robert Hazell.

'Yes, and she has seen baby and thinks him lovely. And now we are going to have dinner, and be as happy as possible, and forget care for a little,' said Lucy quickly, seeing that a question was on her husband's lips. 'Oh, Mary, had I only known of your coming, what would I not have made for dinner in honour of you! Can you take stewed beef and a very plain pudding?'

'A dry crust from you, Lucy, would taste sweet, because it would be flavoured with love,' answered Mary, with a tremulous smile.

So they went down together to the cosy little dining-

room, and Mary broke bread for the first time at her brother's table. They were very tender with her, for they saw that her heart was sore about something, and they would do all that love could to lighten her care.

'Now, Robert and you can have the drawing-room for your quiet talk,' said Lucy, when they rose from the table.

'You will come too, Lucy; I have no secrets from Bob's wife,' said Mary affectionately.

'Oh, I'll be coming out and in with baby, and I'll be listening too,' said Lucy, with a nod and a smile.

Robert was a trifle anxious. He saw that Mary was excited, and he had heard of late many rumours concerning the affairs of his own people. But he was hardly prepared for what Mary had to tell him.

'Oh, Bob, I have been so longing to see you. Things are so terrible at home. You have heard, of course, that the firm is changed,' she began, the moment they had entered the drawing-room.

Robert started. 'No, I have been down at Wigan for a week, and only returned yesterday, so I have heard no news. What has happened?'

'It is Hazell & Ford now, and that fearful man has got papa completely in his power. I believe we are nearly beggars.'

'Oh, nonsense, Molly! It is quite impossible in so short a time.'

'It is quite true. You know papa has been getting weaker and weaker of late. His intellect is not at all what it was. I believe that it was Ford who taught papa to take too much. At least I am sure that he encouraged him in it, so that he might get a firmer hold.'

'And the fellow has got himself made a partner,' said

Robert. 'Well, upon my word, he has made a rapid rise. He is clever enough anyhow; but how do you know that papa's affairs are in an embarrassed state?'

'Papa told me first,' said Mary, and her colour heightened; 'and that odious creature told me too. Oh, Robert, I do not know how I am to tell you it all. He has asked me to marry him, and papa wishes it, and I fear I must, to save papa from ruin, though I would rather die.'

Robert Hazell's colour rose also, it was with anger, not with embarrassment.

'My darling, don't distress yourself. It is needless. Marry Ford! That would be a pretty story. Why did you not come to me long since?'

'Oh, I daren't! You don't know papa. He gets into such fearful passions if we do the least thing. I daren't have come. For myself, I would not have minded his anger much, but it made mamma so ill to have these scenes. We were glad to be meek and humble for peace' sake. That man and drink together, Bob, have ruined Hazelwood. I wish papa had been anything but a brewer.'

Robert Hazell said nothing in reply. He was walking up and down the room, with his brows knit, and his gloomy eyes fixed on the floor. He was reproaching himself for leaving the old name and the old home to the mercy of that unprincipled man, and yet there had seemed no other course open to him at the time. He had had no idea of the hold the love of strong drink had over his father, nor any idea either of the influence Michael Ford wielded, even in his day, in the brewery. He could scarcely credit the story Mary had come to tell

'When did you learn all this, Mary; or, rather, when did things come to a crisis?' he asked presently.

'Last week—Friday it was—the day we got Bertie's letter. Ford came to dinner that night, but, before he came, papa called me to the library, and told me he wished me to listen favourably to his new partner. Mr. Ford had his say after dinner.'

Mary's lip curled at the remembrance of it.

'I can guess what your answer was,' said Robert, with a slight smile.

'It surprised the new member of the firm considerably,' said Mary significantly. 'He had some plain truths told him. I only hope he laid them to heart. He made use of all kinds of threats, and said he would beggar us all. I rang for Kitty to show him out at last. Wasn't that frightful then, Robert, to do to the new member of the firm?'

'It served him right; I only wish I had been there to give him a little assistance down-stairs,' said Robert, with energy.

'I mustered all the scorn I could to crush him. He looked mean enough. He was frightfully angry, and I hear that there never have been such scenes at the brewery as there have been this week. The people are in a state of smouldering rebellion, which will soon become active. He wants to clear out the Rows, he says, and draft in new men from the north. So he is taking every means he can to aggravate them. The rents are raised again, and he will not pay a farthing of overtime. He is a perfect slave-driver. What is to be done?'

'What does papa say now? He knows, of course, what answer you gave that precious scoundrel?'

'Oh yes, because I told him every word. He went to the brewery next day, and has been quite ill ever since. I believe there was a scene. obert, it makes my blood boil when I see how terrified papa is for Ford.'

'I shall put an end to that,' said Robert, with that quiet decision which of yore had carried such weight with it. 'Before we are twenty-four hours older, Mr. Ford and I will understand each other. If there is no other course open, I will advise papa to retire from the concern entirely; and I shall see that Mr. Ford gets no more than his deserts.'

'Oh, he will take everything, I believe. He is such a man, Robert! It is impossible to get the better of him!'

'I will see at least that he does not get the better of me,' said Robert, and his eyes gleamed. He was thoroughly roused, and he saw that immediate action of some kind was absolutely necessary.

'And now, how are you to get home? Can you stay all night?'

'No, I daren't; mamma was in terror lest papa should ask where I had gone. I don't believe he will see you when you come, Ford has poisoned his mind so against both Bertie and you. He seems to be convinced that you robbed him and took advantage of him when you were in the brewery. Oh, it is a miserable business from beginning to end!'

'Its end has come any way,' said Robert gravely. 'Are you there, Lucy?'

'Yes, here, dear. Baby has had his bath, and Susie will give him his supper. My little maid is quite

a treasure, Mary. Well, have you had a nice talk?'

'Ask Bob. There isn't anything very nice in it, Lucy,' said Mary, with her nervous smile. 'But it has been an immense relief to me. Be thankful you have a solid, sensible husband, Lucy. It is a necessary refuge for the female mind.'

'Am I not thankful and happy?' asked Lucy, with a sweet, tender smile, which found an answering tenderness in her husband's eyes.

'Lucy is an angel, Mary,' he said quickly. 'Look what I have given her in exchange for Clieveden, which you used often to say was an earthly paradise! And yet she is happy. She would even try to make me believe she prefers this little box to any place she has ever seen or heard of.'

'So I do. Oh, Robert, how can you say such things?' asked Lucy, with a smile and a tear.

'Bless you, my children,' said Mary, with a touch of her old humour. 'When you come over to Hazelwood, Bob, be sure you bring Lucy and the baby to aid the assault. Perhaps Robert Meredith Hazell will win the day with his grandfather. And now I must go away home.'

'You and Lucy can have a confab while I get the gig. Yes, we are quite grand. Mr. Edwardes keeps a light trap here, and the use of it is mine, or Lucy's rather. She wheedled it out of him with that smile of hers. I'll drive you over, and we can talk by the way.'

In half an hour Mary was sitting by her brother's side in the coalmaster's gig, and the high spirited horse

was making short work of the hilly road betwixt Burnley and Medlington.

'See, Bob, what a curious glare is in the sky. Is that not at Medlington?' said Mary suddenly, as they mounted the crest of the last hill, and the whole valley of the Med was before them.

'Yes, it's at Medlington, Mary,' said Robert slowly. 'There's a fire somewhere.'

He did not express the apprehension which took possession of him. They both watched in silence the sullen glow overspreading the dark night sky, until they had driven another mile, and then the flames and smoke came in sight.

'It is the brewery, Mary; don't you think so?'

'I am afraid of it,' said Mary, growing very white, and cowering close into her brother. 'What can it mean?'

'I suspect it is the work of revenge, if the people are in the state you described to me,' said Robert. 'We had better drive round that way. We may be in time to prevent further mischief. I believe I could command attention yet; and they adore you. See, Mary, the offices are in flames. It is a mighty burning.'

Ay, it was a mighty burning, and by the time they reached the place there was nothing left of the Hazell brewery but the falling walls. The fire, fanned by the night wind, had done its work well.

Michael Ford was flying about the ruins like a madman, and when the gig with the brother and sister drove up, he cursed them both, and all of the name of Hazell, in words which haunted those who heard it to their dying day.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ALL'S WELL.

THE brewery, unfortunately, was not fully insured, and the loss was very considerable. As was to be expected, the loss fell more heavily on the new partner, who, in spite of all his boasting, had not got his fingers upon Mr. Hazell's capital. He had received large sums from him at various times certainly; and had, to use that expressive phrase, feathered his nest well; but the destruction of building, plant, and stock was a calamity he had not looked for. He tore up to Hazelwood, like a madman, the morning after the fire, and demanded an interview with Mr. Hazell. He was shown into the library, where, in a few minutes, Robert came to him. He had sent a message home with the gig, and remained all night at Hazelwood, but had not yet seen his father, who was confined to his bedroom, and knew nothing of what had occurred.

'Well, sir,' said Robert, as he closed the door and faced the irate little creature standing at the window. His manner as he spoke was cold, curt, and distant in

the extreme: he did not even give him a sign of recognition.

'Well, too,' quoth Mr. Ford rudely. 'I did not ask for you, did I? It's the old man I want to see.'

'You can't see him,' said Robert shortly. 'Please say what you have to say, and go. There can be no welcome for you, sir, in this house.'

Mr. Ford absolutely glared, but somehow he felt afraid of Robert Hazell. He was quiet, but determination sat on every feature. The plotter and schemer knew in a moment that his reign was over.

'Oh, there can't, can't there? And why not, pray? I've come to know the meaning of last night's pretty business. I believe you all know more of it than you'll admit: your high and mighty sister'—

'If you mention my sister's name again, I'll kick you out of the house. I'm a man of my word,' said Robert savagely.

Mr. Ford shifted uneasily from one foot to another, but his demeanour became quieter.

'Well, them that did it will have their deserts. If that Becker doesn't get seven years, there won't be justice in the land. What's the governor saying to it, eh?—a nice dish for his breakfast, wasn't it? How does he like the sight he sees now from his bedroom window, instead of the thriving colony he was so proud of?'

'My father is too ill to take much interest in anything,' responded Robert. 'You cannot see him. I must refer you to Mr. Atkins, the attorney, if you want to speak about legal business. In any other

matter I act as my father's representative, and I have no desire to prolong this interview.'

'Oh, that's how it is, is it?' queried Ford sneeringly. 'Well, if you're to act for the old man'—

'Mr. Hazell, if you please,' put in Robert stiffly.

'Well, Mr. Hazell, then. What I want to know is, what damages I'm to get for last night's work? Of course it falls heaviest on me, for my interest as partner was chiefly in what was demolished by these scoundrels. That's the question Mr. Hazell will have to decide as soon as he's able, and before the question of rebuilding comes on.'

'Whoever may rebuild, my father will not,' returned Robert quietly. 'He will retire from business now. As to the question about damages, it is too absurd. You took your interest in the concern with all its risks. There is no use wasting time in foolish talk. I expect all connection between you and the name of Hazell is now ended. I must congratulate you, sir, on what you have made of it. You will not quit the firm a poor man; but whether you are an honourable one or not is another matter. I reserve my opinion. Good morning, Mr. Ford.'

Ford was about to speak again, but Robert shook his head and walked out of the room. And what could the junior partner do but accept his dismissal, grinding his teeth with rage as he went. Robert had carried things with a high hand indeed. He had taken a great deal upon himself, and had acted for his father with a decisive promptitude that gentleman would scarcely have had the courage to display before Michael Ford

Robert's judgment was sound, and he was quite willing to bear the consequences of his morning's work.

He met Mary in the hall. She had been out of doors, and her face was flushed with walking through the sharp morning air. She had a bunch of bright holly-berries and Christmas roses—the first of the season—in her hand.

'Robert, *what* have you been saying to him?' she asked, almost gleefully. 'I saw him go in and come out, and there was a beautiful change in his demeanour.'

'He knows my sentiments now; that is all, Molly. I don't think we shall have much further trouble with Michael Ford,' returned Robert, with a dry smile. 'Will you go up and inquire whether papa will see me. I can't stay much longer, though I could come back after I see to some things at Ladywell.'

'Just go up alone, Bob. It is often better to do these things without preparation. Papa is awake, and up. Madeline took him his breakfast long since. No doubt he knows now what has happened. I am sure he will be thankful and glad to see you.'

Robert took her advice, and went up at once to his father's room. He was in the dressing-room, and had his chair wheeled close to the window, from which he was mournfully contemplating the smouldering ruins of the brewery. He had not appeared much distressed by the news, which Lena had gently broken to him when she brought him his morning chocolate. Perhaps he was not very greatly surprised. He looked round hurriedly at the opening of the door, and there was a

nervousness in both look and manner which quickly gave place to surprise and unmistakable relief.

'It's you, Robert, my boy! Come in, come in. I—I thought it was Ford. I told them I couldn't see him if he came. Sit down, sit down.'

It was a curious meeting. They shook hands as naturally and unconcernedly as if they had parted only yesterday; but Robert was inwardly affected by the grievous change in his father's appearance. He was quite a broken-down old man.

'When did you come?'

'I have been here all night. I drove over from Ladywell last night,' returned Robert.

'Ay, ay. I suppose the fire would be visible from Ladywell. A fine night's work, eh?' asked the old man, with a feeble smile, as he pointed to the ruins. 'It'll be a fine disappointment for Ford. But it's his doing, all his doing. I warned him he was oppressing the folk. Flesh and blood can only stand a certain amount, but he is as headstrong as he is tyrannical. Ah, Bob, it is a bad thing to let a servant know too much or get too firm a hold. I see now the mistake I made with you and Bertie. I'd undo the past, my lad, if I could'—

'Don't reproach yourself, father,' said Robert cheerfully. 'Neither Bertie nor I have had any reason to regret it. I like my work at Burnley famously.'

'Ay; and you have a little son, Eleanor told me. What do you call him?'

'We named him for you and for Lucy's father—Robert Meredith Hazell.'

'Ah, well, if he turns out as well as his father he'll be worth the trouble of rearing him. You've always been a good boy, Bob, and I didn't do the right thing by you. It was the drink, nothing but the drink—it poisons the very nature of a man. You'll bring up your boy to abhor it. Tell him it ruined his grandfather in his old age. I've been taking myself to task these few days, lying in my bed. What a life I've led these women-folk lately! Bob, your sister's a brick. She gave *him* the right-about-face and no mistake.'

The old man shook with silent laughter at the remembrance of that night.

'I hoped she'd do it; and yet he threatened all sorts of things if she wouldn't have him. I'm glad all this has happened. He had too tight a hold. I could scarcely call my soul my own. You won't let him in upon me if he comes. I have no strength. He can make me do anything.'

Robert's heart was full of pity at the pathetic weakness his father displayed.

'He will not come back in a hurry, sir. He has been here this morning. I have just come up from showing him out, after a few plain remarks.'

'No!' Mr. Hazell sat up in his chair, with eager, excited interest. 'What did you say?'

'He was beginning in a very high-handed fashion, but I stopped him. I told him that he could settle any legal business with Atkins, and that I, as your representative, declined to have any further talk with him.'

Tears—tears of relief—actually started in the old

man's eyes, and he gripped his son's hand in his nerveless fingers.

'I told him you would not rebuild the brewery, and that you would probably retire immediately from business.'

'Oh, my son! There's a load lifted off my mind. Do you know I have lived in terror of that man? I believe in another six months he would have cleaned me out.'

'But you have still plenty?' queried Robert, not without anxiety. 'He had threatened Mary with turning you all out of Hazelwood—a vain threat, surely?'

'Oh yes, the place is all right; and there's the Amaranth bonds, worth a thousand a year at any rate. I've given him in all, I think, about three thousand pounds since you left—a nice nest-egg for him, isn't it?'

'Ay, the villain. He talked about giving Becker seven years; he deserves such a sentence ten times more richly. We must try to get these men off as easily as possible, father.'

'Oh yes. I'll see to it. I'll be able to see to anything, now that this frightful incubus is lifted from my shoulders,' said the old man; and indeed he looked as if new life had come to him. It was a mystery to Robert Hazell how Ford had ever acquired such an influence over a man of his father's character and nature. The solution of the mystery was to be found in that all-powerful bottle which Ford had kept within constant reach in the private room at the brewery.

'I'm going to turn over a new leaf, Robert, in my old age. I've made up my mind that I shall drink no

more. And whoever rebuilds the brewery, as you said, I never shall. How did you know so well what I intended?'

'I hoped you would be persuaded,' returned Robert, as he rose to go. 'Well, I must go home. I may give your love to Lucy and the boy, I suppose. Perhaps you'll come in some day when you are able to drive as far?'

'Ay will I. I have something to make up to you and yours, Bob. I've been a foolish, wicked old man. May God have mercy on me for my sins!'

'Brighter days are at hand, father,' said Robert, and his eyes were dim. 'Good-bye. Keep up your heart. We'll see you a hale, hearty man yet.'

Mary was restlessly pacing the passages and stairs awaiting the result of the interview. She met Robert on the landing, and slipped her arm through his.

'It is all right, dear. The sun has risen over Hazelwood,' he said, as he stooped to kiss her. 'Say good-bye, and let me go. Go to papa now. I believe he must have a great deal to say to you.'

When Mary entered the room she found her father sitting by the window, looking out with a far-away expression in his eyes.

'Is that you, wife?'

'No, it is I, papa,' returned Mary softly. 'Mamma is not down yet. She feels very nervous after her excitement. May I tell her you are so much better?'

'Yes: tell her I hope, with the grace of God, that I am a changed man. Kiss me, my darling, and tell me if you forgive me.'

'Hush, oh hush! there can never be any talk of forgiveness between us two,' said Mary, as she bent over his chair.

'Do you know what I have been thinking since Robert went out? That I have had good, dutiful children, and was not grateful for my blessings. I will try now to show what I think of my children. I have been a poor father to them.'

Mary laid one hand on his lips, and with the other smoothed away the grey hair from his brow.

'How quickly one's thoughts travel. I have made fifty plans this morning. Shall I tell you the latest? I am planning a trip to the New World for mamma and Madeline and you and I, to visit Bertie and his wife. Suppose we leave after the New Year, and Robert and his wife will live here in our absence; and he can drive daily to and from Ladywell, if he has not made a change before then. Wouldn't that be a pleasant change of scene for us all?'

But Mary only answered with her tears.

. . . .

Mr. Hazell's proposal became an accomplished fact, and soon after the New Year the party sailed for the New World. In the interval the affairs of the brewery had been wound up, but Michael Ford, wisely judging that he had coined a good penny, which he had better take care of, did not present any claim. He disappeared from Medlington, and as yet there is no talk of the brewery being rebuilt. The ringleaders in the work of incendiarism got off with a light imprisonment, there being no prosecuting parties; and Mr. Hazell took good

care that their wives and families should not suffer during the incarceration. Employment was afterwards found for them; some of them, Becker among the rest, found occupation at Burnley, where they were under the kindly eye of Mr. Robert. Money can do much. Robert is no longer cashier, but a large shareholder in the ownership of the Ladywell mines. He will occupy Hazelwood during the term of his father's absence, and then the Priory will become his home. So time will bring him to the fulfilment of an early dream. Wherever Robert and Lucy Hazell may set up their family altar, be it in humbleness or in affluence, it will be a sanctuary to the Lord. The children born and reared at their fireside cannot but grow up good men and women with such an example before them.

And what of Mary? Is she, so eminently fitted to grace any station, to walk alone through life? I am not writing the history of Mary Hazell or of Madeline Rayne. They are both young, life is all before them. No doubt each will find her happiest sphere. So we will say farewell.

THE END.

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