FRANCES KANE'S FORTUNE

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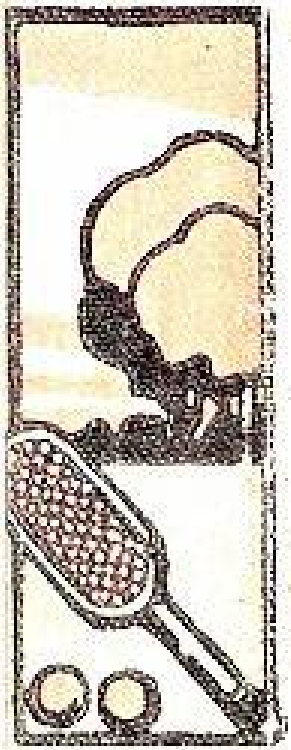

DONOHUE

FRANCES KANE'S FORTUNE

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BY

L. T. MEADE,

AUTHOR OF "HOW IT ALL CAME ROUND," "WATER GIPSIES," ETC.

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FRANCES KANE'S FORTUNE.

CHAPTER I.

THE LETTER.

It was a very sunny June day, and a girl was pacing up and down a sheltered path in an old-fashioned garden. She walked slowly along the narrow graveled walk, now and then glancing at the carefully trimmed flowers of an elaborate ribbon border at her right, and stopping for an instant to note the promise of fruit on some well-laden peach and pear-trees. The hot sun was pouring down almost vertical rays on her uncovered head, but she was either impervious to its power, or, like a salamander, she rejoiced in its fierce noonday heat.

"We have a good promise of peaches and pears," she said to herself; "I will see that they are sold this year. We will just keep a few for my father to eat, but the rest shall go. It is a pity Watkins spends so much time over the ribbon border; it does not pay, and it uses up so many of our bedding plants."

She frowned slightly as she said these last words, and put up her hand to shade her face from the sun, as though for the first time she noticed its dazzling light and heat.

"Now I will go and look to the cabbages," she said, continuing her meditations aloud. "And those early pease ought to be fit for pulling now. Oh! is that you, Watkins? Were you calling me? I wanted to speak to you about this border. You must not use up so many geraniums and calceolarias here. I don't mind the foliage plants, but the others cost too much, and can not be made use of to any profit in a border of this kind."

"You can't make a ribbon, what's worthy to be called a ribbon, with foliage plants," gruffly retorted the old gardener. "Master would be glad to see you in the house, Miss Frances, and yer's a letter what carrier has just brought."

"Post at this hour?" responded Frances, a little eagerness and interest lighting up her face; "that is unusual, and a letter in the middle of the day is quite a treat. Well, Watkins, I will go to my father now, and see you at six o'clock in the kitchen garden about the cabbages and peas."

"As you please, Miss Frances; the wegitables won't be much growed since you looked at them yester-night, but I'm your sarvint, miss. Carrier called at the post-office and brought two letters: one for you, and t'other for master. I'm glad you're pleased to get 'em, Miss Frances."

Watkins's back was a good deal bent; he certainly felt the heat of the sun, and was glad to hobble off into the shade.

"Fuss is no word for her," he said; "though she's a good gel, and means well—werry well."

After the old gardener had left her, Frances stood quite still; the sun beat upon her slight figure, upon her rippling, abundant dark-brown hair, and lighted up a face which was a little hard, a tiny bit soured, and scarcely young enough to belong to so slender and lithe a figure. The eyes, however, now were full of interest, and the lips melted into very soft curves as Frances turned her letter round, examined the postmarks, looked with interest at the seal, and studied the handwriting. Her careful perusal of the outside of the letter revealed at a glance how few she got, and how such a comparatively uninteresting event in most lives was regarded by her.

"This letter will keep," she said to herself, slipping it into her pocket. "I will hear what father has to tell me first. It is a great treat to have an unopened letter to look forward to. I wonder where this is from. Who can want to write to me from Australia? If Philip were alive—" Here she paused and sighed. "In the first place, I heard of his death three years ago; in the second, being alive, why should he write? It is ten years since we met."

Her face, which was a very bright and practical one, notwithstanding those few hard lines, looked pensive for a moment. Then its habitual expression of cheerfulness returned to it, and when she entered the house Frances Kane looked as practical and business-like a woman as could be found anywhere in the whole of the large parish in the north of England where she and her father lived.

Squire Kane, as he was called, came of an old family; and in the days before Frances was born he was supposed to be rich. Now, however, nearly all his lands were mortgaged, and it was with difficulty that the long, low, old-fashioned house, and lovely garden which surrounded it, could be kept together. No chance at all would the squire have had of spending his last days in the house where he was born, and where many generations of ancestors had lived and died, but for Frances. She managed the house and the gardens, and the few fields which were not let to surrounding farmers. She managed Watkins, too, and the under-gardener, and the two men-servants; and, most of all, she managed Squire Kane.

He had been a hale and hearty man in his day, with a vigorous will of his own, and a marvelous and fatal facility for getting through money; but now he leaned on Frances, was guided by her in all things; never took an opinion or spent a shilling without her advice; and yet all the time he thought himself to be the ruler, and she the ruled. For Frances was very tactful, and if she governed with a rod of iron, she was clever enough to incase it well in silk.

"I want you, Frances," called a rather querulous old voice.

The squire was ensconced in the sunniest corner of the sunny old parlor; his feet were stretched out on a hassock; he wore a short circular cape over his shoulders, and a black velvet skull-cap was pushed a little crooked over his high bald forehead. He had aquiline features, an aristocratic mouth, and sunken but somewhat piercing eyes. As a rule his expression was sleepy, his whole attitude indolent; but now he was alert, his deep-set eyes were wide open

and very bright, and when his daughter came in, he held out a somewhat trembling hand, and drew her to his side.

"Sit down, Frances—there, in the sun, it's so chilly in the shade—don't get into that corner behind me, my dear; I want to look at you. What do you think? I have got a letter, and news—great news! It is not often that news comes to the Firs in these days. What do you think, Frances? But you will never guess. Ellen's child is coming to live with us!"

"What?" said Frances. "What! Little Fluff we used to call her? I don't understand you, father; surely Ellen would never part with her child."

"No, my dear, that is true. Ellen and her child were bound up in each other; but she is dead—died three months ago in India. I have just received a letter from that good-for-nothing husband of hers, and the child is to leave school and come here. Major Danvers can't have her in India, he says, and her mother's wish was—her mother's last wish—that she should make her home with us. She will be here within a week after the receipt of this letter, Frances. I call it great news; fancy a young thing about the house again!"

Frances Kane had dark, straight brows; they were drawn together now with a slight expression of surprise and pain.

"I am not so old, father," she said; "compared to you, I am quite young. I am only eight-and-twenty."

"My dear," said the squire, "you were never young. You are a good woman, Frances, an excellent, well-meaning woman; but you were never either child or girl. Now, this little thing—how long is it since she and her mother were here, my love?"

"It was just before Cousin Ellen went to India," responded Frances, again knitting her brows, and casting back her memory. "Yes, it was six years ago; I remember it, because we planted the new asparagus bed that year."

"Ay, ay; and a very productive bed it turned out," responded the squire. "Fluff was like a ball then, wasn't she?—all curly locks, and dimples, and round cheeks, and big blue eyes like saucers! The merriest little kitten—she plagued me, but I confess I liked her. How old would she be now, Frances?"

"About seventeen," replied Frances. "Almost a grown-up girl; dear, dear, how time does fly! Well, father, I am glad you are pleased. I will read the letter, if you will let me, by and by, and we must consult as to what room to give the child. I hope she won't find it very dull."

"Not she, my dear, not she. She was the giddiest mortal—always laughing, and singing, and skipping about in the sunshine. Dear heart! it will do me good to see anything so lively again."

"I am glad she is coming," repeated Frances, rising to her feet. "Although you must remember, father, that six years make a change. Ellen may not be quite so kittenish and frolicsome now."

"Ellen!" repeated the squire; "I'm not going to call the child anything so formal. Fluff she always was and will be with me—a kittenish creature with a kittenish name; I used to tell her so, and I expect I shall again."

"You forget that she has just lost her mother," said Frances. "They loved each other dearly, and you can not expect her not to be changed. There is also another thing, father; I am sorry to have to mention it, but it is necessary. Does Major Danvers propose to give us an allowance for keeping his daughter here? Otherwise it will be impossible for us to have her except on a brief visit."

The squire pulled himself with an effort out of his deep arm-chair. His face flushed, and his eyes looked angry.

"You are a good woman, Frances, but a bit hard," he said. "You don't suppose that a question of mere money would keep Ellen's child away from the Firs? While I am here she is sure of a welcome. No,

there was nothing said about money in this letter, but I have no doubt the money part is right enough. Now I think I'll go out for a stroll. The sun is going off the south parlor, and whenever I get into the shade I feel chilly. If you'll give me your arm, my dear, I'll take a stroll before dinner. Dear, dear! it seems to me there isn't half the heat in the sun there used to be. Let's get up to the South Walk, Frances, and pace up and down by the ribbon border—it's fine and hot there—what I like. You don't wear a hat, my dear? quite right—let the sun warm you all it can."

CHAPTER II.

"THIS IS WONDERFUL."

It was quite late on that same afternoon before Frances found a leisure moment to read her own letter. It was not forgotten as it lay in her pocket, but she was in no hurry to ascertain its contents.

"Until it is read it is something to look forward to," she said to herself; "afterward—oh, of course there can be nothing of special interest in it."

She sighed; strong and special interests had never come in her way.

The afternoon which followed the receipt of the two letters was a specially busy one. The squire never grew tired of discussing the news which his own letter had brought him. He had a thousand conjectures which must be dwelt upon and entered into; how and when had Ellen Danvers died? what would the child Ellen be like? which bedroom would suit her best? would she like the South Walk as much as the old squire did himself? would she admire the ribbon border? would she appreciate the asparagus which she herself had seen planted?

The old man was quite garrulous and excited, and Frances was pleased to see him so interested in anything. When she had walked with him for nearly an hour she was obliged to devote some time to Watkins in the vegetable garden; then came dinner; but after that meal there always was a lull in the day's occupation for Frances, for the squire went to sleep over his pipe, and never cared to be aroused or spoken to until his strong coffee was brought to him at nine o'clock.

On this particular evening Frances felt her heart beat with a pleased and quickened movement. She had her unopened letter to read. She would go to the rose arbor, and have a quiet time there while her

father slept. She was very fond of Keats, and she took a volume of his poems under her arm, for, of course, the letter would not occupy her many moments. The rose arbor commanded a full view of the whole garden, and Frances made a graceful picture in her soft light-gray dress, as she stepped into it. She sat down in one of the wicker chairs, laid her copy of Keats on the rustic table, spread the bright shawl on her lap, and took the foreign letter out of her pocket.

"It is sure to be nothing in the least interesting," she said to herself. "Still, there is some excitement about it till it is opened." And as she spoke she moved to the door of the arbor.

Once again she played with the envelope and examined the writing. Then she drew a closely written sheet out of its inclosure, spread it open on her lap, and began to read.

As she did so, swiftly and silently there rose into her cheeks a beautiful bloom. Her eyelids quivered, her hand shook; the bloom was succeeded by a pallor. With feverish haste her quick eyes flew over the paper. She turned the page and gasped slightly for breath. She raised her head, and her big, dark eyes were full of tears, and a radiant, tender smile parted her lips.

"Thank God!" she said; "oh, this is wonderful! Oh, thank God!"

Once again she read the letter, twice, three times, four times. Then she folded it up, raised it to her lips, and kissed it. This time she did not return it to her pocket, but, opening her dress, slipped it inside, so that it lay against her heart.

"Miss Frances!" old Watkins was seen hobbling down the path. "You hasn't said what's to be done with the bees. They are sure to swarm to-morrow, and—and—why, miss, I seem to have startled you like—"

"Oh, not at all, Watkins; I will come with you now, and we will make some arrangement about the bees."

Frances came out of the arbor. The radiant light was still in her eyes,

a soft color mantled her cheeks, and she smiled like summer itself on the old man.

He looked at her with puzzled, dull wonder and admiration.

"What's come to Miss Frances?" he said to himself. "She looks rare and handsome, and she's none so old."

The question of the bees was attended to, and then Frances paced about in the mellow June twilight until it was time for her father to have his coffee. She came in then, sat down rather in the shadow, and spoke abruptly. Her heart was beating with great bounds, and her voice sounded almost cold in her effort to steady it.

"Father, I, too, have had a letter to-day."

"Ay, ay, my love. I saw that the carrier brought two. Was it of any importance? If not, we might go on with our 'History of Greece.' I was interested in where we left off last night. You might read to me for an hour before I go to bed, Frances; unless, indeed, you have anything more to say about Fluff, dear little soul! Do you know, it occurred to me that we ought to get fresh curtains and knickknacks for her room? It ought to look nice for her, dear, bright little thing!"

"So it shall, father." There was no shade of impatience in Frances's tone. "We will talk of Fluff presently. But it so happens that my letter was of importance. Father, you remember Philip Arnold?"

"Arnold—Arnold? Dimly, my dear, dimly. He was here once, wasn't he? I rather fancy that I heard of his death. What about him, Frances?"

Frances placed her hand to her fast-beating heart. Strange—her father remembered dimly the man she had thought of, and dreamed of, and secretly mourned for for ten long years.

"Philip Arnold is not dead," she said, still trying to steady her voice. "It was a mistake, a false rumor. He has explained it—my letter was

from him."

"Really, my love? Don't you think there is a slight draught coming from behind that curtain? I am so sensitive to draughts, particularly after hot days. Oblige me, Frances, my dear, by drawing that curtain a little more to the right. Ah, that is better. So Arnold is alive. To tell the truth, I don't remember him very vividly, but of course I'm pleased to hear that he is not cut off in his youth. A tall, good-looking fellow, wasn't he? Well, well, this matter scarcely concerns us. How about the dimity in the room which will be Fluff's? My dear Frances, what is the matter? I must ask you not to fidget so."

Frances sprung suddenly to her feet.

"Father, you must listen to me. I am going to say something which will startle you. All these quiet years, all the time which has gone by and left only a dim memory of a certain man to you, have been spent by me smothering down regrets, stifling my youth, crushing what would have made me joyous and womanly—for Philip Arnold has not been remembered at all dimly by me, father, and when I heard of his death I lived through something which seemed to break the spring of energy and hope in me. I did not show it, and you never guessed, only you told me to-day that I had never been young, that I had never been either child or girl. Well, all that is over now, thank God! hope has come back to me, and I have got my lost youth again. You will have two young creatures about the house, father, and won't you like it?"

"I don't know," said the squire. He looked up at his daughter in some alarm; her words puzzled him; he was suddenly impressed too by the brightness in her eyes, and the lovely coloring on her cheeks.

"What is all this excitement, Frances?" he said. "Speak out; I never understand riddles."

Frances sat down as abruptly as she had risen.

"The little excitement was a prelude to my letter, dear father," she

said. "Philip is alive, and is coming to England immediately. Ten years ago he saw something in me—I was only eighteen then—he saw something which gave him pleasure, and—and—more. He says he gave me his heart ten years ago, and now he is coming to England to know if I will accept him as my husband. That is the news which my letter contains, father. You see, after all, my letter is important—as important as yours."

"Bless me!" said the squire. The expression of his face was not particularly gratified; his voice was not too cordial. "A proposal of marriage to you, Frances? Bless me!—why, I can scarcely remember the fellow. He was here for a month, wasn't he? It was the summer before your mother died. I think it is rather inconsiderate of you to tell me news of this sort just before I go to bed, my dear. I don't sleep over-well, and it is bad to lie down with a worry on your pillow. I suppose you want me to answer the letter for you, Frances, but I'll do nothing of the kind, I can tell you. If you encouraged the young man long ago, you must get out of it as best you can now."

"Out of it, father? Oh, don't you understand?"

"Then you mean to tell me you care for him? You want to marry a fellow whom you haven't seen for ten years! And pray what am I to do if you go away and leave me?"

"Something must be managed," said Frances.

She rose again. Her eyes no longer glowed happily; her lips, so sweet five minutes ago, had taken an almost bitter curve.

"We will talk this over quietly in the morning, dear father," she said. "I will never neglect you, never cast you aside; but a joy like this can not be put out of a life. That is, it can not be lightly put away. I have always endeavored to do my duty—God will help me to do it still. Now shall I ring for prayers?"

CHAPTER III.

AFTER TEN YEARS.

When Frances got to her room she took out pen and ink, and without a moment's hesitation wrote an answer to her letter.

"My dear Philip,—I have not forgotten you—I remember the old times, and all the things to which you alluded in your letter. I thought you were dead, and for the last three or four years always remembered you as one who had quite done with this world. Your letter startled me to-day, but your hope about me has been abundantly fulfilled, for I have never for a moment forgotten you. Philip, you have said very good words to me in your letter, and whatever happens, and however matters may be arranged between us in the future, I shall always treasure the words, and bless you for comforting my heart with them. But, Philip, ten years is a long time—in ten years we none of us stay still, and in ten years some of us grow older than others. I think I am one of those who grow old fast, and nothing would induce me to engage myself to you, or even to tell you that I care for you, until after we have met again. When you reach England—I will send this letter to the address you give me in London—come down here. My dear and sweet mother is dead, but I dare say my father will find you a room at the Firs, and if not, there are good lodgings to be had at the White Hart in the village. If you are of the same mind when you reach England as you were when you wrote this letter, come down to the old place, and let us renew our acquaintance. If, after seeing me, you find I am not the Frances you had in your heart all these years, you have only to go away without speaking, and I shall understand. In any case, thank you for the letter, and believe me, yours faithfully,

Frances

Kane."

This letter was quickly written, as speedily directed and stamped, and, wrapping her red shawl over her head, Frances herself went out in the silent night, walked half a mile to the nearest pillar-box, kissed the letter passionately before she dropped it through the slit, and then returned home, with the stars shining over her, and a wonderful new peace in her heart. Her father's unsympathetic words were forgotten, and she lived over and over again on what her hungry heart had craved for all these years.

The next morning she was up early; for the post of housekeeper, head-gardener, general accountant, factotum, amanuensis, reader, etc., to John Kane, Esq., of the Firs, was not a particularly light post, and required undivided attention, strong brains, and willing feet, from early morning to late night every day of the week. Frances was by no means a grumbling woman, and if she did not go through her allotted tasks with the greatest possible cheerfulness and spirit, she performed them ungrudgingly, and in a sensible, matter-of-fact style.

On this particular morning, however, the joy of last night was still in her face; as she followed Watkins about, her merry laugh rang in the air; work was done in half the usual time, and never done better, and after breakfast she was at leisure to sit with her father and read to him as long as he desired it.

"Well, Frances," he said, in conclusion, after the reader's quiet voice had gone on for over an hour and a half, "you have settled that little affair of last night, I presume, satisfactorily. I have thought the whole matter over carefully, my love, and I have really come to the conclusion that I can not spare you. You see you are, so to speak, necessary to me, dear. I thought I would mention this to you now, because in case you have not yet written to that young Arnold, it will simplify matters for you. I should recommend you not to enter on the question of your own feelings at all, but state the fact simply—'My father can not spare me.'"

"I wrote to Philip last night," said Frances. "I have neither refused him nor accepted him. I have asked him on a visit here; can we put him up at the Firs?"

"Certainly, my love; that is a good plan. It will amuse me to have a man about the house again, and travelers are generally entertaining. I can also intimate to him, perhaps with more propriety than you can, how impossible it would be for me to spare you. On the whole, my dear, I think you have acted with discernment. You don't age well, Frances, and doubtless Arnold will placidly acquiesce in my decision. By all means have him here."

"Only I think it right to mention to you, father"—here Frances stood up and laid her long, slender white hand with a certain nervous yet imperative gesture on the table—"I think it right to mention that if, after seeing me, Philip still wishes to make me his wife, I shall accept him."

"My dear!" Squire Kane started. Then a satisfied smile played over his face. "You say this as a sort of bravado, my dear. But we really need not discuss this theme; it positively wearies me. Have you yet made up your mind, Frances, what room Ellen's dear child is to occupy?"

CHAPTER IV.

FLUFF.

The day on which Ellen Danvers arrived at the Firs was long remembered, all over the place, as the hottest which had been known in that part of the country for many a long year. It was the first week of July, and the sun blazed fiercely and relentlessly—not the faintest little zephyr of a breeze stirred the air—in the middle of the day, the birds altogether ceased singing, and the Firs, lying in its sheltered valley, was hushed into a hot, slumberous quiet, during which not a sound of any sort was audible.

Even the squire preferred a chair in the south parlor, which was never a cool room, and into which the sun poured, to venturing abroad; even he shuddered at the thought of the South Walk to-day. He was not particularly hot—he was too old for that—but the great heat made him feel languid, and presently he closed his eyes and fell into a doze.

Frances, who in the whole course of her busy life never found a moment for occasional dozes, peeped into the room, smiled with satisfaction when she saw him, tripped lightly across the floor to steal a pillow comfortably under his white head, arranged the window-curtains so as to shade his eyes, and then ran upstairs with that swift and wonderfully light movement which was habitual to her. She had a great deal to do, and she was not a person who was ever much affected by the rise or fall of the temperature. First of all, she paid a visit to a charming little room over the porch. It had lattice windows, which opened like doors, and all round the sill, and up the sides, and over the top of the window, monthly roses and jasmine, wistaria and magnolia, climbed. A thrush had built its nest in the honeysuckle over the porch window, and there was a faint sweet twittering sound heard there now, mingled with the perfume of the roses and jasmine. The room inside was all white, but daintily relieved here and there with

touches of pale blue, in the shape of bows and drapery. The room was small, but the whole effect was light, cool, pure. The pretty bed looked like a nest, and the room, with its quaint and lovely window, somewhat resembled a bower.

Frances looked round it with pride, gave one or two finishing touches to the flowers which stood in pale-blue vases on the dressing-table, then turned away with a smile on her lips. There was another room just beyond, known in the house as the guest-chamber proper. It was much more stately and cold, and was furnished with very old dark mahogany; but it, too, had a lovely view over the peaceful homestead, and Frances's eyes brightened as she reflected how she and Ellen would transform the room with heaps of flowers, and make it gay and lovely for a much-honored guest.

She looked at her watch, uttered a hurried exclamation, fled to her own rather insignificant little apartment, and five minutes later ran down-stairs, looking very fresh, and girlish, and pretty, in a white summer dress. She took an umbrella from the stand in the hall, opened it to protect her head, and walked fast up the winding avenue toward the lodge gates.

"I hear some wheels, Miss Frances," said Watkins's old wife, hobbling out of the house. "Eh, but it is a hot day; we'll have thunder afore night, I guess. Eh, Miss Frances, but you do look well, surely."

"I feel it," said Frances, with a very bright smile. "Ah, there's my little cousin—poor child! how hot she must be. Well, Fluff, so here you are, back with your old Fanny again!"

There was a cry—half of rapture, half of pain—from a very small person in the lumbering old trap. The horse was drawn up with a jerk, and a girl, with very little of the woman about her, for she was still all curls, and curves, and child-like roundness, sprung lightly out of the trap, and put her arms round Frances's neck.

"Oh, Fan, I am glad to see you again! Here I am back just the same

as ever; I haven't grown a bit, and I'm as much a child as ever. How is your father? I was always so fond of him. Is he as faddy as of old? That's right; my mission in life is to knock fads out of people. Frances dear, why do you look at me in that perplexed way? Oh, I suppose because I'm in white. But I couldn't wear black on a day like this, as it wouldn't make mother any happier to know that every breath I drew was a torture. There, we won't talk of it. I have a black sash in my pocket; it's all crumpled, but I'll tie it on, if you'll help me. Frances dear, you never did think, did you, that trouble would come to me? but it did. Fancy Fluff and trouble spoken of in the same breath; it's like putting a weight of care on a butterfly; it isn't fair—you don't think it fair, do you, Fan?"

The blue eyes were full of tears; the rosy baby lips pouted sorrowfully.

"We won't talk of it now, at any rate, darling," said Frances, stooping and kissing the little creature with much affection.

Ellen brightened instantly.

"Of course we won't. It's delicious coming here; how wise it was of mother to send me! I shall love being with you more than anything. Why, Frances, you don't look a day older than when I saw you last."

"My father says," returned Frances, "that I age very quickly."

"But you don't, and I'll tell him so. Oh, no, he's not going to say those rude, unpleasant things when I'm by. How old are you, Fan, really? I forget."

"I am twenty-eight, dear."

"Are you?"

Fluff's blue eyes opened very wide.

"You don't look old, at any rate," she said presently. "And I should judge from your face you didn't feel it."

The ancient cab, which contained Ellen's boxes and numerous small possessions, trundled slowly down the avenue; the girls followed it arm in arm. They made a pretty picture—both faces were bright, both pairs of eyes sparkled, their white dresses touched, and the dark, earnest, and sweet eyes of the one were many times turned with unfeigned admiration to the bewitchingly round and baby face of the other.

"She has the innocent eyes of a child of two," thought Frances. "Poor little Fluff! And yet sorrow has touched even her!"

Then her pleasant thoughts vanished, and she uttered an annoyed exclamation.

"What does Mr. Spens want? Why should he trouble my father to-day of all days?"

"What is the matter, Frances?"

"That man in the gig," said Frances. "Do you see him? Whenever he comes, there is worry; it is unlucky his appearing just when you come to us, Fluff. But never mind; why should I worry you? Let us come into the house."

At dinner that day Frances incidentally asked her father what Mr. Spens wanted.

"All the accounts are perfectly straight," she said. "What did he come about? and he stayed for some time."

The slow blood rose into the old squire's face.

"Business," he said; "a little private matter for my own ear. I like Spens; he is a capital fellow, a thorough man of business, with no humbug about him. By the way, Frances, he does not approve of our selling the fruit, and he thinks we ought to make more of the ribbon border. He says we have only got the common yellow calceolarias—he does not see a single one of the choicer kinds."

"Indeed!" said Frances. She could not help a little icy tone coming into her voice. "Fluff, won't you have some cream with your strawberries?—I did not know, father, that Mr. Spens had anything to say of our garden."

"Only an opinion, my dear, and kindly meant. Now, Fluff"—the squire turned indulgently to his little favorite—"do you think Frances ought to take unjust prejudices?"

"But she doesn't," said Fluff. "She judges by instinct, and so do I. Instinct told her to dislike Mr. Spens' back as he sat in his gig, and so do I dislike it. I hate those round fat backs and short necks like his, and I hate of all things that little self-satisfied air."

"Oh, you may hate in that kind of way if you like," said the squire. "Hatred from a little midget like you is very different from Frances's sober prejudice. Besides, she knows Mr. Spens; he has been our excellent man of business for years. But come, Fluff, I am not going to talk over weighty matters with you. Have you brought your guitar? If so, we'll go into the south parlor and have some music."

CHAPTER V.

"FRANCES, YOU ARE CHANGED!"

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight—good—nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen—excellent! Oh, how out of breath I am, and how hot it is! Is that you, Frances? See, I've been skipping just before the south parlor window to amuse the squire for the last hour. He has gone to sleep now, so I can stop. Where are you going? How nice you look! Gray suits you. Oh, Frances, what extravagance! You have retrimmed that pretty shady hat! But it does look well. Now where are you off to?"

"I thought I would walk up the road a little way," said Frances. Her manner was not quite so calm and assured as usual. "Our old friend Philip Arnold is coming to-night, you know, and I thought I would like to meet him."

"May I come with you? I know I'm in a mess, but what matter? He's the man about whom all the fuss is made, isn't he?"

Frances blushed.

"What do you mean, dear?" she asked.

"Oh, don't I know? I heard you giving directions about his room, and didn't I see you walking round and round the garden for nearly two hours to-day choosing all the sweetest things—moss roses, and sweetbrier, and sprays of clematis? Of course there's a fuss made about him, though nothing is said. I know what I shall find him—There, I'm not going to say it—I would not vex you for worlds, Fan dear."

Frances smiled.

"I must start now, dear," she said, "or he will have reached the house before I leave it. Do you want to come with me, Fluff? You may if you like."

"No, I won't. I'm ever so tired, and people who are fussed about are dreadfully uninteresting. Do start for your walk, Frances, or you won't be in time to welcome your hero."

Frances started off at once. She was amused at Fluff's words.

"It is impossible for the little creature to guess anything," she said to herself; "that would never do. Philip should be quite unbiased. It would be most unfair for him to come here as anything but a perfectly free man. Ten years ago he said he loved me; but am I the same Frances? I am older; father says I am old for twenty-eight—then I was eighteen. Eighteen is a beautiful age—a careless and yet a grave age. Girls are so full of desires then; life stretches before them like a brilliant line of light. Everything is possible; they are not really at the top of the hill, and they feel so fresh and buoyant that it is a pleasure to climb. There is a feeling of morning in the air. At eighteen it is a good thing to be alive. Now, at eight-and-twenty one has learned to take life hard; a girl is old then, and yet not old enough. She is apt to be overworried; I used to be, but not since his letter came, and to-night I think I am back at eighteen. I hope he won't find me much altered. I hope this dress suits me. It would be awful now, when the cup is almost at my lips, if anything dashed it away; but, no! God has been very good to me, and I will have faith in Him."

All this time Frances was walking up-hill. She had now reached the summit of a long incline, and, looking ahead of her, saw a dusty traveler walking quickly with the free-and-easy stride of a man who is accustomed to all kinds of athletic exercises.

"That is Philip," said Frances.

Her heart beat almost to suffocation; she stood still for a moment, then walked on again more slowly, for her joy made her timid.

The stranger came on. As he approached he took off his hat, revealing a very tanned face and light short hair; his well-opened

eyes were blue; he had a rather drooping mustache, otherwise his face was clean shaven. If ten years make a difference in a woman, they often effect a greater change in a man. When Arnold last saw Frances he was twenty-two; he was very slight then, his mustache was little more than visible, and his complexion was too fair. Now he was bronzed and broadened. When he came up to Frances and took her hand, she knew that not only she herself, but all her little world, would acknowledge her lover to be a very handsome man.

"Is that really you, Frances?" he began.

His voice was thoroughly manly, and gave the girl who had longed for him for ten years an additional thrill of satisfaction.

"Is that really you? Let me hold your hand for an instant; Frances you are changed!"

"Older, you mean, Philip."

She was blushing and trembling—she could not hide this first emotion.

He looked very steadily into her face, then gently withdrew his hand.

"Age has nothing to do with it," he said. "You are changed, and yet there is some of the old Frances left. In the old days you had a petulant tone when people said things which did not quite suit you; I hope—I trust—it has not gone. I am not perfect, and I don't like perfection. Yes, I see it is still there. Frances, it is good to come back to the old country, and to you."

"You got my letter, Philip?"

"Of course; I answered it. Were you not expecting me this evening?"

"Yes: I came out here on purpose to meet you. What I should have said, Philip, was to ask you if you agreed to my proposal."

"And what was that?"

"That we should renew our acquaintance, but for the present both be free."

Arnold stopped in his walk, and again looked earnestly at the slight girl by his side. Her whole face was eloquent—her eyes were bright with suppressed feeling, but her words were measured and cold. Arnold was not a bad reader of character. Inwardly he smiled.

"Frances was a pretty girl," he said to himself; "but I never imagined she would grow into such a beautiful woman."

Aloud he made a quiet reply.

"We will discuss this matter to-morrow, Frances. Now tell me about your father. I was greatly distressed to see by your letter that your mother is dead."

"She died eight years ago, Philip. I am accustomed to the world without her now; at first it was a terrible place to me. Here we are, in the old avenue again. Do you remember it? Let us get under the shade of the elms. Oh, Fluff, you quite startled me!"

Fluff, all in white—she was never seen in any other dress, unless an occasional black ribbon was introduced for the sake of propriety—came panting up the avenue. Her face was flushed, her lips parted, her words came out fast and eagerly:

"Quick, Frances, quick! The squire is ill; I tried to awake him, and I couldn't. Oh, he looks so dreadful!"

"Take care of Philip, and I will go to him," said Frances. "Don't be frightened, Fluff; my father often sleeps heavily. Philip, let me introduce my little cousin, Ellen Danvers. Now, Nelly, be on your best behavior, for Philip is an old friend, and a person of importance."

"But we had better come back to the house with you, Frances," said Arnold. "Your father may be really ill. Miss—Miss Danvers seems alarmed."

"But I am not," said Frances, smiling first at Philip and then at her little cousin. "Fluff—we call this child Fluff as a pet name—does not know my father as I do. He often sleeps heavily, and when he does his face gets red, and he looks strange. I know what to do with him. Please don't come in, either of you, for half an hour. Supper will be ready then."

She turned away, walking rapidly, and a bend in the avenue soon hid her from view.

Little Ellen had not yet quite recovered her breath. She stood holding her hand to her side, and slightly panting.

"You seem frightened," said Arnold, kindly.

"It is not that," she replied. Her breath came quicker, almost in gasps. Suddenly she burst into tears. "It's all so dreadful," she said.

"What do you mean?" said Arnold.

To his knowledge he had never seen a girl cry in his life. He had come across very few girls while in Australia. One or two women he had met, but they were not particularly worthy specimens of their sex; he had not admired them, and had long ago come to the conclusion that the only perfect, sweet, and fair girl in existence was Frances Kane. When he saw Fluff's tears he discovered that he was mistaken—other women were sweet and gracious, other girls were lovable.

"Do tell me what is the matter," he said, in a tone of deep sympathy; for these fast-flowing tears alarmed him.

"I'm not fit for trouble," said Fluff. "I'm afraid of trouble, that's it. I'm really like the butterflies—I die if there's a cloud. It is not long since I lost my mother, and—now, now—I know the squire is much more ill than Frances thinks. Oh, I know it! What shall I do if the squire really gets very ill—if he—he dies? Oh, I'm so awfully afraid of death!"

Her cheeks paled visibly, her large, wide-open blue eyes dilated; she was acting no part—her terror and distress were real. A kind of instinct told Arnold what to say to her.

"You are standing under these great shady trees," he said. "Come out into the sunshine. You are young and apprehensive. Frances is much more likely to know the truth about Squire Kane than you are. She is not alarmed; you must not be, unless there is really cause. Now is not this better? What a lovely rose! Do you know, I have not seen this old-fashioned kind of cabbage rose for over ten years!"

"Then I will pick one for you," said Fluff.

She took out a scrap of cambric, dried her eyes like magic, and began to flit about the garden, humming a light air under her breath. Her dress was of an old-fashioned sort of book-muslin—it was made full and billowy; her figure was round and yet lithe, her hair was a mass of frizzy soft rings, and when the dimples played in her cheeks, and the laughter came back to her intensely blue eyes, Arnold could not help saying—and there was admiration in his voice and gaze:

"What fairy godmother named you so appropriately?"

"What do you mean? My name is Ellen."

"Frances called you Fluff; Thistledown would be as admirably appropriate."

While he spoke Fluff was handing him a rose. He took it, and placed it in his button-hole. He was not very skillful in arranging it, and she stood on tiptoe to help him. Just then Frances came out of the house. The sun was shining full on the pair; Fluff was laughing, Arnold was making a complimentary speech. Frances did not know why a shadow seemed to fall between her and the sunshine which surrounded them. She walked slowly across the grass to meet them. Her light dress was a little long, and it trailed after her. She had put a bunch of Scotch roses into her belt. Her step grew slower and

heavier as she walked across the smoothly kept lawn, but her voice was just as calm and clear as usual as she said gently:

"Supper is quite ready. You must be so tired and hungry, Philip."

"Not at all," he said, leaving Fluff and coming up to her side. "This garden rests me. To be back here again is perfectly delightful. To appreciate an English garden and English life, and—and English ladies—here his eyes fell for a brief moment on Fluff—one most have lived for ten years in the backwoods of Australia. How is your father, Frances? I trust Miss Danvers had no real cause for alarm?"

"Oh, no; Ellen is a fanciful little creature. He did sleep rather heavily. I think it was the heat; but he is all right now, and waiting to welcome you in the supper-room. Won't you let me show you the way to your room? You would like to wash your hands before eating."

Frances and Arnold walked slowly in the direction of the house. Fluff had left them; she was engaged in an eager game of play with an overgrown and unwieldly pup and a Persian kitten. Arnold had observed with some surprise that she had forgotten even to inquire for Mr. Kane.

CHAPTER VI.

"I WILL NOT SELL THE FIRS."

On the morning after Arnold's arrival the squire called his daughter into the south parlor.

"My love," he said, "I want a word with you."

As a rule Frances was very willing to have words with her father. She was always patient and gentle and sweet with him; but she would have been more than human if she had not cast some wistful glances into the garden, where Philip was waiting for her. He and she also had something to talk about that morning, and why did Fluff go out, and play those bewitching airs softly to herself on the guitar? And why did she sing in that wild-bird voice of hers? and why did Philip pause now and then in his walk, as though he was listening—which indeed he was, for it would be difficult for any one to shut their ears to such light and harmonious sounds. Frances hated herself for feeling jealous. No—of course she was not jealous; she could not stoop to anything so mean. Poor darling little Fluff! and Philip, her true lover, who had remained constant to her for ten long years.

With a smile on her lips, and the old look of patience in her steady eyes, she turned her back to the window and prepared to listen to what the squire had to say.

"The fact is, Frances—" he began. "Sit down, my dear, sit down; I hate to have people standing, it fidgets me so. Oh! you want to be out with that young man; well, Fluff will amuse him—dear little thing, Fluff—most entertaining. Has a way of soothing a man's nerves, which few women possess. You, my dear, have often a most irritating way with you; not that I complain—we all have our faults. You inherit this intense overwrought sort of manner from your mother, Frances."

Frances, who was standing absolutely quiet and still again, smiled

slightly.

"You had something to talk to me about," she said, in her gentlest of voice.

"To be sure I had. I can tell you I have my worries—wonder I'm alive—and since your mother died never a bit of sympathy do I get from mortal. There, read that letter from Spens, and see what you make of it. Impudent? uncalled for? I should think so; but I really do wonder what these lawyers are coming to. Soon there'll be no distinctions between man and man anywhere, when a beggarly country lawyer dares to write to a gentleman like myself in that strain. But read the letter, Frances; you'll have to see Spens this afternoon. *I'm* not equal to it."

"Let me see what Mr. Spens says," answered Frances.

She took the lawyer's letter from the squire's shaking old fingers, and opened it. Then her face became very pale, and as her eyes glanced rapidly over the contents, she could not help uttering a stifled exclamation.

"Yes, no wonder you're in a rage," said the squire. "The impudence of that letter beats everything."

"But what does Mr. Spens mean?" said Frances. "He says here—unless you can pay the six thousand pounds owing within three months, his client has given him instructions to sell the Firs. What does he mean, father? I never knew that we owed a penny. Oh, this is awful!"

"And how do you suppose we have lived?" said the squire, who was feeling all that undue sense of irritation which guilty people know so well. "How have we had our bread and butter? How has the house been kept up? How have the wages been met? I suppose you thought that that garden of yours—those vegetables and fruit—have kept everything going? That's all a woman knows. Besides, I've been

unlucky—two speculations have failed—every penny I put in lost in them. Now, what's the matter, Frances? You have a very unpleasant manner of staring."

"There was my mother's money," said Frances, who was struggling hard to keep herself calm. "That was always supposed to bring in something over two hundred pounds a year. I thought—I imagined—that with the help I was able to give from the garden and the poultry yard that we—we lived within our means."

Her lips trembled slightly as she spoke. Fluff was playing "Sweethearts" on her guitar, and Arnold was leaning with his arms folded against the trunk of a wide-spreading oak-tree. Was he listening to Fluff, or waiting for Frances? She felt like a person struggling through a horrible nightmare.

"I thought we lived within our means," she said, faintly.

"Just like you—women are always imagining things. We have no means to live on; your mother's money has long vanished—it was lost in that silver mine in Peru. And the greater part of the six thousand pounds lent by Spens has one way or another pretty nearly shared the same fate. I've been a very unlucky man, Frances, and if your mother were here, she'd pity me. I've had no one to sympathize with me since her death."

"I do, father," said his daughter. She went up and put her arms round his old neck. "It was a shock, and I felt half stunned. But I fully sympathize."

"Not that I am going to sell the Firs," said the squire, not returning Frances's embrace, but allowing her to take his limp hand within her own. "No, no; I've no idea of that. Spens and his client, whoever he is, must wait for their money, and that's what you have got to see him about, Frances. Come, now, you must make the best terms you can with Spens—a woman can do what she likes with a man when she knows how to manage."

"But what am I to say, father?"

"Say? Why, that's your lookout. Never heard of a woman yet who couldn't find words. Say? Anything in the world you please, provided you give him to clearly to understand that come what may I will not sell the Firs."

Frances stood still for two whole minutes. During this time she was thinking deeply—so deeply that she forgot the man who was waiting outside—she forgot everything but the great and terrible fact that, notwithstanding all her care and all her toil, beggary was staring them in the face.

"I will see Mr. Spens," she said at last, slowly: "it is not likely that I shall be able to do much. If you have mortgaged the Firs to this client of Mr. Spens, he will most probably require you to sell, in order to realize his money; but I will see him, and let you know the result."

"You had better order the gig, then, and go now; he is sure to be in at this hour. Oh, you want to talk to the man that you fancy is in love with you; but lovers can wait, and business can't. Understand clearly, once for all, Frances, that if the Firs is sold, I die."

"Dear father," said Frances—again she took his unwilling hand in hers—"do you suppose I want the Firs to be sold? Don't I love every stone of the old place, and every flower that grows here? If words can save it, they won't be wanting on my part. But you know better than I do that I am absolutely powerless in the matter."

She went out of the room, and the squire sat with the sun shining full on him, and grumbled. What was a blow to Frances, a blow which half stunned her in its suddenness and unexpectedness, had come gradually to the squire. For years past he knew that while his daughter was doing her utmost to make two ends meet—was toiling early and late to bring in a little money to help the slender household purse—she was only postponing an evil day which could never be averted. From the first, Squire Kane in his own small way had been a

speculator—never at any time had he been a lucky one, and now he reaped the results.

After a time he pottered to his feet, and strolled out into the garden. Frances was nowhere visible, but Arnold and Ellen were standing under a shady tree, holding an animated conversation together.

"Here comes the squire," said Fluff, in a tone of delight. She flew to his side, put her hand through his arm, and looked coaxingly and lovingly into his face.

"I am so glad you are not asleep," she said. "I don't like you when you fall asleep and get so red in the face; you frightened me last night—I was terrified—I cried. Didn't I, Mr. Arnold?"

"Yes," replied Arnold, "you seemed a good deal alarmed. Do you happen to know where your daughter is, Mr. Kane?"

"Yes; she is going into Martinstown on business for me. Ah, yes, Fluff, you always were a sympathizing little woman." Here the squire patted the dimpled hand; he was not interested in Philip Arnold's inquiries.

"If Frances is going to Martinstown, perhaps she will let me accompany her," said Arnold. "I will go and look for her."

He did not wait for the squire's mumbling reply, but started off quickly on his quest.

"Frances does want the gift of sympathy," said the squire, once more addressing himself with affection to Ellen. "Do you know, Fluff, that I am in considerable difficulty; in short, that I am going through just now a terrible trouble—oh, nothing that you can assist me in, dear. Still, one does want a little sympathy, and poor dear Frances, in that particular, is sadly, painfully deficient."

"Are you really in great trouble?" said Fluff. She raised her eyes with a look of alarm.

"Oh, I am dreadfully sorry! Shall I play for you, shall I sing something? Let me bring this arm-chair out here by this pear-tree; I'll get my guitar; I'll sing you anything you like—'Robin Adair,' or 'Auld Robin Gray,' or 'A Man's a Man;' you know how very fond you are of Burns."

"You are a good little girl," said the squire. "Place the arm-chair just at that angle, my love. Ah, that's good! I get the full power of the sun here. Somehow it seems to me, Fluff, that the summers are not half as warm as they used to be. Now play 'Bonnie Dundee'—it will be a treat to hear you."

Fluff fingered her guitar lovingly. Then she looked up into the wizened, discontented face of the old man opposite to her.

"Play," said the squire. "Why don't you begin?"

"Only that I'm thinking," said the spoiled child, tapping her foot petulantly. "Squire, I can't help saying it—I don't think you are quite fair to Frances."

"Eh, what?" said Squire Kane, in a voice of astonishment. "Highty-tighty, what next! Go on with your playing, miss."

"No, I won't! It isn't right of you to say she's not sympathetic."

"Not right of me! What next, I wonder! Let me tell you, Fluff, that although you're a charming little chit, you are a very saucy one."

"I don't care whether I'm saucy or not. You ought not to be unfair to Frances."

These rebellious speeches absolutely made the squire sit upright in his chair.

"What do you know about it?" he queried.

"Because she is sympathetic; she has the dearest, tenderest, most unselfish heart in the world. Oh, she's a darling! I love her!"

"Go on with your playing, Fluff," said the squire.

Two bright spots of surprise and anger burned on his cheeks, but there was also a reflective look on his face.

Fluff's eyes blazed. Her fair cheeks crimsoned, and she tried to thunder out a spirited battle march on her poor little guitar.

CHAPTER VII.

NO OTHER WAY.

Arnold went quickly round to the back of the house. Although he had been absent for ten years, he still remembered the ways of the old place, and knew where to find the almost empty stables, and the coach-houses which no longer held conveyances.

"This place requires about four thousand pounds a year to keep it up properly," murmured Arnold to himself, "and from the looks of things I should say these dear good folks had not as many hundreds. I wonder if Frances will have me—I wonder if—" here he paused.

His heart was full of Frances this morning, but it was also full of a strange kind of peace and thanksgiving. He was not greatly anxious; he had a curious sensation of being rested all over. The fact was, he had gone through the most hair-breadth escapes, the most thrilling adventures, during the last ten years. He had escaped alive, at the most fearful odds. He had known hunger and thirst; he had been many, many times face to face with death. For more than half the time of his exile things had gone against him, and hard indeed had been his lot; then the tide had slowly turned, and after five more years Philip Arnold had been able to return to his native land, and had felt that it was allowed to him to think with hope of the girl he had always loved.

He was in the same house with Frances now. She had not yet promised to be his, but he did not feel anxious. The quiet of the English home, the sweet, old-fashioned peace of the garden, the shade under the trees, the songs of the old-fashioned home birds, the scent of the old-fashioned home flowers, and the bright eyes and gentle voice of the prettiest little English girl he had ever seen, had a mesmerizing effect upon him. He wanted Frances; Frances was his one and only love; but he felt no particular desire to hurry on matters,

or to force an answer from her until she was ready to give it.

He strolled into the stable-yard, where Pete, the under-gardener, message-boy and general factotum, a person whom Watkins, the chief manager, much bullied, was harnessing a shaggy little pony to a very shaky-looking market cart. The cart wanted painting, the pony grooming, and the harness undoubtedly much mending.

"What are you doing, Pete?" said Arnold.

"This yer is for Miss Frances," drawled the lad. "She's going into Martinstown, and I'm gwine with her to hold the pony."

"No, you're not," said Arnold. "I can perform that office. Go and tell her that I'm ready when she is."

Pete sauntered away, but before he reached the back entrance to the house Frances came out. She walked slowly, and when she saw Philip her face did not light up. He was startled, not at an obvious, but an indefinable change in her. He could not quite tell where it lay, only he suddenly knew that she was quite eight-and-twenty, that there were hard lines round the mouth which at eighteen had been very curved and beautiful. He wished she would wear the pretty hat she had on last night; he did not think that the one she had on was particularly becoming. Still, she was his Frances, the girl whose face had always risen before him during the five years of horror through which he had lived, and during the five years of hope which had succeeded them.

He came forward and helped her to get into the little old-fashioned market cart. Then, as she gathered up the reins, and the pony was moving off, he prepared to vault into the vacant seat by her side. She laid her hand on it, however, and turned to him a very sad and entreating face.

"I think you had better not, Philip," she said. "It will be very hot in Martinstown to-day. I am obliged to go on a piece of business for my

father. I am going to see Mr. Spens, our lawyer, and I may be with him for some time. It would be stupid for you to wait outside with the pony. Pete had better come with me. Go back to the shade of the garden, Philip. I hear Fluff now playing her guitar."

"I am going with you," said Arnold. "Forgive me, Frances, but you are talking nonsense. I came here to be with you, and do you suppose I mind a little extra sunshine?"

"But I am a rather dull companion to-day," she said, still objecting. "I am very much obliged to you—you are very kind, but I really have nothing to talk about. I am worried about a bit of business of father's. It is very good of you, Philip, but I would really rather you did not come into Martinstown."

"If that is so, of course it makes a difference," said Arnold. He looked hurt. "I won't bother you," he said. "Come back quickly. I suppose we can have a talk after dinner?"

"Perhaps so; I can't say. I am very much worried about a piece of business of my father's."

"Pete, take your place behind your mistress," said Arnold.

He raised his hat, there was a flush on his face as Frances drove down the shady lane.

"I have offended him," she said to herself; "I suppose I meant to. I don't see how I can have anything to say to him now; he can't marry a beggar; and, besides, I must somehow or other support my father. Yes, it's at an end—the brightest of dreams. The cup was almost at my lips, and I did not think God would allow it to be dashed away so quickly. I must manage somehow to make Philip cease to care for me, but I think I am the most miserable woman in the world."

Frances never forgot that long, hot drive into Martinstown. She reached the lawyer's house at a little before noon, and the heat was then so great that when she found herself in his office she nearly

fainted.

"You look really ill, Miss Kane," said the man of business, inwardly commenting under his breath on how very rapidly Frances was ageing. "Oh, you have come from your father; yes, I was afraid that letter would be a blow to him; still, I see no way out of it—I really don't!"

"I have never liked you much, Mr. Spens," said Frances Kane. "I have mistrusted you, and been afraid of you; but I will reverse all my former opinions—all—now, if you will only tell me the exact truth with regard to my father's affairs."

The lawyer smiled and bowed.

"Thank you for your candor," he remarked. "In such a case as yours the plain truth is best, although it is hardly palatable. Your father is an absolutely ruined man. He can not possibly repay the six thousand pounds which he has borrowed. He obtained the money from my client by mortgaging the Firs to him. Now my client's distinct instructions are to sell, and realize what we can. The property has gone much to seed. I doubt if we shall get back what was borrowed; at any rate, land, house, furniture, all must go."

"Thank you—you have indeed spoken plainly," said Frances. "One question more: when must you sell?"

"In three months from now. Let me see; this is July. The sale will take place early in October."

Frances had been sitting. She now rose to her feet.

"And there is really no way out of it?" she said, lingering for a moment.

"None; unless your father can refund the six thousand pounds."

"He told me, Mr. Spens, that if the Firs is sold he will certainly die. He

is an old man, and feeble now. I am almost sure that he speaks the truth when he says such a blow will kill him."

"Ah! painful, very," said the lawyer. "These untoward misfortunes generally accompany rash speculation. Still, I fear—I greatly fear—that this apprehension, if likely to be realized, will not affect my client's resolution."

"Would it," said Frances, "would it be possible to induce your client to defer the sale till after my father's death? Indeed—indeed—indeed, I speak the truth when I say I do not think he will have long to wait for his money. Could he be induced to wait, Mr. Spens, if the matter were put to him very forcibly?"

"I am sure he could not be induced, Miss Kane; unless, indeed, you could manage to pay the interest at five per cent. on his six thousand pounds. That is, three hundred a year."

"And then?" Frances's dark eyes brightened.

"I would ask him the question; but such a thing is surely impossible."

"May I have a week to think it over? I will come to you with my decision this day week."

"Well, well, I say nothing one way or another. You can't do impossibilities, Miss Kane. But a week's delay affects no one, and I need not go on drawing up the particulars of sale until I hear from you again."

Frances bowed, and left the office without even shaking hands with Mr. Spens.

"She's a proud woman," said the lawyer to himself, as he watched her driving away. "She looks well, too, when her eyes flash, and she puts on that haughty air. Odd that she should be so fond of that cantankerous old father. I wonder if the report is true which I heard of an Australian lover turning up for her. Well, there are worse-looking

women than Frances Kane. I thought her very much aged when she first came into the office, but when she told me that she didn't much like me, she looked handsome and young enough."

Instead of driving home, Frances turned the pony's head in the direction of a long shady road which led into a westerly direction away from Martinstown. She drove rapidly for about half an hour under the trees. Then she turned to the silent Pete.

"Pete, you can go back now to the Firs, and please tell your master and Miss Danvers that I shall not be home until late this evening. See, I will send this note to the squire."

She tore a piece of paper out of her pocket-book, and scribbled a few lines hastily.

> "Dear Father,—I have seen Mr. Spens. Don't despair. I am doing my best for you.
>
> Frances."

"I shall be back before nightfall," said Frances, giving the note to the lad. "Drive home quickly, Pete. See that Bob has a feed of oats, and a groom-down after his journey. I shall be home at latest by nightfall."

CHAPTER VIII.

FOR THE SAKE OF THREE HUNDRED A YEAR.

For nearly another quarter of a mile Frances walked quickly under the friendly elm-trees. Then she came to some massive and beautifully wrought iron gates, and paused for an instant, pressing her hand to her brow.

"Shall I go on?" said she to herself. "It means giving up Philip—it means deliberately crushing a very bright hope."

She remained quite still for several seconds longer. Her lips, which were white and tired-looking, moved silently. She raised her eyes, and looked full into the blue deep of the sky; and then she turned in at one of the gates, and walked up an exquisitely kept carriage drive.

Some ladies in a carriage bowled past her; the ladies bent forward, bowed, and smiled.

"Why, that is Frances Kane," they said one to another. "How good of her to call—and this is one of Aunt Lucilla's bad days. If she will consent to see Frances it will do her good."

Frances walked on. The avenue was considerably over a mile in length. Presently she came to smaller gates, which were flung open. She now found herself walking between velvety greenswards, interspersed with beds filled with all the bright flowers of the season. Not a leaf was out of place; not an untidy spray was to be seen anywhere; the garden was the perfection of what money and an able gardener could achieve.

The avenue was a winding one, and a sudden bend brought Frances in full view of a large, square, massive-looking house—a house which contained many rooms, and was evidently of modern date. Frances

mounted the steps which led to the wide front entrance, touched an electric bell, and waited until a footman in livery answered her summons.

"Is Mrs. Passmore at home?"

"I will inquire, madame. Will you step this way?"

Frances was shown into a cool, beautifully furnished morning-room.

"What name, madame?"

"Miss Kane, from the Firs. Please tell Mrs. Passmore that I will not detain her long."

The man bowed, and, closing the door softly after him, withdrew.

Her long walk, and all the excitement she had gone through, made Frances feel faint. It was past the hour for lunch at the Firs, and she had not eaten much at the early breakfast. She was not conscious, however, of hunger, but the delicious coolness of the room caused her to close her eyes gratefully—gave her a queer sensation of sinking away into nothing, and an odd desire, hardly felt before it had vanished, that this might really be the case, and so that she might escape the hard rôle of duty.

The rustling of a silk dress was heard in the passage—a quick, light step approached—and a little lady most daintily attired, with a charming frank face, stepped briskly into the room.

"My dear Frances, this is delightful—how well—no, though, you are not looking exactly the thing, poor dear. So you have come to have lunch with me; how very, very nice of you! The others are all out, and I am quite alone."

"But I have come to see you on business, Carrie."

"After luncheon, then, dear. My head is swimming now, for I have been worrying over Aunt Lucilla's accounts. Ah, no, alas! this is not

one of her good days. Come into the next room, Frances—if you have so little time to spare, you busy, busy creature, you can at least talk while we eat."

Mrs. Passmore slipped her hand affectionately through Frances's arm, and led her across the wide hall to another cool and small apartment where covers were already placed for two.

"I am very glad of some lunch, Carrie," said Frances. "I left home early this morning. I am not ashamed to say that I am both tired and hungry."

"Eat then, my love, eat—these are lamb cutlets; these pease are not to be compared with what you can produce at the Firs, but still they are eatable. Have a glass of this cool lemonade. Oh, yes, we will help ourselves. You need not wait Smithson."

The footman withdrew. Mrs. Passmore flitted about the table, waiting on her guest with a sort of loving tenderness. Then she seated herself close to Frances, pretended to eat a mouthful or two, and said suddenly:

"I know you are in trouble. And yet I thought—I hoped—that you would be bringing me good news before long. Is it true, Frances, that Philip Arnold is really alive after all, and has returned to England?"

"It is perfectly true, Carrie. At this moment Philip is at the Firs."

Mrs. Passmore opened her lips—her bright eyes traveled all over Frances's face.

"You don't look well," she said, after a long pause. "I am puzzled to account for your not looking well now."

"What you think is not going to happen, Carrie. Philip is not likely to make a long visit. He came yesterday; he may go again to-morrow or next day. We won't talk of it. Oh, yes, of course it is nice to think he is alive and well. Carrie, does your aunt Lucilla still want a companion?"

Mrs. Passmore jumped from her seat—her eyes lighted up; she laid her two dimpled, heavily ringed hands on Frances's shoulders.

"My dear, you can't mean it! You can't surely mean that you would come? You know what you are to auntie; you can do anything with her. Why, you would save her, Frances; you would save us all."

"I do think of accepting the post, if you will give it to me," said Frances.

"Give it to you? you darling! As if we have not been praying and longing for this for the last two years!"

"But, Carrie, I warn you that I only come because necessity presses me—and—and—I must make conditions—I must make extravagant demands."

"Anything, dearest. Is it a salary? Name anything you fancy. You know Aunt Lucilla is rolling in money. Indeed, we all have more than we know what to do with. Money can't buy everything, Frances. Ah, yes, I have proved that over and over again; but if it can buy you, it will for once have done us a good turn. What do you want, dear? Don't be afraid to name your price—a hundred a year? You shall have it with pleasure."

"Carrie, I know what you will think of me, but if I am never frank again I must be now. I don't come here to oblige you, or because I have a real, deep, anxious desire to help your aunt. I come—I come alone because of a pressing necessity; there is no other way out of it that I can see, therefore my demand must be extravagant. If I take the post of companion to your aunt Lucilla, I shall want three hundred pounds a year."

Mrs. Passmore slightly started, and for the briefest instant a frown of disappointment and annoyance knit her pretty brows. Then she glanced again at the worn face of the girl who sat opposite to her; the steadfast eyes looked down, the long, thin, beautifully cut fingers

trembled as Frances played idly with her fork and spoon.

"No one could call Frances Kane mercenary," she said to herself. "Poor dear, she has some trouble upon her. Certainly her demand is exorbitant; never before since the world was known did a companion receive such a salary. Still, where would one find a second Frances?"

"So be it, dear," she said, aloud. "I admit that your terms are high, but in some ways your services are beyond purchase. No one ever did or ever will suit Aunt Lucilla as you do. Now, when will you come?"

"I am not quite sure yet, Carrie, that I can come at all. If I do it will probably be in a week from now. Yes, to-morrow week; if I come at all I will come then; and I will let you know certainly on this day week."

"My dear, you are a great puzzle to me; why can't you make up your mind now?"

"My own mind is made up, Carrie, absolutely and fully, but others have really to decide for me. I think the chances are that I shall have my way. Carrie dear, you are very good; I wish I could thank you more."

"No, don't thank me. When you come you will give as much as you get. Your post won't be a sinecure."

"Sinecures never fell in my way," said Frances. "May I see your aunt for a few minutes to-day?"

"Certainly, love—you know her room. You will find her very poorly and fractious this afternoon. Will you tell her that you are coming to live with her, Frances?"

"No; that would be cruel, for I may not be able to come, after all. Still, I think I shall spend some time in doing my utmost to help you and yours, Carrie."

"God bless you, dear! Now run up to auntie. You will find me in the

summer-house whenever you like to come down. I hope you will spend the afternoon with me, Frances, and have tea; I can send you home in the evening."

"You are very kind, Carrie, but I must not stay. I will say good-bye to you now, for I must go back to Martinstown for a few minutes early this afternoon. Good-bye, thank you. You are evidently a very real friend in need."

Frances kissed Mrs. Passmore, and then ran lightly up the broad and richly carpeted stairs. Her footsteps made no sound on the thick Axminster. She flitted past down a long gallery hung with portraits, presently stopped before a baize door, paused for a second, then opened it swiftly and went in.

She found herself in an anteroom, darkened and rendered cool with soft green silk drapery. The anteroom led to a large room beyond. She tapped at the door of the inside room, and an austere-looking woman dressed as a nurse opened it immediately. Her face lighted up when she saw Frances.

"Miss Kane, you're just the person of all others my mistress would like to see. Walk in, miss, please. Can you stay for half an hour? If so, I'll leave you."

"Yes, Jennings. I am sorry Mrs. Carnegie is so ill to-day."

Then she stepped across the carpeted floor, the door was closed behind her, and she found herself in the presence of a tall thin woman, who was lying full length on a sofa by the open window. Never was there a more peevish face than the invalid wore. Her brows were slightly drawn together, her lips had fretful curves; the pallor of great pain, of intense nervous suffering, dwelt on her brow. Frances went softly up to her.

"How do you do, Mrs. Carnegie?" she said, in her gentle voice.

The sound was so low and sweet that the invalid did not even start. A

smile like magic chased the furrows from her face.

"Sit down, Frances, there's a dear child," she said. "Now, I have been wishing for you more than for any one. I'm at my very worst to-day, dear. My poor back is so bad—oh, the nerves, dear child, the nerves! I really feel that I can not speak a civil word to any one, and Jennings is so awkward, painfully awkward—her very step jars me; and why will she wear those stiff-starched caps and aprons? But there, few understand those unfortunates who are martyrs to nerves."

"You have too much light on your eyes," said Frances. She lowered the blind about an inch or two.

"Now tell me, have you been down-stairs to-day?"

"How can you ask me, my love, when I can't even crawl? Besides, I assure you, dear, dearest one"—here Mrs. Carnegie took Frances's hand and kissed it—"that they dislike having me. Freda and Alicia quite show their dislike in their manner. Carrie tries to smile and look friendly, but she is nothing better than a hypocrite. I can read through them all. They are only civil to me; they only put up with their poor old aunt because I am rich, and they enjoy my comfortable house. Ah! they none of them know what nerves are—the rack, the tear, to the poor system, that overstrained nerves can give. My darling, you understand, you pity me."

"I am always very sorry for you, Mrs. Carnegie, but I think when you are better you ought to exert yourself a little more, and you must not encourage morbid thoughts. Now shall I tell you what I did with that last five-pound note you gave me?"

"Ah, yes, love, that will be interesting. It is nice to feel that even such a useless thing as money can make some people happy. Is it really, seriously the case, Frances, that there are any creatures so destitute in the world as not to know where to find a five-pound note?"

"There are thousands and thousands who don't even know where to

find a shilling," replied Frances.

Mrs. Carnegie's faded blue eyes lighted up.

"How interesting!" she said. "Why, it must make existence quite keen. Fancy being anxious about a shilling! I wish something would make life keen for me; but my nerves are in such a state that really everything that does not thrill me with torture, palls."

"I will tell you about the people who have to find their shillings," responded Frances.

She talked with animation for about a quarter of an hour, then kissed the nervous sufferer, and went away.

Half an hour's brisk walking brought her back to Martinstown. She reached the lawyer's house, and was fortunate in finding him within.

"Will you tell your client, Mr. Spens, that if he will hold over the sale of the Firs until after my father's death, I will engage to let him have five per cent. on his money? I have to-day accepted the post of companion to Mrs. Carnegie, of Arden. For this I am to have a salary of three hundred pounds a year."

"Bless me!" said the lawyer. "Such a sacrifice! Why! that woman can't keep even a servant about her. A heartless, selfish hypochondriac! even her nieces will scarcely stay in the house with her. I think she would get you cheap at a thousand a year, Miss Kane; but you must be joking."

"I am in earnest," responded Frances. "Please don't make it harder for me, Mr. Spens. I know what I am undertaking. Will you please tell your client that I can pay him his interest? If he refuses to accept it, I am as I was before; if he consents, I go to Arden. You will do me a great favor by letting me know his decision as soon as possible."

The lawyer bowed.

"I will do so," he said. Then he added, "I hope you will forgive me, Miss Kane, for saying that I think you are a very brave and unselfish woman, but I don't believe even you will stand Mrs. Carnegie for long."

"I think you are mistaken," responded Frances, gently. "I do it for the sake of three hundred pounds a year, to save the Firs for my father during his lifetime."

The lawyer thought he had seldom seen anything sadder than Frances' smile. It quite haunted him as he wrote to his client, urging him to accept her terms.

CHAPTER IX.

UNDER THE ELMS.

Squire Kane had spent by no means an unhappy day. The misfortune, which came like a sudden crash upon Frances, he had been long prepared for. Only last week Mr. Spens had told him that he might expect some such letter as had been put into his hands that morning. He had been a little nervous while breaking his news to Frances—a little nervous and a little cross. But when once she was told, he was conscious of a feeling of relief; for all his hard words to her, he had unbounded faith in this clever managing daughter of his; she had got him out of other scrapes, and somehow, by hook or by crook, she would get him out of this.

Except for Fluff's rather hard words to him when he spoke to her about Frances, he had rather an agreeable day. He was obliged to exert himself a little, and the exertion did him good and made him less sleepy than usual. Both Fluff and Philip did their best to make matters pass agreeably for him, and when Frances at last reached home, in the cool of the evening, she found herself in the midst of a very cheerful domestic scene.

At this hour the squire was usually asleep in the south parlor; on this night he was out-of-doors. His circular cape, it is true, was over his shoulders, and Fluff had tucked a white shawl round his knees, but still he was sitting out-of-doors, cheering, laughing, and applauding while Arnold and Miss Danvers sung to him. Fluff had never looked more lovely. Her light gossamery white dress was even more cloudy than usual; a softer, richer pink mantled her rounded cheeks; her big blue eyes were lustrous, and out of her parted lips poured a melody as sweet as a nightingale's. Arnold was standing near her—he also was singing—and as Frances approached he did not see her, for his glance, full of admiration, was fixed upon Miss Danvers.

"Halloo! here we are, Frances!" called out the squire, "and a right jolly time we've all had. I'm out-of-doors, as you see; broken away from my leading-strings when you're absent; ah, ah! How late you are, child! but we didn't wait dinner. It doesn't agree with me, as you know, to be kept waiting for dinner."

"You look dreadfully tired, Frances," said Philip.

He dropped the sheet of music he was holding, and ran to fetch a chair for her. He no longer looked at Ellen, for Frances's pallor and the strained look in her eyes filled him with apprehension.

"You don't look at all well," he repeated.

And he stood in front of her, shading her from the gaze of the others.

Frances closed her eyes for a second.

"It was a hot, long walk," she said then, somewhat faintly. And she looked up and smiled at him. It was the sweetest of smiles, but Arnold, too, felt, as well as the lawyer, that there was something unnatural and sad in it.

"I don't understand it," he said to himself. "There's some trouble on her; what can it be? I'm afraid it's a private matter, for the squire's right enough. Never saw the old boy looking jollier." Aloud he said, turning to Fluff, "Would it not be a good thing to get a cup of tea for Frances? No?—now I insist. I mean you must let us wait on you, Frances; Miss Danvers and I will bring the tea out here. We absolutely forbid you to stir a step until you have taken it."

His "we" meant "I."

Frances was only too glad to lie back in the comfortable chair, and feel, if only for a few minutes, she might acknowledge him her master.

The squire, finding all this fuss about Frances wonderfully uncongenial, had retired into the house, and Arnold and Fluff served

her daintily—Arnold very solicitous for comfort, and Fluff very merry, and much enjoying her present office of waiting-maid.

"I wish this tea might last forever," suddenly exclaimed Frances.

Her words were spoken with energy, and her dark eyes, as they glanced at Arnold, were full of fire.

It was not her way to speak in this fierce and spasmodic style, and the moment the little sentence dropped from her lips she blushed.

Arnold looked at her inquiringly.

"Are you too tired to have a walk with me?" he said. "Not far—down there under the shade of the elm-trees. You need not be cruel, Frances. You can come with me as far as that."

Frances blushed still more vividly.

"I am really very tired," she answered. There was unwillingness in her tone.

Arnold gazed at her in surprise and perplexity.

"Perhaps," he said, suddenly, looking at Fluff, "perhaps, if you are quite too tired even to stir a few steps, Frances, Miss Danvers would not greatly mind leaving us alone here for a little."

Before she could reply, he went up to the young girl's side and took her hand apologetically.

"You don't mind?" he said. "I mean, you won't think me rude when I tell you that I have come all the way from Australia to see Frances?"

"Rude? I am filled with delight," said Fluff.

Her eyes danced; she hummed the air of "Sweethearts" quite in an obtrusive manner as she ran into the house.

"Oh, squire," she said, running up to the old man, who had seated

himself in his favorite chair in the parlor. "I have discovered such a lovely secret."

"Ah, what may that be, missy? By the way, Fluff, you will oblige me very much if you will call Frances here. This paraffine lamp has never been trimmed—if I light it, it will smell abominably; it is really careless of Frances to neglect my comforts in this way. Oblige me by calling her, Fluff; she must have finished her tea by this time."

"I'm not going to oblige you in that way," said Fluff. "Frances is particularly engaged—she can't come. Do you know he came all the way from Australia on purpose? What can a lamp matter?"

"What a lot of rubbish you're talking, child! Who came from Australia? Oh, that tiresome Arnold! A lamp does matter, for I want to read."

"Well, then, I'll attend to it," said Fluff. "What is the matter with it?"

"The wick isn't straight—the thing will smell, I tell you."

"I suppose I can put it right. I never touched a lamp before in my life. Where does the wick come?"

"Do be careful, Ellen, you will smash that lamp—it cost three and sixpence. There, I knew you would; you've done it now."

The glass globe lay in fragments on the floor. Fluff gazed at the broken pieces comically.

"Frances would have managed it all right," she said. "What a useless little thing I am! I can do nothing but dance and sing and talk. Shall I talk to you, squire? We don't want light to talk, and I'm dying to tell you what I've discovered."

"Well, child, well—I hate a mess on the floor like that. Well, what is it you've got to say to me, Fluff? It's really unreasonable of Frances not to come. She must have finished her tea long ago."

"Of course she has finished her tea; she is talking to Mr. Arnold. He

came all the way from Australia to have this talk with her. I'm so glad. You'll find out what a useful, dear girl Frances is by and by, when you never have her to trim your lamps."

"What do you mean, you saucy little thing? When I don't have Frances; what do you mean?"

"Why, you can't have her when she's—she's married. It must be wonderfully interesting to be married; I suppose I shall be some day. Weren't you greatly excited long, long ago, when you married?"

"One would think I lived in the last century, miss. As to Frances, well—well, she knows my wishes. Where did you say she was? Really, I'm very much disturbed to-day; I had a shock, too, this morning—oh! nothing that you need know about; only Frances might be reasonable. Listen to me, Fluff; your father is in India, and, it so happens, can not have you with him at present, and your mother, poor soul, poor, dear soul! she's dead; it was the will of Heaven to remove her, but if there is a solemn duty devolving upon a girl, it is to see to her parents, provided they are with her. Frances has her faults, but I will say, as a rule, she knows her duty in this particular."

The squire got up restlessly as he spoke, and, try as she would, Fluff found she could no longer keep him quiet in the dark south parlor. He went to the open window and called his daughter in a high and peevish voice. Frances, however, was nowhere within hearing.

The fact was, when they were quite alone, Philip took her hand and said, almost peremptorily:

"There is a seat under the elm-trees; we can talk there without being disturbed."

"It has come," thought Frances. "I thought I might have been spared to-night. I have no answer ready—I don't know what is before me. The chances are that I must have nothing to say to Philip; every chance is against our marrying, and yet I can not—I know I can not refuse him

to-night."

They walked slowly together through the gathering dusk. When they reached the seat under the elm-tree Arnold turned swiftly, took Frances's hand in his, and spoke.

"Now, Frances, now; and at last!" he said. "I have waited ten years for this moment. I have loved you with all my heart and strength for ten years."

"It was very—very good of you, Philip."

"Good of me! Why do you speak in that cold, guarded voice? Goodness had nothing to say to the matter. I could not help myself. What's the matter, Frances? A great change has come over you since the morning. Are you in trouble? Tell me what is troubling you, my darling?"

Frances began to cry silently.

"You must not use loving words to me," she said; "they—they wring my heart. I can not tell you what is the matter, Philip, at least for a week. And—oh! if you would let me answer you in a week—and oh! poor Philip, I am afraid there is very little hope."

"Why so, Frances; don't you love me?"

"I—I—ought not to say it. Let me go back to the house now."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. Do you love me?"

"Philip, I said I would give you an answer in a week."

"This has nothing to say to your answer. You surely know now whether you love me or not."

"I—Philip, can't you see? Need I speak?"

"I see that you have kept me at a distance, Frances; that you have left me alone all day; that you seem very tired and unhappy. What I see—

yes, what I see—does not, I confess, strike me in a favorable light."

Frances, who had been standing all this time, now laid her hand on Arnold's shoulder. Her voice had grown quiet, and her agitation had disappeared.

"A week will not be long in passing," she said. "A heavy burden has been laid upon me, and the worst part is the suspense. If you have waited ten years, you can wait another week, Philip. I can give you no other answer to-night."

The hand which unconsciously had been almost caressing in its light touch was removed, and Frances returned quickly to the house. She came in by a back entrance, and, going straight to her own room, locked the door. Thus she could not hear her father when he called her.

But Philip remained for a long time in the elm-walk, hurt, angry, and puzzled.

CHAPTER X.

"FLUFF WILL SUIT HIM BEST."

Frances spent a very unhappy night. She could not doubt Philip's affection for her, but she knew very little about men, and was just then incapable of grasping its depth. Like many another woman, she overlooked the fact that in absolutely sacrificing herself she also sacrificed the faithful heart of the man who had clung to her memory for ten long years.

Frances was too humble to suppose it possible that any man could be in serious trouble because he could not win her.

"I know what will happen," she said to herself, as she turned from side to side of her hot, unrestful pillow. "I know exactly how things will be. The man to whom my father owes the money will accept the interest from me. Yes, of course, that is as it should be. That is what I ought to wish for and pray for. In about a week from now I shall go to live at Arden, and the next few years of my life will be taken up soothing Mrs. Carnegie's nerves. It is not a brilliant prospect, but I ought to be thankful if in that way I can add to my poor father's life. Of course, as soon as I hear from Mr. Spens, I must tell Philip I can have nothing to say to him. I must give Philip up. I must pretend that I don't love him. Perhaps he will be disappointed for awhile; but of course he will get over it. He'll get another wife by and by; perhaps he'll choose Fluff. Fluff is just the girl to soothe a man and make him happy. She is so bright, and round, and sweet, she has no hard angles anywhere, and she is so very pretty. I saw Philip looking at her with great admiration to-night. Then she is young, too. In every way she is more suited to him than I am. Oh, it won't be at all difficult for Philip to transfer his affections to Fluff! Dear little girl, she will make him happy. They will both be happy, and I must hide the pain in my heart somehow. I do believe, I do honestly believe, that Fluff is more suited to Philip than I am; for now and then, even if I had the happiest lot, I

must have my sad days. I am naturally grave, and sometimes I have a sense of oppression. Philip would not have liked me when I was not gay. Some days I must feel grave and old, and no man would like that. No doubt everything would be for the best; at least, for Philip, and yet how much—how much I love him!"

Frances buried her head in the bed-clothes, and sobbed, long and sadly. After this fit of crying she fell asleep.

It was early morning, and the summer light was filling the room when she woke. She felt calmer now, and she resolutely determined to turn her thoughts in practical directions. There was every probability that the proposal she had made to Mr. Spens would be accepted, and if that were so she had much to do during the coming week.

She rose at her usual early hour, and, going down-stairs, occupied herself first in the house, and then with Watkins in the garden. She rather dreaded Philip's appearance, but if he were up early he did not come out, and when Frances met him at breakfast his face wore a tired, rather bored expression. He took little or no notice of her, but he devoted himself to Fluff, laughing at her gay witty sallies, and trying to draw her out.

After breakfast Frances had a long conversation with her father. She then told him what she meant to do in order that he might continue to live at the Firs. She told her story in a very simple, ungarnished manner, but she said a few words in a tone which rather puzzled the squire at the end.

"I will now tell you," she said, "that when Philip wrote to me asking me to be his wife I was very, very glad. For all the long years of his absence I had loved him, and when I thought he was dead I was heart-broken. I meant to marry him after he wrote me that letter, but I would not say so at once, for I knew that I had grown much older, and I thought it quite possible that when he saw me he might cease to love me. That is not the case; last night he let me see into his heart, and he loves me very, very deeply. Still, if your creditor consents to the

arrangement I have proposed, I can not marry Philip—I shall then absolutely and forever refuse him. But I do this for you, father, for my heart is Philip's. I wish you to understand, therefore, that I could not give up more for you than I am doing. It would be a comfort for me if, in return, you would give me a little affection."

Frances stood tall and straight and pale by her father's side. She now looked full into his face. There were no tears in her eyes, but there was the passion of a great cry in the voice which she tried to render calm.

The squire was agitated in spite of himself; he was glad Fluff was not present. He had an uneasy consciousness of certain words Fluff had said to him yesterday.

"You are a good girl, Frances," he said, rising to his feet and laying his trembling old hand on her arm. "I love you after my fashion, child—I am not a man of many words. By and by, when you are old yourself, Frances, you won't regret having done something to keep your old father for a short time longer out of his grave. After all, even with your utmost endeavor, I am not likely to trouble any one long. When I am dead and gone, you can marry Philip Arnold, Frances."

"No father."

Frances's tone was quiet and commonplace now.

"Sit down, please; don't excite yourself. I am not a woman to keep any man waiting for me. I trust, long before you are dead, father, Philip will be happy with another wife."

"What! Fluff, eh?" said the old man. "What a capital idea! You will forgive my saying that she will suit him really much better than you, Frances. Ah, there they go down the elm-walk together. She certainly is a fascinating little thing. It will comfort you, Frances, to know that you do Philip no injury by rejecting him; for he really gets a much more suitable wife in that pretty young girl—you are decidedly

passée, my love."

Frances bit her lips hard.

"On the whole, then, you are pleased with what I have done," she said, in a constrained voice.

"Very much pleased, my dear. You have acted well, and really with uncommon sense for a woman. There is only one drawback that I can see to your scheme. While you are enjoying the luxuries and comforts of Arden, who is to take care of me at the Firs?"

"I have thought of that," said Frances. "I acknowledge there is a slight difficulty; but I think matters can be arranged. First of all, father, please disabuse yourself of the idea that I shall be in a state of comfort and luxury. I shall be more or less a close prisoner; I shall be in servitude. Make of that what you please."

"Yes, yes, my love—a luxurious house, carriages, and horses—an affectionate and most devoted friend in Lucilla Carnegie—the daintiest living, the most exquisitely furnished rooms. Yes, yes, I'm not complaining. I'm only glad your lot has fallen in such pleasant places, Frances. Still, I repeat, what is to become of me?"

"I thought Mrs. Cooper, our old housekeeper, would come back and manage matters for you, father. She is very skillful and nice, and she knows your ways. Watkins quite understands the garden, and I myself, I am sure, will be allowed to come over once a fortnight or so. There is one thing—you must be very, very careful of your money, and Watkins must try to sell all the fruit and vegetables he can. Fluff, of course, can not stay here. My next thought is to arrange a home for her, but even if I have to leave next week, she need not hurry away at once. Now, father, if you will excuse me, I will go out to Watkins, for I have a great deal to say to him."

CHAPTER XI.

EDGE TOOLS.

"I have something to say to you, Fluff," said Frances.

The young girl was standing in her white dress, with her guitar hung in its usual attitude by her side. She scarcely ever went anywhere without this instrument, and she was fond of striking up the sweetest, wildest songs to its accompaniment at any moment.

Fluff, for all her extreme fairness and babyishness, had not a doll's face. The charming eyes could show many emotions, and the curved lips reveal many shades either of love or dislike. She had not a passionate face; there were neither heights nor depths about little Fluff; but she had a very warm heart, and was both truthful and fearless.

She had been waiting in a sheltered part of the garden for over an hour for Arnold. He had promised to go down with her to the river—he was to sketch, and she was to play. It was intensely hot, even in the shadiest part of the squire's garden, but by the river there would be coolness and a breeze. Fluff was sweet-tempered, but she did not like to wait an hour for any man, and she could not help thinking it aggravating of Arnold to go on pacing up and down in the hot sun by the squire's side. What could the squire and Arnold have to say to each other? And why did the taller and younger man rather stoop as he walked? And why was his step so depressed, so lacking in energy that even Fluff, under her shady tree in the distance, noticed it?

She was standing so when Frances came up to her; now and then her fingers idly touched her guitar, her rosy lips pouted, and her glowing dark-blue eyes were fixed reproachfully on Arnold's distant figure.

Frances looked pale and fagged; she was not in the becoming white dress which she had worn during the first few days of Arnold's visit; she was in gray, and the gray was not particularly fresh nor cool in texture.

"Fluff, I want to speak to you," she said.

And she laid her hand on the girl's shoulder—then her eyes followed Fluff's; she saw Arnold, and her cheeks grew a little whiter than before.

"Fluff misses him already," she whispered to her heart. "And he likes her. They are always together. Yes, I see plainly that I sha'n't do Philip any serious injury when I refuse him."

"What is it, Frances?" said Fluff, turning her rather aggrieved little face full on the new-comer. "Do you want to say anything to me very badly? I do call it a shame of Mr. Arnold; he and the squire have chatted together in the South Walk for over an hour. It's just too bad, I might have been cooling myself by the river now; I'm frightfully hot."

"No, you're not really very hot," said Frances, in the peculiarly caressing tone she always employed when speaking to her little cousin. "But I own it is very annoying to have to wait for any one—more particularly when you are doing nothing. Just lay your guitar on the grass, Fluff, and let us walk up and down under the shade here. I have something to say to you, and it will help to pass the time."

Fluff obeyed at once.

"You don't look well, Frances," she said, in her affectionate way, linking her hand through her cousin's arm. "I have noticed that you haven't looked yourself ever since the day you went to Martinstown—nearly a week ago now. Now I wonder at that, for the weather has been so perfect, and everything so sweet and nice; and I must say it is a comfort to have a pleasant man like Mr. Arnold in the house. I have enjoyed myself during the past week, and I greatly wonder you

haven't, Frances."

"I am glad you have been happy, dear," said Frances, ignoring the parts of Fluff's speech which related to herself. "But it is on that very subject I want now to speak to you. You like living at the Firs, don't you, Fluff?"

"Why, of course, Frances. It was poor mamma's"—here the blue eyes brimmed with tears—"it was darling mother's wish that I should come here to live with you and the squire. I never could be so happy anywhere as at the Firs; I never, never want to leave it."

"But of course you will leave it some day, little Fluff, for in the ordinary course of things you will fall in love and you will marry, and when this happens you will love your new home even better than this. However, Fluff, we need not discuss the future now, for the present is enough for us. I wanted to tell you, dear, that it is very probable, almost certain, that I shall have to go away from home. What is the matter, Fluff?"

"You go away? Then I suppose that is why you look ill. Oh, how you have startled me!"

"I am sorry to have to go, Fluff, and I can not tell you the reason. You must not ask me, for it is a secret. But the part that concerns you, dear, is that, if I go, I do not see how you can stay on very well at the Firs."

"Of course I should not dream of staying, Francie. With you away, and Mr. Arnold gone"—here she looked hard into Frances's face—"it would be dull. Of course, I am fond of the squire, but I could not do without another companion. Where are you going, Frances? Could not I go with you?"

"I wish you could, darling. I will tell you where I am going to-morrow or next day. It is possible that I may not go, but it is almost certain that I shall."

"Oh, I trust, I hope, I pray that you will not go."

"Don't do that, Fluff, for that, too, means a great trouble. Oh, yes, a great trouble and desolation. Now, dear, I really must talk to you about your own affairs. Leave me out of the question for a few moments, pet. I must find out what you would like to do, and where you would like to go. If I go away I shall have little or no time to make arrangements for you, so I must speak to you now. Have you any friends who would take you in until you would hear from your father, Fluff?"

"I have no special friends. There are the Harewoods, but they are silly and flirty, and I don't care for them. They talk about dress—you should hear how they go on—and they always repeat the silly things the men they meet say to them. No, I won't go to the Harewoods. I think if I must leave you, Frances, I had better go to my old school-mistress, Mrs. Hopkins. She would be always glad to have me."

"That is a good thought, dear. I will write to her to-day just as a precautionary measure. Ah, and here comes Philip. Philip, you have tried the patience of this little girl very sadly."

In reply to Frances' speech Arnold slightly raised his hat; his face looked drawn and worried; his eyes avoided Frances's, but turned with a sense of refreshment to where Fluff stood looking cool and sweet, and with a world of tender emotion on her sensitive little face.

"A thousand apologies," he said. "The squire kept me. Shall I carry your guitar? No, I won't sketch, thanks; but if you will let me lie on my back in the long grass by the river, and if you will sing me a song or two, I shall be grateful ever after."

"Then I will write to Mrs. Hopkins, Fluff," said Frances. And as the two got over a stile which led down a sloping meadow to the river, she turned away. Arnold had neither looked at her nor addressed her again.

"My father has been saying something to him," thought Frances. And she was right.

The squire was not a man to take up an idea lightly and then drop it. He distinctly desired, come what might, that his daughter should not marry Arnold; he came to the sage conclusion that the best way to prevent such a catastrophe was to see Arnold safely married to some one else. The squire had no particular delicacy of feeling to prevent his alluding to topics which might be avoided by more sensitive men. He contrived to see Arnold alone, and then, rudely, for he did not care to mince his words, used expressions the reverse of truthful, which led Arnold, whose faith was already wavering in the balance, to feel almost certain that Frances never had cared for him, and never would do so. He then spoke of Fluff, praising her enthusiastically, and without stint, saying how lucky he considered the man who won not only a beautiful, but a wealthy bride, and directly suggested to Arnold that he should go in for her.

"She likes you now," said the squire; "bless her little heart, she'd like any one who was kind to her. She's just the pleasantest companion any man could have—a perfect dear all round. To tell the truth, Arnold, even though she is my daughter, I think you are well rid of Frances."

"I'm ashamed to hear you say so, sir. If what you tell me is true, your daughter has scarcely behaved kindly to me; but, notwithstanding that, I consider Frances quite the noblest woman I know."

"Pshaw!" said the squire. "You agree with Fluff—she's always praising her, too. Of course, I have nothing to say against my daughter—she's my own uprearing, so it would ill beseem me to run her down. But for a wife, give me a fresh little soft roundabout, like Fluff yonder."

Arnold bit his lip.

"You have spoken frankly to me, and I thank you," he said. "If I am so unfortunate as not to win Miss Kane's regard, there is little use in my

prolonging my visit here; but I have yet to hear her decision from her own lips. If you will allow me, I will leave you now, squire, for I promised Miss Danvers to spend some of this afternoon with her by the river."

"With Fluff? Little puss—very good—very good—Ah!

'The time I've spent in wooing'

never wasted, my boy—never wasted. I wish you all success from the bottom of my heart."

"Insufferable old idiot!" growled Arnold, under his breath.

But he was thoroughly hurt and annoyed, and when he saw Frances, could not bring himself even to say a word to her.

The squire went back to the house to enjoy his afternoon nap, and to reflect comfortably on the delicious fact that he had done himself a good turn.

"There is no use playing with edge tools," he murmured. "Frances means well, but she confessed to me she loved him. What more likely, then, that she would accept him, and, notwithstanding her good resolutions, leave her poor old father in the lurch? If Frances accepts Arnold, it will be ruin to me, and it simply must be prevented at all hazards."

CHAPTER XII.

THE CUNNING LITTLE MOUSE.

Fluff found her companion strangely dull. They reached the river, where Arnold, true to his promise, did stretch himself at full length in the long fragrant grass; and Fluff, true to her promise, touched her guitar gently, and gently, softly, and sympathetically sung a song or two. She sung about the "Auld acquaintance" who should never be forgot; she sung of "Robin Adair;" and, lastly, her clear little notes warbled out the exquisite Irish melody, "She is far from the land." Never had Fluff sung better. She threw feeling and sympathy into her notes—in short, she excelled herself in her desire to please. But when at the end of the third song Arnold still made no response, when not the flicker of an eyelid or the faintest dawn of a smile showed either approbation or pleasure, the spoiled child threw her guitar aside, and spoke pettishly.

"I won't amuse you any more," she said. "I don't like sulky people; I am going home to my darling Frances. She is often troubled—oh, yes, she knows what trouble is—but she never sulks, never!"

"Look here, Fluff," said Arnold. "I may call you Fluff, may I not?"

"I don't mind."

Fluff's big eyes began to dilate. She stretched out her hand to draw her guitar once more to her side. She was evidently willing to be reasonable.

"Look here," repeated Arnold. He rose hastily, and leaning on a low wall which stood near, looked down at the bright little girl at his feet. "Fluff," he said, "should you greatly mind if I threw conventionality to the winds, and spoke frankly to you?"

"I should not mind at all," said Fluff. "I don't know what you have got to

say, but I hate conventionalities."

"The fact is, I am very much bothered."

"Oh!"

"And I haven't a soul to consult."

Another "Oh!" and an upward glance of two lovely long-fringed eyes.

"And I think you have a kind, affectionate heart, Fluff."

"I have."

"And you won't misunderstand a man who is half distracted?"

"I am sorry you are half distracted. No, I won't misunderstand you."

"That is right, and what I expected. I was thinking of all this, and wondering if I might speak frankly to you when you were singing those songs. That is the reason I did not applaud you, or say thank you, or anything else commonplace."

"I understand now," said Fluff. "I'm very glad. I was puzzled at first, and I thought you rude. Now I quite understand."

"Thank you, Fluff; if I may sit by your side I will tell you the whole story. The fact is, I want you to help me, but you can only do so by knowing everything. Why, what is the matter? Are you suddenly offended?"

"No," answered little Ellen; "but I'm surprised. I'm so astonished that I'm almost troubled, and yet I never was so glad in my life. You are the very first person who has ever asked me to help them. I have amused people—oh, yes, often; but helped—you are the very first who has asked me that."

"I believe you are a dear little girl," said Arnold, looking at her affectionately; "and if any one can set things right now, you are the person. Will you listen to my story? May I begin?"

"Certainly."

"Remember, I am not going to be conventional."

"You said that before."

"I want to impress it upon you. I am going to say the sort of things that girls seldom listen to."

"You make me feel dreadfully curious," said Fluff. "Please begin."

"The beginning is this: Ten years ago I came here. I stayed here for a month. I fell in love with Frances."

"Oh—oh! darling Frances. And you fell in love with her ten years ago?"

"I did. I went to Australia. For five years I had an awful time there; my friends at home supposed me to be dead. The fact is, I was taken captive by some of the bushmen. That has nothing to say to my story, only all the time I thought of Frances. I remained in Australia five more years. During that five years I was making my fortune. As I added pound to pound, I thought still of Frances. I am rich now, and I have come home to marry her."

"Oh," said little Fluff, with a deep-drawn sigh, "what a lovely story! But why, then, is not Frances happy?"

"Ah, that is where the mystery comes in; that is what I want you to find out. I see plainly that Frances is very unhappy. She won't say either yes or no to my suit. Her father gives me to understand that she does not love me; that she never loved me. He proposes that instead of marrying Frances I should try to make you my wife. He was urging me to do so just now when I kept you waiting. All the time he was telling me that Frances never could or would love me, and that you were the wife of all others for me."

"Why do you tell me all this?" said Fluff. Her cheeks had crimsoned,

and tears trembled on her eyelashes. "Why do you spoil a beautiful story by telling me this at the end?"

"Because the squire will hint it to you, Fluff; because even Frances herself will begin to think that I am turning my affections in your direction; because if you help me as I want you to help me, we must be much together; because I must talk very freely to you; in short, because it is absolutely necessary that we should quite understand each other."

"Yes," said Fluff. "I see now what you mean; it is all right; thank you very much." She rose to her feet. "I will be a sort of sister to you," she said, laying her little hand in his; "for I love Frances better than any sister, and when you are her husband you will be my brother."

"No brother will ever be truer to you, Fluff; but, alas, and alas! is it ever likely that Frances can be my wife?"

"Of course she will," said Fluff. "Frances is so unhappy because she loves you."

"Nonsense."

"Well, I think so, but I'll soon find out."

"You will? If you were my real sister, I would call you a darling."

"You may call me anything you please. I am your sister to all intents and purposes, until you are married to my darling, darling Frances. Oh, won't I give it to the squire! I think he's a perfectly horrid old man, and I used to be fond of him."

"But you will be careful, Fluff—a rash word might do lots of mischief."

"Of course I'll be careful. I have lots of tact."

"You are the dearest girl in the world, except Frances."

"Of course I am. That was a very pretty speech, and I am going to

reward you. I am going to tell you something."

"What is that?"

"Frances is going away."

Arnold gave a slight start.

"I did not know that," he said. "When?"

"She told me when you were talking to the squire. She is going away very soon, and she wants me to go too. I am to go back to my old school-mistress, Mrs. Hopkins. Frances is very sorry to go, and yet when I told her that I hoped she would not have to, she said I must not wish that, for that would mean a great calamity. I don't understand Frances at present, but I shall soon get to the bottom of everything."

"I fear it is all too plain," said Arnold, lugubriously. "Frances goes away because she does not love me, and she is unhappy because she does not wish to give me pain."

"You are quite wrong, sir. Frances is unhappy on her own account, not on yours. Well, I'll find out lots of things to-night, and let you know. I'm going to be the cunningest little mouse in the world; but oh, won't the squire have a bad time of it!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"LITTLE GIRLS IMAGINE THINGS."

The morning's post brought one letter. It was addressed to Miss Kane, and was written in a business hand. The squire looked anxiously at his daughter as she laid it unopened by her plate. Fluff, who was dressed more becomingly than usual, whose eyes were bright, and who altogether seemed in excellent spirits, could not help telegraphing a quick glance at Arnold; the little party were seated round the breakfast-table, and the squire, who intercepted Fluff's glance, chuckled inwardly. He was very anxious with regard to the letter which Frances so provokingly left unopened, but he also felt a pleasing thrill of satisfaction.

"Ha! ha!" he said to himself, "my good young man, you are following my advice, for all you looked so sulky yesterday. Fluff, little dear, I do you a good turn when I provide you with an excellent husband, and I declare, poor as I am, I won't see you married without giving you a wedding present."

After breakfast the squire rose, pushed aside his chair, and was about to summon his daughter to accompany him to the south parlor, when Fluff ran up to his side.

"I want to speak to you most particularly," she said. "I have a secret to tell you," and she raised her charming, rounded, fresh face to his. He patted her on the cheek.

"Is it very important?" he said, a little uneasily, for he noticed that Philip and Frances were standing silently, side by side in the bay-window, and that Frances had removed her letter from its envelope, and was beginning to read it.

"She'll absolutely tell that fellow the contents of the most important letter she ever received," inwardly grumbled the squire. "He'll know before her father knows." Aloud he said, "I have a little business to talk over with Frances just now, Ellen. I am afraid your secret must wait, little puss."

"But that's what it can't do," answered Fluff. "Don't call Frances; she's reading a letter. What a rude old man you are, to think of disturbing her! I'm quite ashamed of you. Now come with me, for I must tell you my important secret."

The squire found himself wheedled and dragged into the south parlor. There he was seated in his most comfortable chair, just as much sunlight as he liked best was allowed to warm him, a footstool was placed under his feet, and Fluff, drawing a second forward, seated herself on it, laid her hand on his knee, and looked at him with an expression of pleased affection.

"Aren't you dreadfully curious?" she said.

"Oh, yes, Fluff—quite devoured with curiosity. I wonder now what Frances is doing; the fact is, she has received an important letter. It's about my affairs. I am naturally anxious to know its contents. Tell your secret as quickly as possible, little woman, and let me get to more important matters."

"More important matters? I'm ashamed of you," said Fluff, shaking her finger at him. "The fact is, squire, you mustn't be in a hurry about seeing Frances—you must curb your impatience; it's very good for you to curb it—it's a little discipline, and discipline properly administered always turns people out delightful. You'll be a very noble old man when you have had a little of the proper sort of training. Now, now—why, you look quite cross; I declare you're not a bit handsome when you're cross. Frances can't come to you at present—she's engaged about her own affairs."

"And what may they be, pray, miss?"

"Ah, that's my secret!"

Fluff looked down; a becoming blush deepened the color in her cheeks; she toyed idly with a rosebud which she held in her hand. Something in her attitude, and the significant smile on her face, made the squire both angry and uneasy.

"Speak out, child," he said. "You know I hate mysteries."

"But I can't speak out," said Fluff. "The time to speak out hasn't come—I can only guess. Squire, I'm so glad—I really do think that Frances is in love with Philip."

"You really do?" said the squire. He mimicked her tone sarcastically, red, angry spots grew on his old cheeks. "Frances in love with Philip, indeed! You have got pretty intimate with that young Australian, Fluff, when you call him by his Christian name."

"Oh, yes; we arranged that yesterday. He's like a brother to me. I told you some time ago that he was in love with Frances. Now, I'm so delighted to be able to say that I think Frances is in love with him."

"Tut—tut!" said the squire. "Little girls imagine things. Little girls are very fanciful."

"Tut—tut!" responded Fluff, taking off his voice to the life. "Little girls see far below the surface; old men are very obtuse."

"Fluff, if that's your secret, I don't think much of it. Run away now, and send my daughter to me."

"I'll do nothing of the kind, for if she's not reading her letter she's talking to her true love. Oh, you must have a heart of stone to wish to disturb them!"

The squire, with some difficulty, pushed aside his footstool, hobbled to his feet, and walked to the window where the southern sun was pouring in. In the distance he saw the gray of Frances's dress through

the trees, and Philip's square, manly, upright figure walking slowly by her side.

He pushed open the window, and hoarsely and angrily called his daughter's name.

"She doesn't hear you," said Fluff. "I expect he's proposing for her now; isn't it lovely? Aren't you delighted? Oh, where's my guitar? I'm going to play 'Sweethearts.' I do hope, squire, you'll give Frances a very jolly wedding."

But the squire had hobbled out of the room.

He was really very lame with rheumatic gout; but the sight of that gray, slender figure, pacing slowly under the friendly sheltering trees, was too much for him; he was overcome with passion, anxiety, rage.

"She's giving herself away," he murmured. "That little vixen, Fluff, is right—she's in love with the fellow, and she's throwing herself at his head; it's perfectly awful to think of it. She has forgotten all about her old father. I'll be a beggar in my old age; the Firs will have to go; I'll be ruined, undone. Oh, was there ever such an undutiful daughter? I must go to her. I must hobble up to that distant spot as quickly as possible; perhaps when she sees me she may pause before she irrevocably commits so wicked an act. Oh, how lame I am! what agonies I'm enduring! Shall I ever be in time? He's close to her—he's almost touching her—good gracious, he'll kiss her if I'm not quick! that little wretch Fluff could have reached them in a twinkling, but she won't do anything to oblige me this morning. Hear her now, twanging away at that abominable air, 'Sweethearts'—oh—oh—puff—puff—I'm quite blown! This walk will kill me! Frances—I say, Frances, Frances."

The feeble, cracked old voice was borne on the breeze, and the last high agonized note reached its goal.

"I am coming, father," responded his daughter. She turned to Arnold and held out her hand.

"God bless you!" she said.

"Is your answer final, Frances?"

"Yes—yes. I wish I had not kept you a week in suspense; it was cruel to you, but I thought—oh, I must not keep my father."

"Your father has you always, and this is my last moment. Then you'll never, never love me?"

"I can not marry you, Philip."

"That is no answer. You never loved me."

"I can not marry you."

"I won't take 'no' unless you say with it, 'I never loved you; I never can love you.'"

"Look at my father, Philip; he is almost falling. His face is crimson. I must go to him. God bless you!"

She took his hand, and absolutely, before the squire's horrified eyes, raised it to her lips, then flew lightly down the path, and joined the old man.

"Is anything wrong, father? How dreadful you look!"

"You—you have accepted the fellow! You have deserted me; I saw you kiss his hand. Fah! it makes me sick. You've accepted him, and I am ruined!"

"On the contrary, I have refused Philip. That kiss was like one we give to the dead. Don't excite yourself; come into the house. I am yours absolutely from this time out."

"Hum—haw—you gave me an awful fright, I can tell you." The squire breathed more freely. "You set that little Fluff on to begin it, and you ended it. I won't be the better of this for some time. Yes, let me lean on you, Frances; it's a comfort to feel I'm not without a daughter. Oh, it

would have been a monstrous thing had you deserted me! Did I not rear you, and bring you up? But in cases of the affections—I mean in cases of those paltry passions, women are so weak."

"But not your daughter, Frances Kane. I, for your sake, have been strong. Now, if you please, we will drop the subject; I will not discuss it further. You had better come into the house, father, until you get cool."

"You had a letter this morning, Frances—from Spens, was it not?"

"Oh, yes; I had forgotten; your creditors will accept my terms for the present. I must drive over to Arden this afternoon, and arrange what day I go there."

"I shall miss you considerably, Frances. It's a great pity you couldn't arrange to come home to sleep; you might see to my comforts then by rising a little earlier in the morning. I wish, my dear, you would propose it to Mrs. Carnegie; if she is a woman of any consideration she will see how impossible it is that I should be left altogether."

"I can not do that, father. Even you must pay a certain price for a certain good thing. You do not wish to leave the Firs, but you can not keep both the Firs and me. I will come and see you constantly, but my time from this out belongs absolutely to Mrs. Carnegie. She gives me an unusually large salary, and, being her servant, I must endeavor in all particulars to please her, and must devote my time to her to a certain extent day and night."

"Good gracious, Frances, I do hope that though adversity has come to the house of Kane, you are not going so far to forget yourself as to stoop to menial work at Arden. Why, rather than that—rather than that, it would be better for us to give up the home of our fathers."

"No work need be menial, done in the right spirit," responded Frances.

Her eyes wandered away, far up among the trees, where Arnold still slowly paced up and down. In the cause of pride her father might

even be induced to give up the Firs. Was love, then, to weigh nothing in the scale?

She turned suddenly to the father.

"You must rest now," she said. "You need not be the least anxious on your own account any more. You must rest and take things quietly, and do your best not to get ill. It would be very bad for you to be ill now, for there would be no one to nurse you. Remember that, and be careful. Now go and sit in the parlor and keep out of draughts. I can not read to you this morning, for I shall be very busy, and you must not call me nor send for me unless it is absolutely necessary. Now, good-bye for the present."

Frances did not, as her usual custom was, establish her father in his easy-chair; she did not cut his morning paper for him, nor attend to the one or two little comforts which he considered essential; she left him without kissing him, only her full, grave, sorrowful eyes rested for one moment with a look of great pathos on his wrinkled, discontented old face, then she went away.

The squire was alone; even the irritating strain of "Sweethearts" no longer annoyed him. Fluff had ceased to play—Fluff's gay little figure was no longer visible; the man who had paced up and down under the distant trees had disappeared; Frances's gray dress was nowhere to be seen.

The whole place was still, oppressively still—not a bee hummed, not a bird sung. The atmosphere was hot and dry, but there was no sunshine; the trees were motionless, there was a feeling of coming thunder in the air.

The squire felt calmed and triumphant, at the same time he felt irritated and depressed. His anxiety was over; his daughter had done what he wished her to do—the Firs was saved, at least for his lifetime—the marriage he so dreaded was never to be. At the same time, he felt dull and deserted; he knew what it was to have his desire, and

leanness in his soul. It would be very dull at the Firs without Frances; he should miss her much when she went away. He was a feeble old man, and he was rapidly growing blind. Who would read for him, and chat with him, and help to while away the long and tedious hours? He could not spend all his time eating and sleeping. What should he do now with all the other hours of the long day and night? He felt pleased with Frances—he owned she was a good girl; but at the same time he was cross with her; she ought to have thought of some other way of delivering him. She was a clever woman—he owned she was a clever woman; but she ought not to have effected his salvation by deserting him.

The squire mumbled and muttered to himself. He rose from his arm-chair and walked to the window; he went out and paced up and down the terrace; he came in again. Was there ever such a long and tiresome morning? He yawned; he did not know what to do with himself.

A little after noon the door of the south parlor was quickly opened and Arnold came in.

"I have just come to say good-bye, sir."

The squire started in genuine amazement. He did not love Arnold, but after two hours of solitude he was glad to hear any human voice. It never occurred to him, too, that any one should feel Frances such a necessity as to alter plans on her account.

"You are going away?" he repeated. "You told me yesterday you would stay here for at least another week or ten days."

"Exactly, but I have changed my mind," said Arnold. "I came here for an object—my object has failed. Good-bye."

"But now, really—" the squire strove to retain the young man's hand in his clasp. "You don't seriously mean to tell me that you are leaving a nice place like the Firs in this fine summer weather because Frances

has refused you."

"I am going away on that account," replied Arnold, stiffly. "Good-bye."

"You astonish me—you quite take my breath away. Frances couldn't accept you, you know. She had me to see after. I spoke to you yesterday about her, and I suggested that you should take Fluff instead. A dear little thing, Fluff. Young, and with money; who would compare the two?"

"Who would compare the two?" echoed Arnold. "I repeat, squire, that I must now wish you good-bye, and I distinctly refuse to discuss the subject of my marriage any further."

Arnold's hand scarcely touched Squire Kane's. He left the south parlor, and his footsteps died away in the distance.

Once more there was silence and solitude. The sky grew darker, the atmosphere hotter and denser—a growl of thunder was heard in the distance—a flash of lightning lighted up the squire's room. Squire Kane was very nervous in a storm—at all times he hated to be long alone—now he felt terrified, nervous, aggrieved. He rang his bell pretty sharply.

"Jane," he said to the servant who answered his summons, "send Miss Kane to me at once."

"Miss Kane has gone to Martinstown, sir. She drove in in the pony-cart an hour go."

"Oh—h'm—I suppose Mr. Arnold went with her?"

"No, sir. Mr. Arnold took a short cut across the fields; he says the carrier is to call for his portmanteau, and he's not a-coming back."

"H'm—most inconsiderate—I hate parties broken up in a hurry like this. What a vivid flash that was! Jane, I'm afraid we are going to have an awful storm."

"It looks like it, sir, and the clouds is coming direct this way. Watkins says as the strength of the storm will break right over the Firs, sir."

"My good Jane, I'll thank you to shut the windows, and ask Miss Danvers to have the goodness to step this way."

"Miss Danvers have a headache, sir, and is lying down. She said as no one is to disturb her."

The squire murmured something inarticulate. Jane lingered for a moment at the door, but finding nothing more was required of her, softly withdrew.

Then in the solitude of his south parlor the squire saw the storm come up—the black clouds gathered silently from east and west, a slight shiver shook the trees, a sudden wind agitated the slowly moving clouds—it came between the two banks of dark vapor, and then the thunder rolled and the lightning played. It was an awful storm, and the squire, who was timid at such times, covered his face with his trembling hands, and even feebly tried to pray. It is possible that if Frances had come to him then he would, in the terror fit which had seized him, have given her her heart's desire. Even the Firs became of small account to Squire Kane, while the lightning flashed in his eyes and the thunder rattled over his head. He was afraid—he would have done anything to propitiate the Maker of the storm—he would have even sacrificed himself if necessary.

But the clouds rolled away, the sunshine came out. Fear vanished from the squire's breast, and when dinner was announced he went to partake of it with an excellent appetite. Fluff and he alone had seats at the board; Arnold and Frances were both away.

Fluff's eyes were very red. She was untidy, too, and her whole appearance might best be described by the word "disheveled." She scarcely touched her dinner, and her chattering, merry tongue was silent.

The squire was a man who never could abide melancholy in others. He had had a fright; his fright was over. He was therefore exactly in the mood to be petted and humored, to have his little jokes listened to and applauded, to have his thrice-told tales appreciated. He was just in the mood, also, to listen to pretty nothings from a pretty girl's lips, to hear her sing, perhaps to walk slowly with her by and by in the sunshine.

Fluff's red eyes, however, Fluff's disordered, untidy appearance, her downcast looks, her want of appetite, presented to him, just then, a most unpleasing picture. As his way was, he resented it, and began to grumble.

"I have had a very dull morning," he began.

"Indeed, sir? I won't take any pease, thank you, Jane; I'm not hungry."

"I hate little girls to come to table who are not hungry," growled the squire. "Bring the pease here, Jane."

"Shall I go up to my room again?" asked Fluff, laying down her knife and fork.

"Oh, no, my love; no, not by any means."

The squire was dreadfully afraid of having to spend as solitary an afternoon as morning.

"I am sorry you are not quite well, Fluff," he said, hoping to pacify the angry little maid; "but I suppose it was the storm. Most girls are very much afraid of lightning. It is silly of them; for really in a room with the windows shut—glass, you know, my dear, is a non-conductor—there is not much danger. But there is no combating the terrors of the weaker sex. I can fancy you, Fluff, burying that pretty little head of yours under the bed-clothes. That doubtless accounts for its present rough condition. You should have come to me, my love; I'd have done my best to soothe your nervous fears."

Fluff's blue eyes were opened wide.

"I don't know what you are talking about," she said. "I afraid of the storm, and burying my head under the bed-clothes, as if I were a baby or a silly old man! Yes, of course I knew there was a storm, but I didn't notice it much, I was too busy packing."

This last remark effectually distracted the squire's attention.

"Packing! good gracious, child, you are not going away too?"

"Of course I am; you don't suppose I am going to stay here without my darling Francie?"

"But what am I to do, Fluff?"

"I don't know, squire. I suppose you'll stay on at the Firs."

"Alone! Do you mean I'm to stay here alone?"

"I suppose so, now that you have sent Frances away."

"I have not sent her away. What do you mean, miss?"

"I'm not going to say what I mean," said Fluff. "Dear Frances is very unhappy, and I'm very unhappy too, and Philip, I think, is the most miserable of all. As far as I can tell, all this unhappiness has been caused by you, squire, so I suppose you are happy; but if you think I am going to stay at the Firs without Frances you are very much mistaken. I would not stay with you now on any account, for you are a selfish old man, and I don't love you any longer."

This angry little speech was uttered after Jane had withdrawn, and even while Fluff spoke she pushed some fruit toward the squire.

"You are a selfish old man," she continued, her cheeks burning and her eyes flashing; "you want your comforts, you want to be amused, and to get the best of everything; and if that is so you don't care for others. Well, here is the nicest fruit in the garden—eat it; and by and

by I'll sing for you, if my singing gives you pleasure. I'll do all this while I stay, but I'm going away the day after to-morrow. But I don't love you any more, for you are unkind to Frances."

The squire was really too much astonished to reply. Nobody in all his life had ever spoken to him in this way before; he felt like one who was assaulted and beaten all over. He was stunned, and yet he still clung in a sort of mechanical way to the comforts which were dearer to him than life. He picked out the finest strawberries which Fluff had piled on his plate, and conveyed them to his lips. Fluff flew out of the room for her guitar, and when she returned she began to sing a gay Italian air in a very sprightly and effective manner. In the midst of her song the squire broke in with a sudden question.

"What do you mean by saying I am unkind to Frances?"

Fluff's guitar dropped with a sudden clatter to the floor.

"You won't let her marry Philip—she loves him with all her heart, and he loves her. They have cared for each other for ten long years, and now you are parting them. You are a dreadfully, dreadfully selfish old man, and I hate you!"

Here the impulsive little girl burst into tears and ran out of the room. The squire sat long over his strawberries.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I HATE THE SQUIRE."

It was arranged that Frances should take up her abode at Arden on the following Friday, and on Thursday Fluff was to go to London, to stay—for a time, at least—under the sheltering wings of her late school-mistress, Mrs. Hopkins. With regard to her departure, Fluff made an extraordinary request—she earnestly begged that Frances should not accompany her to Martinstown. She gave no reason for this desire; but she enforced it by sundry pettings, by numerous embraces, by both tears and smiles—in short, by the thousand and one fascinations which the little creature possessed. A certain Mrs. Mansfield was to escort Fluff to London; and Frances arranged that the two should meet at the railway station, and catch the twelve-o'clock train for town.

"I don't want you to introduce her to me, darling," said Fluff. "I can't possibly mistake her, for she is tall, and has a hooked nose, and always wears black, you say. And you know what I am, just exactly like my name; so it will be impossible for us not to recognize each other."

Thus Fluff got her way, and Frances saw her off, not from the railway platform, but standing under the elm-trees where Fluff had first seen her and Arnold together.

When a turn in the road quite hid Frances Kane from the little girl's view she clasped her hands with a mixture of ecstasy and alarm.

"Now I can have my way," she said to herself, "and dear Frances will never, never suspect."

A cab had been sent for to Martinstown to fetch away Fluff and her belongings. The driver was a stranger, and Fluff thought it extremely unlikely that, even if he wished to do so he would be able to tell tales.

She arrived in good time at the railway station, instantly assumed a business-like air, looked out for no tall lady with a hooked nose in black, but calmly booked her luggage for a later train, and calling the same cabman, asked him to drive her to the house of the lawyer, Mr. Spens.

The lawyer was at home, and the pretty, excitable little girl was quickly admitted into his presence. Mr. Spens thought he had seldom seen a more radiant little vision than this white-robed, eager, childish creature—childish and yet womanly just then, with both purpose and desire in her face.

"You had my letter, hadn't you?" said Fluff. "I am Ellen Danvers; Miss Kane is my cousin, and my dearest, and most dear friend."

"I have had your letter, Miss Danvers, and I remained at home in consequence. Won't you sit down? What a beautiful day this is!"

"Oh, please, don't waste time over the weather. I am come to talk to you about Frances. You have got to prevent it, you know."

"My dear young lady, to prevent what?"

"Well, she's not to go to Arden. She's not to spend the rest of her days with a dreadful, fanciful old woman! She's to do something else quite different. You've got to prevent Frances making herself and—and—others miserable all her life. Do you hear, Mr. Spens?"

"Yes, I certainly hear, Miss Danvers. But how am I to alter or affect Miss Kane's destiny is more than I can at present say. You must explain yourself. I have a very great regard for Miss Kane; I like her extremely. I will do anything in my power to benefit her; but as she chose entirely of her own free will—without any one, as far as I am aware, suggesting it to her—to become companion to Mrs. Carnegie, I do not really see how I am to interfere."

"Yes, you are," said Fluff, whose eyes were now full of tears. "You are to interfere because you are at the bottom of the mystery. You know

why Frances is going to Mrs. Carnegie, and why she is refusing to marry Philip Arnold, who has loved her for ten years, and whom she loves with all her heart. Oh, I can't help telling you this! It is a secret, a kind of secret, but you have got to give me another confidence in return."

"I did not know about Arnold, certainly," responded Spens. "That alters things. I am truly sorry; I am really extremely sorry. Still I don't see how Miss Kane can act differently. She has promised her father now: it is the only way to save him. Poor girl! I am sorry for her, but it is the only way to save the squire."

"Oh, the squire!" exclaimed Fluff, jumping up in her seat, and clasping her hands with vexation. "Who cares for the squire? Is he to have everything. Is nobody to be thought of but him? Why should Frances make all her days wretched on his account? Why should Frances give up the man she is so fond of, just to give him a little more comfort and luxuries that he doesn't want? Look here, Mr. Spens, it is wrong—it must not be! I won't have it!"

Mr. Spens could not help smiling.

"You are very eager and emphatic," he said. "I should like to know how you are going to prevent Miss Kane taking her own way."

"It is not her own way; it is the squire's way."

"Well, it comes to the same thing. How are you to prevent her taking the squire's way?"

"Oh, you leave that to me! I have an idea. I think I can work it through. Only I want you, Mr. Spens, to tell me the real reason why Frances is going away from the Firs, and why she has to live at Arden. She will explain nothing; she only says it is necessary. She won't give any reason either to Philip or me."

"Don't you think, Miss Danvers, I ought to respect her confidence? If she wished you to know, she would tell you herself."

"Oh, please—please tell me! Do tell me! I won't do any mischief, I promise you. Oh, if only you knew how important it is that I should find out!"

The lawyer considered for a moment. Fluff's pretty words and beseeching gestures were having an effect upon him. After all, if there was any chance of benefiting Miss Kane, why should the squire's miserable secret be concealed? After a time he said:

"You look like a child, but I believe you have sense. I suppose whatever I tell you, you intend to repeat straight-way to Mr. Arnold?"

"Well, yes; I certainly mean to tell him."

"Will you promise to tell no one but Arnold?"

"Yes, I can promise that."

"Then the facts are simple enough. The squire owes six thousand pounds to a client of mine in London. My client wants to sell the Firs in order to recover his money. The squire says if he leaves the Firs he must die. Miss Kane comes forward and offers to go as companion to Mrs. Carnegie, Mrs. Carnegie paying her three hundred pounds a year, which sum she hands over to my client as interest at five per cent. on the six thousand pounds. These are the facts of the case in a nutshell, Miss Danvers. Do you understand them?"

"I think I do. I am very much obliged to you. What is the name of your client?"

"You must excuse me, young lady—I can not divulge my client's name."

"But if Philip wanted to know very badly, you would tell him?"

"That depends on the reason he gave for requiring the information."

"I think it is all right, then," said Fluff, rising to her feet. "Good-bye, I am greatly obliged to you. Oh, that dear Frances. Mr. Spens, I think I hate the squire."

CHAPTER XV.

"MR. LOVER."

If there was a girl that was a prime favorite with her school-fellows, that girl was Ellen Danvers. She had all the qualifications which insure success in school life. She was extremely pretty, but she was unconscious of it; she never prided herself on her looks, she never tried to heighten her loveliness by a thousand little arts which school-girls always find out and despise. She had always plenty of money, which at school, if not elsewhere, is much appreciated. She was generous, she was bright, she was loving; she was not sufficiently clever to make any one envious of her, but at the same time she was so very smart and quick that not the cleverest girl in the school could despise her.

When Fluff went away from Merton House the tribulation experienced on all sides was really severe. The girls put their heads together, and clubbed to present her with a gold bangle, and she in return left them her blessing, a kiss all round, and a pound's worth of chocolate creams.

The school was dull when Fluff went away; she took a place which no one else quite held. She was not at all weak or namby-pamby, but she was a universal peace-maker. Fluff made peace simply by throwing oil on troubled waters, for she certainly was not one to preach; and as to pointing a moral, she did not know the meaning of the word.

It was with great rejoicing, therefore, that the young ladies of Mrs. Hopkins' select seminary were informed on a certain Thursday morning that their idol was about to return to them. She was no longer to take her place in any of the classes; she was to be a parlor boarder, and go in and out pretty much as she pleased; but she was to be in the house again, and they were to see her bright face, and

hear her gay laugh, and doubtless she would once more be every one's confidante and friend.

In due course Fluff arrived. It was late when she made her appearance, for she had missed the train by which Frances had intended her to travel. But late as the hour was—past nine o'clock—Fluff found time to pay a visit to the school-room, where the elder girls were finishing preparations for to-morrow, to rush through the dormitories, and kiss each expectant little one.

"It's just delicious!" whispered Sibyl Lake, the youngest scholar in the school. "We have you for the last fortnight before we break up. Just fancy, you will be there to see me if I get a prize!"

"Yes, Sibyl, and if you do I'll give you sixpennyworth of chocolate creams."

Sibyl shouted with joy.

The other children echoed her glee. One of the teachers was obliged to interfere. Fluff vanished to the very select bedroom that she was now to occupy, and order was once more restored.

Fluff's name was now in every one's mouth. Didn't she look prettier than ever? Wasn't she nicer than ever? Hadn't she a wonderfully grown-up air?

One day it was whispered through the school that Fluff had got a lover. This news ran like wildfire from the highest class to the lowest. Little Sibyl asked what a lover meant, and Marion Jones, a lanky girl of twelve, blushed while she answered her.

"It isn't proper to speak about lovers," said Katie Philips. "Mother said we weren't to know anything about them. I asked her once, and that was what she said. She said it wasn't proper for little girls to know about lovers."

"But grown girls have them," responded Marion, "I think it must be

captivating. I wish I was grown up."

"You're much too ugly, Marion, to have a lover," responded Mary Mills. "Oh, for goodness' sake, don't get so red and angry! She's going to strike me! Save me, girls!"

"Hush!" exclaimed Katie, "hush! come this way. Look through the lattice. Look through the wire fence just here. Can you see? There's Fluff, and there's her lover. He's rather old, isn't he? But hasn't he *l'air distingué*? Isn't Fluff pretty when she blushes? The lover is rather tall. Oh, do look, Mary, can you see—can you see?"

"Yes, he has fair hair," responded Mary. "It curls. I'm sorry it is fair and curly, for Fluff's is the same. He should be dark, like a Spaniard. Oh, girls, girls, he has got such lovely blue eyes, and such white teeth! He smiled just now, and I saw them."

"Let me peep," said Marion. "I haven't got one peep yet."

But here the voices became a little loud, and the lovers, if they were lovers, passed out of sight behind the yew hedge.

"That's it," said Fluff when she had finished her story; "it's all explained now. I hope you're obliged to me."

"No brother could love you better, nor appreciate you more than I do, Fluff."

"Thank you; I'll tell you how much I care for those words when you let me know what you are going to do."

Arnold put his hand to his forehead; his face grew grave, he looked with an earnest, half-puzzled glance at the childish creature by his side.

"I really think you are the best girl in the world, and one of the cleverest," he said. "I have a feeling that you have an idea in your head, but I am sorry to say nothing very hopeful up to the present time

has occurred to me. It does seem possible, after your explanation, that Frances may love me, and yet refuse me; yes, certainly, that does now seem possible."

"How foolish you are to speak in that doubting tone," half snapped Fluff (certainly, if the girls had seen her now they would have thought she was quarreling with her lover). "How can you say perhaps Frances loves you? Loves you! She is breaking her heart for you. Oh! I could cry when I think of Frances's pain!"

"Dear little friend!" said Arnold. "Then if that is so—God grant it, oh, God grant it—Frances and I must turn to you to help us."

Fluff's face brightened.

"I will tell you my plan," she said. "But first of all you must answer me a question."

"What is it? I will answer anything."

"Mr. Arnold—"

"You said you would call me Philip."

"Oh, well, Philip—I rather like the name of Philip—Philip, are you a rich man?"

"That depends on what you call riches, Fluff. I have brought fifteen thousand pounds with me from the other side of the world. I took five years earning it, for all those five years I lived as a very poor man, I was adding penny to penny, and pound to pound, to Frances's fortune."

"That is right," exclaimed Fluff, clapping her hands. "Frances's fortune—then, of course, then you will spend it in saving her."

"I would spend every penny to save her, if I only knew how."

"How stupid you are," said Fluff. "Oh, if only I were a man!"

"What would you do, if you were?"

"What would I not do? You have fifteen thousand pounds, and Frances is in all this trouble because of six thousand pounds. Shall I tell you, must I tell you what you ought to do?"

"Please—pray tell me."

"Oh, it is so easy. You must get the name of the old horror in London to whom the squire owes six thousand pounds, and you must give him six out of your fifteen, and so pay off the squire's debt. You must do this and—and—"

"Yes, Fluff; I really do think you are the cleverest little girl I ever came across."

"The best part is to come now," said Fluff. "Then you go to the squire; tell him that you will sell the Firs over his head, unless he allows you to marry Frances. Oh, it is so easy, so, so delightful!"

"Give me your hand, Fluff. Yes, I see light—yes. God bless you, Fluff!"

"There is no doubt she has accepted him," reported Mary Mills to her fellows. "They have both appeared again around the yew hedge, and he has taken her hand, and he is smiling. Oh, he is lovely when he smiles!"

"I wish I was grown up," sighed Marion, from behind. "I'd give anything in all the world to have a lover."

"It will be interesting to watch Fluff at supper to-night," exclaimed Katie Philips. "Of course she'll look intensely happy. I wonder if she'll wear an engagement-ring."

The supper hour came. Fluff took her seat among the smaller girls; her face was radiant enough to satisfy the most exacting, but her small dimpled fingers were bare.

"Why do you all stare at my hands so?" she exclaimed once.

"It's on account of the ring," whispered little Sibyl. "Hasn't he given you the ring yet?"

"Who is 'he,' dear?"

"Oh, I wasn't to say. His name is Mr. Lover."

CHAPTER XVI.

SWEETLY ROMANTIC.

Mrs. Carnegie could scarcely be considered the most cheerful companion in the world. There was a general sense of rejoicing when Frances took up her abode at Arden, but the victim who was to spend the greater part of her life in Mrs. Carnegie's heated chambers could scarcely be expected to participate in it. This good lady having turned her thoughts inward for so long, could only see the world from this extremely narrow standpoint. She was hypochondriacal, she was fretful, and although Frances managed her, and, in consequence, the rest of the household experienced a good deal of ease, Frances herself, whose heart just now was not of the lightest, could not help suffering. Her cheeks grew paler, her figure slighter and thinner. She could only cry at night, but then she certainly cried a good deal.

On a certain sunny afternoon, Mrs. Carnegie, who thought it her bounden duty on all occasions to look out for grievances, suddenly took it upon herself to complain of Frances's looks.

"It is not that you are dull, my dear," she remarked. "You are fairly cheerful, and your laugh is absolutely soothing; but you are pale, dreadfully pale, and pallor jars on my nerves, dear. Yes, I assure you, in the sensitive state of my poor nerves a pale face like yours is absolutely excruciating to them, darling."

"I am very sorry," replied Frances. She had been a month with Mrs. Carnegie now, and the changed life had certainly not improved her. "I am very sorry." Then she thought a moment. "Would you like to know why I am pale?"

"How interesting you are, my love—so different from every other individual that comes to see me. It is good for my poor nerves to have my attention distracted to any other trivial matter? Tell me, dearest, why you are so pallid. I do trust the story is exciting—I need

excitement, my darling. Is it an affair of the heart, precious?"

Frances's face grew very red. Even Mrs. Carnegie ought to have been satisfied for one brief moment with her bloom.

"I fear I can only give you a very prosaic reason," she said, in her gentle, sad voice. "I have little or no color because I am always shut up in hot rooms, and because I miss the open-air life to which I was accustomed."

Mrs. Carnegie tried to smile, but a frown came between her brows.

"That means," she said, "that you would like to go out. You would leave your poor friend in solitude."

"I would take my friend with me," responded Frances. "And she should have the pleasure of seeing the color coming back into my cheeks."

"And a most interesting sight it would be, darling. But oh, my poor, poor nerves! The neuralgia in my back is positively excruciating at this moment, dearest. I am positively on the rack; even a zephyr would slay me."

"On the contrary," replied Frances in a firm voice, "you would be strengthened and refreshed by the soft, sweet air outside. Come, Mrs. Carnegie, I am your doctor and nurse, as well as your friend, and I prescribe a drive in the open air for you this morning. After dinner, too, your sofa, shall be placed in the arbor; in short, I intend you to live out-of-doors while this fine weather lasts."

"Ah, dear imperious one! And yet you will kill me with this so-called kindness."

"On the contrary, I will make you a strong woman if I can. Now I am going to ring to order the carriage."

She bustled about, had her way, and to the amazement of every one

Mrs. Carnegie submitted to a drive for an hour in an open carriage.

All the time they were out Frances regaled her with the stories of the poor and suffering people. She told her stories with great skill, knowing just where to leave off, and just the points that would be most likely to interest her companion. So interesting did she make herself that never once during the drive was Mrs. Carnegie heard to mention the word "nerves," and so practical and to the point were her words that the rich woman's purse was opened, and two five-pound notes were given to Frances to relieve those who stood most in need of them.

"Positively I am better," explained Mrs. Carnegie, as she ate her dainty dinner with appetite.

An hour later she was seated cosily in the arbor which faced down the celebrated Rose Walk, a place well known to all the visitors at Arden.

"You are a witch," she said to Frances; "for positively I do declare the racking, torturing pain in my back is easier. The jolting of the carriage ought to have made it ten times worse, but it didn't. I positively can't understand it, my love."

"You forget," said Frances, "that although the jolting of the carriage might have tried your nerves a very little, the soft, sweet air and change of scene did them good."

"And your conversation, dearest—the limpid notes of that sweetest voice. Ah, Frances, your tales were harrowing!"

"Yes; but they were more harrowing to be lived through. You, dear Mrs. Carnegie, to-day have relieved a certain amount of this misery."

"Ah, my sweet, how good your words sound! They are like balm to this tempest-tossed heart and nerve-racked form. Frances dear, we have an affinity one for the other. I trust it may be our fate to live and die together."

Frances could scarcely suppress a slight shudder. Mrs. Carnegie suddenly caught her arm.

"Who is that radiant-looking young creature coming down the Rose Walk?" she exclaimed. "See—ah, my dear Frances, what a little beauty! What style! what exquisite bloom!"

"Why, it is Fluff!" exclaimed Frances.

She rushed from Mrs. Carnegie's side, and the next moment Miss Danvers's arms were round her neck.

"Yes, I've come, Frances," she exclaimed. "I have really come back. And who do you think I am staying with?"

"Oh, Fluff—at the Firs! It would be kind of you to cheer my poor old father up with a visit."

"But I'm not cheering him up with any visit—I'm not particularly fond of him. I'm staying with Mr. and Mrs. Spens."

Frances opened her eyes very wide; she felt a kind of shock, and a feeling almost of disgust crept over her.

"Mr. Spens? Surely you don't mean my father's lawyer, Mr. Spens, who lives in Martinstown, Fluff?"

"Yes, I don't mean anybody else."

"But I did not think you knew him."

"I did not when last I saw you, but I do now—very well, oh, very well indeed. He's a darling."

"Fluff! How can you speak of dull old Mr. Spens in that way? Well, you puzzle me. I don't know why you are staying with him."

"You are not going to know just at present, dearest Francie. There's a little bit of a secret afloat. Quite a harmless, innocent secret, which I

promise you will break nobody's heart. I like so much being with Mr. Spens, and so does Philip—Philip is there, too."

"Philip? Then they are engaged," thought Frances. "It was very soon. It is all right, of course, but it is rather a shock. Poor little Fluff—dear Philip—may they be happy!"

She turned her head away for a moment, then, with a white face, but steady, quiet eyes, said in her gentlest tones:

"Am I to congratulate you, then, Fluff?"

"Yes, you are—yes, you are. Oh, I am so happy, and everything is delicious! It's going on beautifully. I mean the—the affair—the secret. Frances, I left Philip at the gate. He would like to see you so much. Won't you go down and have a chat with him?"

"I can not; you forget that I am Mrs. Carnegie's companion. I am not my own mistress."

"That thin, cross-looking woman staring at us out of the bower yonder? Oh, I'll take care of her. I promise you I'll make myself just as agreeable as you can. There, run down, run down—I see Philip coming to meet you. Oh, what a cold wretch you are, Frances! You don't deserve a lover like Philip Arnold—no, you don't."

"He is not my lover, he is yours."

"Mine? No, thank you—there, he is walking down the Rose-path. He is sick of waiting, poor fellow! I am off to Mrs. Carnegie. Oh, for goodness' sake, Francie, don't look so foolish!"

Fluff turned on her heel, put wings to her feet, and in a moment, panting and laughing, stood by Mrs. Carnegie's side.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she exclaimed when she could speak. "I know who you are, and I am dear Frances's cousin, Fluff. I know you would not mind giving the poor thing a chance, and allowing me to

stay and try to entertain you for a little."

"Sit down, my dear, sit down. You really are a radiant little vision. It is really most entertaining to me to see anything so fresh and pretty. I must congratulate you on the damask roses you wear in your cheeks, my pretty one."

"Thank you very much; I know I have plenty of color. Do you mind sitting a little bit, just so—ah, that is right. Now we'll have our backs to the poor things, and they'll feel more comfortable."

"My dear, extraordinary, entertaining little friend, what poor things do you mean?"

"Why, Frances and—"

"Frances—my companion—Frances Kane?"

"Yes, your companion. Only she oughtn't to be your companion, and she won't be long. Your companion, and my darling cousin, Frances Kane, and her lover."

"Her lover! I knew there was a love affair. That accounts for the pallor! Oh, naughty Frances; oh, cruel maiden, to deceive your Lucilla! I felt it, I guessed it, it throbbed in the air. Frances and her lover! My child, I adore lovers—let me get a peep at him. Dear Frances, dear girl! And is the course of true love going smoothly, miss—miss—I really don't know your name, my little charmer."

"My name is Fluff—please don't look round. It's a very melancholy love affair just at present, but I'm making it right."

"My little bewitching one, I would embrace you, but my poor miserable nerves won't permit of the least exertion. And so Frances, my Frances, has a lover! It was wrong of her, darling, not to tell of this."

"She gave him up to come to you."

"Oh, the noble girl! But do you think, my child, I would permit such a sacrifice? No, no; far rather would Lucilla Carnegie bury her sorrows in the lonely tomb. Lend me your handkerchief, sweet one—I can't find my own, and my tears overflow. Ah, my Frances, my Frances, I always knew you loved me, but to this extent—oh, it is too much!"

"But she didn't do it for you," said Fluff. "She wanted the money to help her father—he's such a cross, selfish old man. He wouldn't let her marry Philip, although Philip loved her for ten years, and saved all his pence in Australia to try and get enough money to marry her, and was nearly eaten himself by the blacks, but never forgot her day or night—and she loved him beyond anything. Don't you think, Mrs. Carnegie, that they ought to be married? Don't you think so?"

"My child, my little fair one, you excite me much. Oh, I shall suffer presently! But now your enthusiasm carries that of Lucilla Carnegie along with you. Yes, they ought to be married."

"Mrs. Carnegie, they must be married. I'm determined, and so is Philip, and so is Mr. Spens. Won't you be determined too?"

"Yes, my child. But, oh, what shall I not lose in my Frances? Forgive one tear for myself—my little rose in June."

"You needn't fret for yourself at all. You'll be ever so happy when you've done a noble thing. Now listen. This is our little plot—only first of all promise, promise most faithfully, that you won't say a word to Frances."

"I promise, my child. How intensely you arouse my curiosity! Really I begin to live."

"You won't give Frances a hint?"

"No, no, you may trust me, little bright one."

"Well, I do trust you. I know you won't spoil all our plans. You'll share them and help us. Oh, what a happy woman you'll be by and by! Now

listen."

Then Fluff seated herself close to Mrs. Carnegie, and began to whisper an elaborately got-up scheme into that lady's ear, to all of which she listened with glowing eyes, her hands clasping Fluff's, her attention riveted on the sweet and eager face.

"It's my plot," concluded the narrator. "Philip doesn't much like it—not some of it—but I say that I will only help him in my own way."

"My dear love, I don't think I ever heard anything more clever and original, and absolutely to the point."

"Now did you? I can't sleep at night, thinking of it—you'll be sure to help me?"

"Help you? With my heart, my life, my purse!"

"Oh, we don't want your purse. You see there's plenty of money; there's the fortune Philip made for Frances. It would be a great pity anything else should rescue her from this dilemma."

"Oh, it is so sweetly romantic!" said Mrs. Carnegie, clasping her hands.

"Yes, that's what I think. You'll be quite ready when the time comes?"

"Oh, quite. More than ready, my brightest fairy!"

"Well, here comes Frances—remember, you're not to let out a word, a hint. I think I've amused Mrs. Carnegie quite nicely, Francie."

Frances's cheeks had that delicate bloom on them which comes now and then as a special and finishing touch, as the last crown of beauty to very pale faces. Her eyes were soft, and her dark eyelashes were still a little wet with some tears which were not unhappy ones.

"Philip wrung a confession out of me," she whispered to her little cousin. "No, Fluff—no, dear Fluff, it does no good—no good

whatever. Still, I am almost glad I told him."

"You told him what?"

"I won't say. It can never come to anything."

"I know what you said—you have made Philip very happy, Frances. Now I must run away."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FIRS OR FRANCES?

It is necessary for some people to go away to be missed. There are certain very quiet people in the world, who make no fuss, who think humbly of themselves, who never on any occasion blow their own trumpets, who under all possible circumstances keep in the background, but who yet have a knack of filling odd corners, of smoothing down sharp angles, of shedding the sunshine of kindness and unselfishness over things generally. There are such people, and they are seldom very much missed until they go away.

Then there is a hue and cry. Who did this? Whose duty was the other? Where is such a thing to be found? Will nobody attend to this small but necessary want? The person who never made any talk, but did all the small things, and made all the other people comfortable, is suddenly missed, and in an instant his or her virtues are discovered.

This was the case at the Firs when Frances on a certain morning drove away.

Watkins missed her—the stable-boy, the house-servant—the cat, the dog—many other domestic pets—and most of all, Squire Kane.

He was not neglected, but he had a sense of loneliness which began at the moment he awoke, and never left him till he went to sleep again.

He had his meals regularly; he was called in good time in the morning; the new housekeeper lighted his candle and brought it to him at night; his favorite fruit and his favorite flowers were still set before him, and the newspaper he liked best always lay by his plate at breakfast-time. Watkins was really an excellent gardener, and the ribbon border still bloomed and flourished, the birds sung in the trees as of yore, the lawn was smoothly kept. It was early September now,

but the old place never looked gayer, sweeter, brighter. Still, somehow or other the squire was dull. His newspaper was there, but there was no one to cut it, no one to read it aloud to him. The flowers were making a wonderful bloom, but there was no special person to talk them over with. He had no one to tell his thoughts to, no one to criticise, no one to praise, and—saddest want of all to a nature like his—not a soul in the world to blame.

Really, Frances was very much missed; he could not quite have believed it before she went, for she was such a quiet, grave woman, but there wasn't the least doubt on the subject. She had a way of making a place pleasant and home-like. Although she was so quiet herself, wherever she went the sun shone. It was quite remarkable how she was missed—even the Firs, even the home of his ancestors, was quite dull without her.

Frances had been away for five weeks, and the squire was beginning to wonder if he could endure much more of his present monotonous life, when one day, as he was passing up and down in the sunny South Walk, he was startled, and his attention pleasingly diverted by the jangling sweet sound of silver bells. A smart little carriage, drawn by a pair of Arab ponies, and driven by a lady, drew up somewhere in the elm avenue; a girl in white jumped lightly out, and ran toward him.

"Good gracious!" he said to himself, "why, it's that dear little Fluff. Well, I am glad to see her."

He hobbled down the path as fast as he could, and as Fluff drew near, sung out cheerily:

"Now this is a pleasing surprise! But welcome to the Firs, my love—welcome most heartily to the Firs."

"Thank you, squire," replied Fluff. "I've come to see you on a most important matter. Shall we go into the house, or may I talk to you here?"

"I hope, my dear, that you have come to say that you are going to pay me another visit—I do hope that is your important business. Your little room can be got ready in no time, and your guitar—I hope you've brought your guitar, my dear. It really is a fact, but I haven't had one scrap of entertainment since Frances went away—preposterous, is it not?"

"Well, of course I knew you'd miss her," said Fluff in a tranquil voice. "I always told you there was no one in the world like Frances."

"Yes, my dear, yes—I will own, yes, undoubtedly, Frances, for all she is so quiet, and not what you would call a young person, is a good deal missed in the place. But you have not answered my query yet, Fluff. Have you come to stay?"

"No, I've not come to stay; at least, I think not. Squire, I am glad you appreciate dear Frances at last."

"Of course, my love, of course. A good creature—not young, but a good, worthy creature. It is a great affliction to me, being obliged, owing to sad circumstances, to live apart from my daughter. I am vexed that you can not pay me a little visit, Fluff. Whose carriage was that you came in? and what part of the world are you staying in at present?"

"That dear little pony-trap belongs to Mrs. Carnegie, of Arden; and her niece, Mrs. Passmore, drove me over. I am staying with Mr. and Mrs. Spens, at Martinstown."

"Spens the lawyer?"

"Yes, Spens the lawyer. I may stay with him if I like, may I not? I am a great friend of his. He sent me over here to-day to see you on most important business."

"My dear Fluff! Really, if Spens has business with me, he might have the goodness to come here himself."

"He couldn't—he has a very bad influenza cold; he's in bed with it. That was why I offered to come. Because the business is so very important."

"How came he to talk over my affairs with a child like you?"

"Well, as you'll learn presently, they happen to be my affairs too. He thought, as he couldn't stir out of his bed, and I knew all the particulars, that I had better come over and explain everything to you, as the matter is of such great importance, and as a decision must be arrived at to-day."

Fluff spoke with great eagerness. Her eyes were glowing, her cheeks burning, and there wasn't a scrap of her usual fun about her.

In spite of himself the squire was impressed.

"I can not imagine what you have to say to me," he said; "but perhaps we had better go into the house."

"I think we had," said Fluff; "for as what I have got to say will startle you a good deal, you had better sit in your favorite arm-chair, and have some water near you in case you feel faint."

As she spoke she took his hand, led him through the French windows into his little parlor, and seated him comfortably in his favorite chair.

"Now I'll begin," said Fluff. "You must not interrupt me, although I'm afraid you will be a little startled. You have mortgaged the Firs for six thousand pounds."

"My dear Ellen!"—an angry flush rose in the squire's cheeks. "Who has informed you with regard to my private affairs? Frances has done very—"

"Frances has had nothing to say to it; I won't go on if you interrupt me. You have mortgaged the Firs for six thousand pounds, to some people of the name of Dawson & Blake, in London. Frances lives at

Arden, in order to pay them three hundred pounds a year interest on the mortgage."

"Yes, yes; really, Frances—really, Spens—"

"Now do stop talking; how can I tell my story if you interrupt every minute? Messrs. Dawson & Blake were very anxious to get back their money, and they wanted to sell the Firs in order to realize it. Mr. Spens had the greatest work in the world to get them to accept Frances's noble offer. He put tremendous pressure to bear, and at last, very unwillingly, they yielded."

"Well, well, my dear"—the squire wiped the moisture from his brow—"they have yielded, that is the great thing—that is the end of the story; at least, for the present."

"No, it is not the end of the story," said Fluff, looking up angrily into the old man's face. "You were quite satisfied, for it seemed all right to you; you were to stay on quietly here, and have your comforts, and the life you thought so pleasant; and Frances was to give up Philip Arnold, whom she loves, and go away to toil and slave and be miserable. Oh, it was all right for you, but it was bitterly all wrong for Frances!"

"My dear little Fluff, my dear Ellen, pray try and compose yourself; I assure you my side of the bargain is dull, very dull. I am alone; I have no companionship. Not a living soul who cares for me is now to be found at the Firs. My side is not all sunshine, Fluff; and I own it—yes, I will own it, Fluff; I miss Frances very much."

"I am glad of that; I am very glad. Now I am coming to the second part of my story. A week ago Mr. Spens had a letter from Messrs. Dawson & Blake to say that they had sold their mortgage on the Firs to a stranger—a man who had plenty of money, but who had taken a fancy to the Firs, and who wished to get it cheap."

The squire sat upright on his chair.

"Mr. Spens wrote at once to the new owner of the mortgage, and asked him if he would take five per cent. interest on his money, and not disturb you while you lived. Mr. Spens received a reply yesterday, and it is because of that I am here now."

The squire's face had grown very white; his lips trembled a little.

"What was the reply?" he asked. "Really—really, a most extraordinary statement; most queer of Spens not to come to me himself about it. What was the reply, Fluff?"

"I told you Mr. Spens was ill and in bed. The stranger's reply was not favorable to your wishes. He wishes for the Firs; he has seen the place, and would like to live there. He says you must sell; or, there is another condition."

"What is that? This news is most alarming and disquieting. What is the other condition—the alternative?"

Fluff rose, yawned slightly, and half turned her back to the squire.

"It is scarcely worth naming," she said, in a light and indifferent voice; "for as Frances loves Philip, of course she would not think of marrying any one else. But it seems that this stranger, when he was poking about the place, had caught sight of Frances, and he thought her very beautiful and very charming. In short, he fell in love with her, and he says if you will let him marry her, that he and she can live here, and you need never stir from the Firs. I mention this," said Fluff; "but of course there's no use in thinking of it, as Frances loves Philip."

"But there is a great deal of use in thinking of it, my dear; I don't know what you mean by talking in that silly fashion. A rich man falls in love with my daughter. Really, Frances must be much better-looking than I gave her credit for. This man, who practically now owns the Firs, wishes to release me from all difficulties if I give him Frances. Of course I shall give him Frances. It is an admirable arrangement. Frances would be most handsomely provided for, and I shall no

longer be lonely with my daughter and son-in-law residing at the Firs."

"But Frances loves Philip!"

"Pooh! a boy-and-girl affair. My dear, I never did, and never will, believe in anything between Frances and Arnold. I always said Arnold should be your husband."

"I don't want him, thank you."

"Frances was always a good girl," continued the squire; "an excellent, good, obedient girl. She refused Philip because I told her to, and now she'll marry this stranger because I wish her to. Really, my dear, on the whole, your news is pleasant; only, by the way, you have not told me the name of the man who now holds my mortgage."

"He particularly wishes his name to be kept a secret for the present, but he is a nice fellow; I have seen him. I think, if Frances could be got to consent to marry him, he would make her an excellent husband."

"My dear, she must consent. Leave my daughter to me; I'll manage her."

"Well, the stranger wants an answer to-day."

"How am I to manage that? I must write to Frances, or see her. Here she is at this moment, driving down the avenue with Mrs. Carnegie. Well, that is fortunate. Now, Fluff, you will take my part; but, of course, Frances will do what I wish."

"You can ask her, squire. I'm going to walk about outside with Mrs. Carnegie."

"And you won't take my part?"

"I won't take anybody's part. I suppose Frances can make up her own mind."

When Miss Kane came into her father's presence her eyes were

brighter, and her lips wore a happier expression than the squire had seen on them for many a long day. She stepped lightly, and looked young and fresh.

Fluff and Mrs. Carnegie paced up and down in the South Walk. Mrs. Carnegie could walk now, and she was certainly wonderfully improved in appearance.

"Beloved little fairy," she whispered to her companion, "this excitement almost overpowers me. It was with the utmost difficulty I could control myself as we drove over. Our sweet Frances looks happy, but I do not think she suspects anything. Dear little one, are you certain, quite certain, that the hero of the hour has really arrived?"

"Philip? I have locked him up in the dining-room," said Fluff, "and he is pacing up and down there now like a caged lion. I do hope the squire will be quick, or he'll certainly burst the lock of the door."

The two ladies paced the South Walk side by side.

"We'll give them half an hour," said Fluff.

When this time had expired, she took Mrs. Carnegie's hand, and they both approached the open windows of the squire's parlor. When the squire saw them he rose and confronted them. Angry red spots were on his cheeks; his hands trembled. Frances was seated at the table; she looked very pale, and as the two ladies approached she was wiping some tears silently from her eyes.

"Yes, look at her," said the squire, who was almost choking with anger. "She refuses him—she absolutely refuses him! She is satisfied that her poor old father shall end his days in the work-house, rather than unite herself to an amiable and worthy man, who can amply provide for her. Oh, it is preposterous! I have no patience with her; she won't even listen to me. Not a word I say has the smallest effect."

"Because, father—"

"No, Frances, I won't listen to any of your 'becauses.' But never, never again even profess to care for your father. Don't waste words, my child; for words are empty when they are not followed by deeds."

"I must take an answer to Mr. Spens to-day," said Fluff. "Perhaps, if Frances thought a little, she would change her mind."

These words seemed to sting Frances, who rose quickly to her feet.

"You know why I can not help my father in this particular," she said. "Oh, I think, between you all, you will drive me mad."

"Perhaps," said Fluff, suddenly—"perhaps if you saw the gentleman, Frances, you might be able to give a different answer. He really is very nice, and—and—the fact is, he's very impatient. He has arrived—he is in the dining room."

"The gentleman who has purchased the mortgage is in the dining-room!" said the squire.

He rubbed his hands gleefully.

"Excellent! Frances will never be so rude as to refuse a rich man to his face. I look upon him already as our deliverer. I, for my part, shall give him a hearty welcome, and will assure him, if he will only give me time, that I will not leave a stone unturned to overcome my daughter's absurd infatuation. Frances, do you hear me? I desire you to behave politely to the stranger when he comes."

"Perhaps I had better go away," said Frances.

"No, no, dear Frances; do stay," pleaded Fluff. "I'll go and fetch the gentleman; I know him; he is really very nice."

She darted away.

Frances turned her back to the window.

"You know, father, all I have done for you," she said, her beautiful

eyes shining and her slim figure very erect. "I have loved Philip—oh, so deeply, so faithfully!—for ten years. For five of these years I thought he was in his grave; and my heart went there, too, with him. Then he came back, and I was very happy; for I found that he had loved me, and thought of me alone, also, all that long, long time. I was happy then, beyond words, and no woman ever more fervently thanked God. Then—then—you know what happened. I gave Philip up. I consented to let my light, my hope, and my joy die out. I did that for you; but I did not consent to let my love die; and I tell you now, once and for all, that my love will never die; and that, as I so love Philip, I can never, even for your sake, marry any one but Philip!"

"Oh, Francie! Francie!" suddenly exclaimed a joyful little voice. "No one in all the world wants you to marry any one else! The stranger isn't a stranger. Say 'Yes' to your father and to Philip at the same time."

Frances turned; Arnold stepped in through the open window and put his arm round her.

"Now, sir," he said, holding Frances's hand, and turning to the squire, "which am I to have—the Firs or Frances?"

Of course everybody present knew the answer, so there is no need to record it here.

THE END.

MONSIEUR THE VISCOUNT'S FRIEND.

A TALE IN THREE CHAPTERS

"Sweet are the vses of aduersitie
Which like the toad, ougly and venemous,
Weares yet a precious Iewell in his head."

As You Like It: a.d. 1623.

CHAPTER I.

It was the year of grace 1779. In one of the most beautiful corners of beautiful France stood a grand old chateau. It was a fine old building, with countless windows large and small, with high pitched roofs and pointed towers, which, in good taste or bad, did its best to be everywhere ornamental, from the gorgon heads which frowned from its turrets to the long row of stables and the fantastic dovecotes. It stood (as became such a castle) upon an eminence, and looked down. Very beautiful indeed was what it looked upon. Terrace below terrace glowed with the most brilliant flowers, and broad flights of steps led from one garden to the other. On the last terrace of all, fountains and jets of water poured into one large basin, in which were gold and silver fish. Beyond this were shady walks, which led to a lake on which floated waterlilies and swans. From the top of the topmost flight of steps you could see the blazing gardens one below the other, the fountains and the basin, the walks and the lake, and beyond these the trees, and the smiling country, and the blue sky of France.

Within the castle, as without, beauty reigned supreme. The sunlight, subdued by blinds and curtains, stole into rooms furnished with every grace and luxury that could be procured in a country that then accounted itself the most highly-civilized in the world. It fell upon beautiful flowers and beautiful china, upon beautiful tapestry and pictures; and it fell upon Madame the Viscountess, sitting at her embroidery. Madame the Viscountess was not young, but she was not the least beautiful object in those stately rooms. She had married into a race of nobles who (themselves famed for personal beauty) had been scrupulous in the choice of lovely wives. The late Viscount (for Madame was a widow) had been one of the handsomest of the gay courtiers of his day; and Madame had not been unworthy of him.

Even now, though the roses on her cheeks were more entirely artificial than they had been in the days of her youth, she was like some exquisite piece of porcelain. Standing by the embroidery frame was Madame's only child, a boy who, in spite of his youth, was already Monsieur the Viscount. He also was beautiful. His exquisitely-cut mouth had a curl which was the inheritance of scornful generations, but which was redeemed by his soft violet eyes and by natural amiability reflected on his face. His hair was cut square across the forehead, and fell in natural curls behind. His childish figure had already been trained in the fencing school, and had gathered dignity from perpetually treading upon shallow steps and in lofty rooms. From the rosettes on his little shoes to his *chapeau à plumes*, he also was like some porcelain figure. Surely, such beings could not exist except in such a chateau as this, where the very air (unlike that breathed by common mortals) had in the ante-rooms a faint aristocratic odor, and was for yards round Madame the Viscountess dimly suggestive of frangipani! Monsieur the Viscount did not stay long by the embroidery frame; he was entertaining to-day a party of children from the estate, and had come for the key of an old cabinet of which he wished to display the treasures. When tired of this, they went out on to the terrace, and one of the children who had not been there before exclaimed at the beauty of the view.

"It is true," said the little Viscount, carelessly, "and all, as far as you can see, is the estate."

"I will throw a stone to the end of your property, Monsieur," said one of the boys, laughing; and he picked one off the walk, and stepping back, flung it with all his little strength. The stone fell before it had passed the fountains, and the failure was received with shouts of laughter.

"Let us see who can beat that," they cried; and there was a general search for pebbles, which were flung at random among the flower-beds.

"One may easily throw such as those," said the Viscount, who was poking under the wall of the first terrace; "but here is a stone that one may call a stone. Who will send this into the fish-pond? It will make a fountain of itself."

The children drew round him as, with ruffles turned back, he tugged and pulled at a large dirty-looking stone, which was half-buried in the earth by the wall. "Up it comes!" said the Viscount, at length; and sure enough, up it came; but underneath it, his bright eyes shining out of his dirty wrinkled body—horror of horrors!—there lay a toad. Now, even in England, toads are not looked upon with much favor, and a party of English children would have been startled by such a discovery. But with French people, the dread of toads is ludicrous in its intensity. In France toads are believed to have teeth, to bite, and to spit poison; so my hero and his young guests must be excused for taking flight at once with a cry of dismay. On the next terrace, however, they paused, and seeing no signs of the enemy, crept slowly back again. The little Viscount (be it said) began to feel ashamed of himself and led the way, with his hand upon the miniature sword which hung at his side. All eyes were fixed upon the fatal stone, when from behind it was seen slowly to push forth, first a dirty wrinkled leg, and then half a dirty wrinkled head, with one gleaming eye. It was too much; with cries of, "It is he! he comes! he spits! he pursues us!" the young guests of the chateau fled in good earnest, and never stopped until they reached the fountain and the fish-pond.

But Monsieur the Viscount stood his ground. At the sudden apparition the blood rushed to his heart, and made him very white, then it flooded back again and made him very red, and then he fairly drew his sword, and shouting, "*Vive la France!*" rushed upon the enemy. The sword if small was sharp, and stabbed the poor toad would most undoubtedly have been, but for a sudden check received by the valiant little nobleman. It came in the shape of a large heavy hand that seized Monsieur the Viscount with the grasp of a giant,

while a voice which could only have belonged to the owner of such a hand said in slow deep tones,

"*Que faites-vous?*" ("What are you doing?")

It was the tutor, who had been pacing up and down the terrace with a book, and who now stood holding the book in his right hand, and our hero in his left.

Monsieur the Viscount's tutor was a remarkable man. If he had not been so, he would hardly have been tolerated at the chateau, since he was not particularly beautiful, and not especially refined. He was in holy orders, as his tonsured head and clerical costume bore witness —a costume which, from its tightness and simplicity, only served to exaggerate the unusual proportions of his person. Monsieur the Preceptor, had English blood in his veins, and his northern origin betrayed itself in his towering height and corresponding breadth, as well as by his fair hair and light blue eyes. But the most remarkable parts of his outward man were his hands, which were of immense size, especially about the thumbs. Monsieur the Preceptor was not exactly in keeping with his present abode. It was not only that he was wanting in the grace and beauty that reigned around him, but that his presence made those very graces and beauties to look small. He seemed to have a gift the reverse of that bestowed upon King Midas —the gold on which his heavy hand was laid seemed to become rubbish. In the presence of the late Viscount, and in that of Madame his widow, you would have felt fully the deep importance of your dress being *à la mode*, and your complexion *à la* strawberries and cream (such influences still exist); but let the burly tutor appear upon the scene, and all the magic died at once out of brocaded silks and pearl-colored stockings, and dress and complexion became subjects almost of insignificance. Monsieur the Preceptor was certainly a singular man to have been chosen as an inmate of such a household; but, though young, he had unusual talents, and added to them the not more usual accompaniments of modesty and trustworthiness. To

crown all, he was rigidly pious in times when piety was not fashionable, and an obedient son of the church of which he was a minister. Moreover, a family that fashion does not permit to be demonstratively religious, may gain a reflected credit from an austere chaplain; and so Monsieur the Preceptor remained in the chateau and went his own way. It was this man who now laid hands on the Viscount, and, in a voice that sounded like amiable thunder, made the inquiry, "*Que faites-vous?*"

"I am going to kill this animal—this hideous horrible animal," said Monsieur the Viscount, struggling vainly under the grasp of the tutor's finger and thumb.

"It is only a toad," said Monsieur the Preceptor, in his laconic tones.

"*Only* a toad, do you say, Monsieur?" said the Viscount. "That is enough, I think. It will bite—it will spit—it will poison; it is like that dragon you tell me of, that devastated Rhodes—I am the good knight that shall kill it."

Monsieur the Preceptor laughed heartily "You are misled by a vulgar error. Toads do not bite—they have no teeth; neither do they spit poison."

"You are wrong, Monsieur," said the Viscount; "I have seen their teeth myself. Claude Mignon, at the lodge, has two terrible ones, which he keeps in his pocket as a charm."

"I have seen them," said the tutor, "in Monsieur Claude's pocket. When he can show me similar ones in a toad's head I will believe. Meanwhile, I must beg of you, Monsieur, to put up your sword. You must not kill this poor animal, which is quite harmless, and very useful in a garden—it feeds upon many insects and reptiles which injure the plants."

"It shall not be useful in this garden," said the little Viscount, fretfully.

"There are plenty of gardeners to destroy the insects, and if needful, we can have more. But the toad shall not remain. My mother would faint if she saw so hideous a beast among her beautiful flowers."

"Jacques!" roared the tutor to a gardener who was at some distance. Jacques started as if a clap of thunder had sounded in his ear, and approached with low bows. "Take that toad, Jacques, and carry it to the *potager*. It will keep the slugs from your cabbages."

Jacques bowed low and lower, and scratched his head, and then did reverence again with Asiatic humility, but at the same time moved gradually backwards, and never even looked at the toad.

"You also have seen the contents of Monsieur Claude's pocket?" said the tutor, significantly, and quitting his hold of the Viscount, he stooped down, seized the toad in his huge finger and thumb, and strode off in the direction of the *potager*, followed at a respectful distance by Jacques, who vented his awe and astonishment in alternate bows and exclamations at the astounding conduct of the incomprehensible Preceptor.

"What is the use of such ugly beasts?" said the Viscount to his tutor, on his return from the *potager*. "Birds and butterflies are pretty, but what can such villains as these toads have been made for?"

"You should study natural history, Monsieur—" began the priest, who was himself a naturalist.

"That is what you always say," interrupted the Viscount, with the perverse folly of ignorance; "but if I knew as much as you do, it would not make me understand why such ugly creatures need have been made."

"Nor," said the priest, firmly, "is it necessary that you should understand it, particularly if you do not care to inquire. It is enough for you and me if we remember Who made them, some six thousand

years before either of us was born."

With which Monsieur the Preceptor (who had all this time kept his place in the little book with his big thumb) returned to the terrace, and resumed his devotions at the point where they had been interrupted; which exercise he continued till he was joined by the Curé of the village, and the two priests relaxed in the political and religious gossip of the day.

Monsieur the Viscount rejoined his young guests, and they fed the gold fish and the swans, and played *Colin Millard* in the shady walks, and made a beautiful bouquet for Madame, and then fled indoors at the first approach of evening chill, and found that the Viscountess had prepared a feast of fruit and flowers for them in the great hall. Here, at the head of the table, with the Madame at his right hand, his guests around, and the liveried lackeys waiting his commands, Monsieur the Viscount forgot that anything had ever been made which could mar beauty and enjoyment; while the two priests outside stalked up and down under the falling twilight, and talked ugly talk of crime and poverty that were *somewhere* now, and of troubles to come hereafter.

And so night fell over the beautiful sky, the beautiful chateau, and the beautiful gardens; and upon the secure slumbers of beautiful Madame and her beautiful son, and beautiful, beautiful France.

CHAPTER II.

It was the year of grace 1792, thirteen years after the events related in the last chapter. It was the 2d of September, and Sunday, a day of rest and peace in all Christian countries, and even more in gay, beautiful France—a day of festivity and merriment. This Sunday, however, seemed rather an exception to the general rule. There were no gay groups of bannered processions; the typical incense and the public devotion of which it is the symbol were alike wanting; the streets in some places seemed deserted, and in others there was an ominous crowd, and the dreary silence was now and then broken by a distant sound of yells and cries, that struck terror into the hearts of the Parisians.

It was a deserted by-street overlooked by some shut-up warehouses, and from the cellar of one of these a young man crept up on to the pathway. His dress had once been beautiful, but it was torn and soiled; his face was beautiful still, but it was marred by the hideous eagerness of a face on which famine has laid her hand—he was starving. As this man came out from the warehouse, another man came down the street. His dress was not beautiful, neither was he. There was a red look about him—he wore a red flannel cap, tricolor ribbons, and had something red upon his hands, which was neither ribbon nor flannel. He also looked hungry; but it was not for food. The other stopped when he saw him, and pulled something from his pocket. It was a watch, a repeater, in a gold filigree case of exquisite workmanship, with raised figures depicting the loves of an Arcadian shepherd and shepherdess; and, as it lay on the white hand of its owner, it bore an evanescent fragrance that seemed to recall scenes as beautiful and as completely past as the days of pastoral perfection, when—

"All the world and love were young,
And truth in every shepherd's tongue."

The young man held it up to the other and spoke.

"It is my mother's," he said, with an appealing glance of violet eyes; "I would not part with it, but that I am starving. Will you get me food?"

"You are hiding?" said he of the red cap.

"Is that a crime in these days?" said the other, with a smile that would in other days have been irresistible.

The man took the watch, shaded the donor's beautiful face with a rough red cap and tricolor ribbon, and bade him follow him. He, who had but lately come to Paris, dragged his exhausted body after his conductor, hardly noticed the crowds in the streets, the signs by which the man got free passage for them both, or their entrance by a little side-door into a large dark building, and never knew till he was delivered to one of the gaolers that he had been led into the prison of the Abbaye. Then the wretch tore the cap of liberty from his victim's head, and pointed to him with a fierce laugh.

"He wants food, this aristocrat. He shall not wait long—there is a feast in the court below, which he shall join presently. See to it, Antoine! and you *Monsieur*, *Mons-ieur*! listen to the banqueters."

He ceased, and in the silence yells and cries from a court below came up like some horrid answer to imprecation.

The man continued—-

"He has paid for his admission, this Monsieur. It belonged to Madame his mother. Behold!"

He held the watch above his head, and dashed it with insane fury on the ground, and bidding the gaoler see to his prisoner, rushed away to the court below.

The prisoner needed some attention. Weakness and fasting and horror had overpowered a delicate body and a sensitive mind, and he lay senseless by the shattered relic of happier times. Antoine the gaoler (a weak-minded man, whom circumstances had made cruel), looked at him with indifference while the Jacobin remained in the place, and with half-suppressed pity when he had gone. The place where he lay was a hall or passage in the prison, into which several cells opened, and a number of the prisoners were gathered together at one end of it. One of them had watched the proceedings of the Jacobin and his victim with profound interest, and now advanced to where the poor youth lay. He was a priest, and though thirteen years had passed over his head since we saw him in the chateau, and though toil and suffering and anxiety had added the traces of as many more: yet it would not have been difficult to recognize the towering height, the candid face, and finally the large thumb in the little book of ——, Monsieur the Preceptor, who had years ago exchanged his old position for a parochial cure. He strode up to the gaoler (whose head came a little above the priest's elbow), and drawing him aside, asked with his old abruptness, "Who is this?"

"It is the Vicomte de B——. I know his face. He has escaped the commissaires for some days."

"I thought so. Is his name on the registers?"

"No. He escaped arrest, and has just been brought in as you saw."

"Antoine," said the Priest, in a low voice, and with a gaze that seemed to pierce the soul of the weak little gaoler; "Antoine, when you were a shoemaker in the Rue de la Croix, in two or three hard winters I think you found me a friend."

"Oh! Monsieur le Curé," said Antoine, writhing; "if Monsieur le Curé would believe that if I could save his life! but—"

"Pshaw!" said the Priest, "it is not for myself, but for this boy. You must save him, Antoine. Hear me, you *must*. Take him now to one of the lower cells and hide him. You risk nothing. His name is not on the prison register. He will not be called, he will not be missed; that fanatic will think that he has perished with the rest of us;" (Antoine shuddered, though the priest did not move a muscle;) "and when this mad fever has subsided and order is restored, he will reward you. And Antoine—"

Here the Priest pocketed his book and somewhat awkwardly with his huge hands unfastened the left side of his cassock, and tore the silk from the lining. Monsieur the Curé's cassock seemed a cabinet of oddities. First he pulled from this ingenious hiding-place a crucifix, which he replaced; then a knot of white ribbon which he also restored; and finally a tiny pocket or bag of what had been cream-colored satin embroidered with small bunches of heartsease, and which was aromatic with otto of roses. Awkwardly, and somewhat slowly he drew out of this a small locket, in the center of which was some unreadable legend in cabalistic looking character, and which blazed with the finest diamonds. Heaven alone knows the secret of that gem, or the struggle with which the Priest yielded it. He put it into Antoine's hand, talking as he did so, partly to himself and partly to the gaoler.

"We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. The diamonds are of the finest, Antoine, and will sell for much. The blessing of a dying priest upon you if you do kindly, and his curse if you do ill to his poor child, whose home was my home in better days. And for the locket,—it is but a remembrance, and to remember is not difficult!"

As the last observation was not addressed to Antoine, so also he did not hear it. He was discontentedly watching the body of the Viscount, whom he consented to help, but with genuine weak-mindedness consented ungraciously.

"How am I to get him there? Monsieur le Curé sees that he cannot stand upon his feet!"

Monsieur le Curé smiled, and stooping, picked his old pupil up in his arms as if he had been a baby, and bore him to one of the doors.

"You must come no further," said Antoine hastily.

"Ingrate!" muttered the priest in momentary anger, and than ashamed, he crossed himself and pressing the young nobleman to his bosom with the last gush of earthly affection that he was to feel, he kissed his senseless face, spoke a benediction to ears that could not hear it, and laid his burden down.

"God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be with thee now and in the dread hour of death. Adieu! we shall meet hereafter."

The look of pity, the yearning of rekindled love, the struggle of silenced memories passed from his face and left a shining calm—foretaste of the perpetual Light and the eternal Rest.

Before he reached the other prisoners, the large thumb had found its old place in the little book, the lips formed the old old words; but it might almost have been said of him already, that "his spirit was with the God who gave it."

As for Monsieur the Viscount, it was perhaps well that he was not too sensible of his position, for Antoine got him down the flight of stone steps that led to the cell by the simple process of dragging him by the heels. After a similar fashion he crossed the floor, and was deposited on a pallet; the gaoler then emptied a broken pitcher of water over his face, and locking the door securely, hurried back to his charge.

When Monsieur the Viscount came to his senses he raised himself and looked round his new abode. It was a small stone cell; it was underground, with a little grated window at the top that seemed to be

level with the court; there was a pallet—painfully pressed and worn,—a chair, a stone on which stood a plate and broken pitcher, and in one corner a huge bundle of firewood which mocked a place where there was no fire. Stones by lay scattered about, the walls were black, and in the far dark corners the wet oozed out and trickled slowly down, and lizards and other reptiles crawled up.

I suppose that the first object that attracts the hopes of a new prisoner is the window of his cell, and to this, despite his weakness, Monsieur the Viscount crept. It afforded him little satisfaction. It was too high in the cell for him to reach it, too low in the prison to command any view, and was securely grated with iron. Then he examined the walls, but not a stone was loose. As he did so, his eye fell upon the floor, and he noticed that two of the stones that lay about had been raised up by some one and a third laid upon the top. It looked like child's play, and Monsieur the Viscount kicked it down, and then he saw that underneath it there was a pellet of paper roughly rolled together. Evidently it was something left by the former occupant of the cell for his successor. Perhaps he had begun some plan for getting away which he had not had time to perfect on his own account. Perhaps—but by this time the paper was spread out, and Monsieur the Viscount read the writing. The paper was old and yellow. It was the fly leaf torn out of a little book and it was written in black chalk, the words—

"*Souvenez-vous du Sauveur.*"
(Remember the Saviour.)

He turned it over, he turned it back again; there was no other mark; there was nothing more; and Monsieur the Viscount did not conceal it from himself that he was disappointed. How could it be otherwise? He had been bred in ease and luxury, and surrounded with everything that could make life beautiful; while ugliness, and want, and sickness, and all that make life miserable, had been kept, as far as they can be kept, from the precincts of the beautiful chateau which was his home. What were the *consolations* of religion to him? They are offered to

those, (and to those only) who need them. They were to Monsieur the Viscount what the Crucified Christ was to the Greeks of old—foolishness.

He put the paper in his pocket and lay down again, feeling it the crowning disappointment of what he had lately suffered. Presently, Antoine came with some food; it was not dainty, but Monsieur the Viscount devoured it like a famished hound, and then made inquiries as to how he came and how long he had been there. When the gaoler began to describe him whom he called the Curé, Monsieur the Viscount's attention quickened into eagerness, an eagerness deepened by the tender interest that always hangs round the names of those whom we have known in happier and younger days. The happy memories recalled by hearing of his old tutor seemed to blot out his present misfortunes. With French excitability, he laughed and wept alternately.

"As burly as ever, you say? The little book? I remember it, it was his breviary. Ah! it is he. It is Monsieur the Preceptor, whom I have not seen for years. Take me to him, bring him here, let me see him!"

But Monsieur the Preceptor was in Paradise.

That first night of Monsieur the Viscount's imprisonment was a terrible one. The bitter chill of a Parisian autumn, the gnawings of half-satisfied hunger, the thick walls that shut out all hope of escape but did not exclude those fearful cries that lasted with few intervals throughout the night, made it like some hideous dream. At last the morning broke; at half-past two o'clock, some members of the *commune* presented themselves in the hall of the National Assembly with the significant announcement: "The prisons are empty!" and Antoine, who had been quaking for hours, took courage, and went with a half loaf of bread and a pitcher of water to the cell that was not "empty." He found his prisoner struggling with a knot of white ribbon, which he was trying to fasten in his hair. One glance at his face told

all.

"It is the fever," said Antoine; and he put down the bread and water and fetched an old blanket and a pillow; and that day and for many days, the gaoler hung above his prisoner's pallet with the tenderness of a woman. Was he haunted by the vision of a burly figure that had bent over his own sick bed in the Rue de la Croix? Did the voice (once so familiar in counsel and benediction!) echo still in his ears?

"*The blessing of a dying priest upon you if you do well, and his curse if you do ill to this poor child, whose home was my home in better days.*"

Be this as it may, Antoine tended his patient with all the constancy compatible with keeping his presence in the prison a secret; and it was not till the crisis was safely past, that he began to visit the cell less frequently, and re-assumed the harsh manners which he held to befit his office.

Monsieur the Viscount's mind rambled much in his illness. He called for his mother, who had long been dead. He fancied himself in his own chateau. He thought that all his servants stood in a body before him, but that not one would move to wait on him. He thought that he had abundance of the most tempting food and cooling drinks, but placed just beyond his reach. He thought that he saw two lights like stars near together, which were close to the ground, and kept appearing and then vanishing away. In time he became more sensible; the chateau melted into the stern reality of his prison walls; the delicate food became bread and water; the servants disappeared like spectres; but in the empty cells, in the dark corners near the floor, he still fancied that he saw two sparks of light coming and going, appearing and then vanishing away. He watched them till his giddy head would bear it no longer, and he closed his eyes and slept. When he awoke he was much better, but when he raised himself and turned towards the stone—there, by the bread and the

broken pitcher, sat a dirty, ugly, wrinkled toad gazing at him, Monsieur the Viscount, with eyes of yellow fire.

Monsieur the Viscount had long ago forgotten the toad which had alarmed his childhood; but his national dislike to that animal had not been lessened by years, and the toad of the prison seemed likely to fare no better than the toad of the chateau. He dragged himself from his pallet, and took up one of the large damp stones which lay about the floor of the cell, to throw at the intruder. He expected that when he approached it, the toad would crawl away, and that he could throw the stone after it; but to his surprise, the beast sat quite unmoved, looking at him with calm shining eyes, and somehow or other, Monsieur the Viscount lacked strength or heart to kill it. He stood doubtful for a moment, and then a sudden feeling of weakness obliged him to drop the stone, and sit down, while tears sprang to his eyes with a sense of his helplessness.

"Why should I kill it?" he said bitterly. "The beast will live and grow fat upon this damp and loathsomeness, long after they have put an end to my feeble life. It shall remain. The cell is not big, but it is big enough for us both. However large be the rooms a man builds himself to live in, it needs but little space in which to die!"

So Monsieur the Viscount dragged his pallet away from the toad, placed another stone by it, and removed the pitcher; and then, wearied with his efforts, lay down and slept heavily.

When he awoke, on the new stone by the pitcher was the toad, staring full at him with topaz eyes. He lay still this time and did not move, for the animal showed no intention of spitting, and he was puzzled by its tameness.

"It seems to like the sight of a man," he thought. "Is it possible that any former inmate of this wretched prison can have amused his solitude by making a pet of such a creature? and if there were such a man, where is he now?"

Henceforward, sleeping or waking, whenever Monsieur the Viscount lay down upon his pallet, the toad crawled up on to the stone, and kept watch over him with shining lustrous eyes; but whenever there was a sound of the key grating in the lock, and the gaoler coming his rounds, away crept the toad, and was quickly lost in the dark corners of the room. When the man was gone, it returned to its place, and Monsieur the Viscount would talk to it, as he lay on his pallet.

"Ah! Monsieur Crapaud," he would say with mournful pleasantry, "without doubt you have had a master, and a kind one; but tell me who was he, and where is he now? Was he old or young, and was it in the last stage of maddening loneliness that he made friends with such a creature as you?"

Monsieur Crapaud looked very intelligent, but he made no reply, and Monsieur the Viscount had recourse to Antoine.

"Who was in this cell before me?" he asked at the gaoler's next visit.

Antoine's face clouded. "Monsieur le Curé had this room. My orders were that he was to be imprisoned 'in secret.'"

Monsieur le Curé had this room. There was a revelation in those words. It was all explained now. The priest had always had a love for animals (and for ugly, common animals) which his pupil had by no means shared. His room at the chateau had been little less than a menagerie. He had even kept a glass beehive there, which communicated with a hole in the window through which the bees flew in and out, and he would stand for hours with his thumb in the breviary, watching the labors of his pets. And this also had been his room! This dark, damp cell. Here, breviary in hand, he had stood, and lain, and knelt. Here, in this miserable prison, he had found something to love, and on which to expend the rare intelligence and benevolence of his nature. Here, finally, in the last hours of his life, he had written on the fly-leaf of his prayer-book something to comfort his

successor, and "being dead yet spoke" the words of consolation which he had administered in his lifetime. Monsieur the Viscount read that paper now with different feelings.

There is perhaps no argument so strong, and no virtue that so commands the respect of young men, as consistency. Monsieur the Preceptor's lifelong counsel and example would have done less for his pupil than was effected by the knowledge of his consistent career, now that it was past. It was not the nobility of the priest's principles that awoke in Monsieur the Viscount a desire to imitate his religious example, but the fact that he had applied them to his own life, not only in the time of wealth, but in the time of tribulation and in the hour of death. All that high-strung piety—that life of prayer—those unswerving admonitions to consider the vanity of earthly treasures, and to prepare for death—which had sounded so unreal amidst the perfumed elegancies of the chateau, came back now with a reality gained from experiment. The daily life of self-denial, the conversation garnished from Scripture and from the Fathers, had not, after all, been mere priestly affectations. In no symbolic manner, but, literally, he had "watched for the coming of his Lord," and "taken up the cross daily;" and so, when the cross was laid on him, and when the voice spoke which must speak to all, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee," he bore the burden and obeyed the summons unmoved.

Unmoved!—this was the fact that struck deep into the heart of Monsieur the Viscount, as he listened to Antoine's account of the Curé's imprisonment. What had astonished and overpowered his own undisciplined nature had not disturbed Monsieur the Preceptor. He had prayed in the chateau—he prayed in the prison. He had often spoken in the chateau of the softening and comforting influences of communion with the lower animals and with nature, and in the uncertainty of imprisonment he had tamed a toad. "None of these things had moved him," and in a storm of grief and admiration, Monsieur the Viscount bewailed the memory of his tutor.

"If he had only lived to teach me!"

But he was dead, and there was nothing for Monsieur the Viscount but to make the most of his example. This was not so easy to follow as he imagined. Things seemed to be different with him to what they had been with Monsieur the Preceptor. He had no lofty meditations, no ardent prayers, and calm and peace seemed more distant than ever. Monsieur the Viscount met, in short, with all those difficulties that the soul must meet with, which, in a moment of enthusiasm, has resolved upon a higher and a better way of life, and in moments of depression is perpetually tempted to forego that resolution. His prison life was, however, a pretty severe discipline, and he held on with struggles and prayers; and so, little by little, and day by day, as the time of his imprisonment went by, the consolations of religion became a daily strength against the fretfulness of imperious temper, the sickness of hope deferred, and the dark suggestions of despair.

The term of his imprisonment was a long one. Many prisoners came and went within the walls of the Abbaye, but Monsieur the Viscount still remained in his cell: indeed, he would have gained little by leaving it if he could have done so, as he would almost certainly have been retaken. As it was, Antoine on more than one occasion concealed him behind the bundles of firewood, and once or twice he narrowly escaped detection by less friendly officials. There were times when the guillotine seemed to him almost better than this long suspense: but while other heads passed to the block, his remained on his shoulders; and so weeks and even months went by. And during all this time, sleeping or waking, whenever he lay down upon his pallet, the toad crept up on to the stone, and kept watch over him with lustrous eyes.

Monsieur the Viscount hardly acknowledged to himself the affection with which he came to regard this ugly and despicable animal. The greater part of his regard for it he believed to be due to its connection with his tutor, and the rest he set down to the score of his own

humanity, and took credit to himself accordingly; whereas in truth Monsieur Crapaud was of incalculable service to his new master, who would lie and chatter to him for hours, and almost forget his present discomfort in recalling past happiness, as he described the chateau, the gardens, the burly tutor, and beautiful Madame, or laughed over his childish remembrances of the toad's teeth in Claude Mignon's pocket; whilst Monsieur Crapaud sat well-bred and silent, with a world of comprehension in his fiery eyes. Whoever thinks this puerile must remember that my hero was a Frenchman, and a young Frenchman, with a prescriptive right to chatter for chattering's sake, and also that he had not a very highly cultivated mind of his own to converse with, even if the most highly cultivated intellect is ever a reliable resource against the terrors of solitary confinement.

Foolish or wise, however, Monsieur the Viscount's attachment strengthened daily; and one day something happened which showed his pet in a new light, and afforded him fresh amusement.

The prison was much infested with certain large black spiders, which crawled about the floor and walls; and, as Monsieur the Viscount was lying on his pallet, he saw one of these scramble up and over the stone on which sat Monsieur Crapaud. That good gentleman, whose eyes, till then, had been fixed as usual on his master, now turned his attention to the intruder. The spider, as if conscious of danger, had suddenly stopped still. Monsieur Crapaud gazed at it intently with his beautiful eyes, and bent himself slightly forward. So they remained for some seconds, then the spider turned round, and began suddenly to scramble away. At this instant Monsieur the Viscount saw his friend's eyes gleam with an intenser fire, his head was jerked forwards; it almost seemed as if something had been projected from his mouth, and drawn back again with the rapidity of lightning. Then Monsieur Crapaud resumed his position, drew in his head, and gazed mildly and sedately before him; *but the spider was nowhere to be seen*.

Monsieur the Viscount burst into a loud laugh.

"Eh, well! Monsieur," said he, "but this is not well-bred on your part. Who gave you leave to eat my spiders, and to bolt them in such an unmannerly way, moreover?"

In spite of this reproof Monsieur Crapaud looked in no way ashamed of himself, and I regret to state that hence-forward (with the partial humaneness of mankind in general), Monsieur the Viscount amused himself by catching the insects (which were only too plentiful) in an old oyster-shell, and setting them at liberty on the stone for the benefit of his friend. As for him, all appeared to be fish that came to his net—spiders and beetles, slugs and snails from the damp corners, flies, and wood-lice found on turning up the large stone, disappeared one after the other. The wood-lice were an especial amusement: when Monsieur the Viscount touched them, they shut up into tight little balls, and in this condition he removed them to the stone, and placed them like marbles in a row, Monsieur Crapaud watching the proceeding with rapt attention. After awhile the balls would slowly open and begin to crawl away; but he was a very active wood-louse indeed who escaped the suction of Monsieur Crapaud's tongue, as his eyes glowing with eager enjoyment, he bolted one after another, and Monsieur the Viscount clapped his hands and applauded.

The grated window was a fine field for spiders and other insects, and by piling up stones on the floor, Monsieur the Viscount contrived to scramble up to it, and fill his friend's oyster-shell with the prey.

One day, about a year and nine months after his first arrival at the prison, he climbed to the embrasure of the window, as usual, oyster-shell in hand. He always chose a time for this when he knew that the court would most probably be deserted, to avoid the danger of being recognized through the grating. He was therefore, not a little startled at being disturbed in his capture of a fat black spider by a sound of something bumping against the iron bars. On looking up, he saw that a string was dangling before the window with something attached to the end of it. He drew it in, and, as he did so, he fancied that he heard

a distant sound of voices and clapped hands, as if from some window above. He proceeded to examine his prize, and found that it was a little round pincushion of sand, such as women use to polish their needles with, and that, apparently, it was used as a make-weight to ensure the steady descent of a neat little letter that was tied beside it, in company with a small lead pencil. The letter was directed to "*The prisoner who finds this.*" Monsieur the Viscount opened it at once. This was the letter:

"*In prison, 24th Prairial, year 2.*

"*Fellow-sufferer, who are you? how long have you been imprisoned? Be good enough to answer.*"

Monsieur the Viscount hesitated for a moment, and then determined to risk all. He tore off a bit of the paper, and with the little pencil hurriedly wrote this reply:—

"*In secret, June 12, 1794.*

"*Louis Archambaud Jean-Marie Arnaud, Vicomte de B. supposed to have perished in the massacres of September, 1792. Keep my secret. I have been imprisoned a year and nine months. Who are you? howlong have you been here?*"

The letter was drawn up, and he watched anxiously for the reply. It came, and with it some sheets of blank paper.

"*Monsieur,—We have the honor to reply to your inquiries and thank you for your frankness. Henri Edouard Clermont, Baron de St. Claire. Valerie de St. Claire. We have been here but two days. Accept our sympathy for your misfortunes.*"

Four words in this note seized at once upon Monsieur the Viscount's interest—*Valerie de St. Claire*:—and for some reasons which I do not pretend to explain, he decided that it was she who was the author of these epistles, and the demon of curiosity forthwith took possession of his mind. Who was she? was she old or young. And in which relation did she stand to Monsieur le Baron—that of wife, of sister, or of daughter? And from some equally inexplicable cause Monsieur the Viscount determined in his own mind that it was the latter. To make assurance doubly sure, however, he laid a trap to discover the real state of the case. He wrote a letter of thanks and sympathy, expressed with all the delicate chivalrous politeness of a nobleman of the old *régime*, and addressed it to *Madame la Baronne*. The plan succeeded. The next note he received contained these sentences:—"*I am not the Baroness. Madame my mother is, alas! dead. I and my father are alone. He is ill; but thanks you, Monsieur, for your letters, which relieve the* ennui *of imprisonment. Are you alone?*"

Monsieur the Viscount, as in duty bound, relieved the ennui of the Baron's captivity by another epistle. Before answering the last question, he turned round involuntarily and looked to where Monsieur Crapaud sat by the broken pitcher. The beautiful eyes were turned towards him, and Monsieur the Viscount took up his pencil, and wrote hastily, "*I am not alone—I have a friend.*"

Henceforward the oyster-shell took a long time to fill, and patience seemed a harder virtue than ever. Perhaps the last fact had something to do with the rapid decline of Monsieur the Viscount's health. He became paler and weaker, and more fretful. His prayers were accompanied by greater mental struggles, and watered with more tears. He was, however, most positive in his assurances to Monsieur Crapaud that he knew the exact nature and cause of the malady that was consuming him. It resulted, he said, from the noxious and unwholesome condition of his cell; and he would entreat Antoine

to have it swept out. After some difficulty the gaoler consented.

It was nearly a month since Monsieur the Viscount had first been startled by the appearance of the little pincushion. The stock of paper had long been exhausted. He had torn up his cambric ruffles to write upon, and Mademoiselle de St. Claire had made havoc of her pocket-handkerchiefs for the same purpose. The Viscount was feebler than ever, and Antoine became alarmed. The cell should be swept out the next morning. He would come himself, he said, and bring another man out of the town with him to help him, for the work was heavy, and he had a touch of rheumatism. The man was a stupid fellow from the country, who had only been a week in Paris; he had never heard of the Viscount, and Antoine would tell him that the prisoner was a certain young lawyer who had really died of fever in prison the day before. Monsieur the Viscount thanked him; and it was not till the next morning arrived, and he was expecting them every moment, that Monsieur the Viscount remembered the toad, and that he would without doubt be swept away with the rest in the general clearance. At first he thought that he would beg them to leave it, but some knowledge of the petty insults which that class of men heaped upon their prisoners made him feel that this would probably be only an additional reason for their taking the animal away. There was no place to hide it in, for they would go all round the room; unless—unless Monsieur the Viscount took it up in his hand. And this was just what he objected to do. All his old feelings of repugnance came back, he had not even got gloves on; his long white hands were bare, he could not touch a toad. It was true that the beast had amused him, and that he had chatted to it; but after all, this was a piece of childish folly—an unmanly way, to say the least, of relieving the tedium of captivity. What was Monsieur Crapaud but a very ugly (and most people said a venomous) reptile? To what a folly he had been condescending! With these thoughts, Monsieur the Viscount steeled himself against the glances of his topaz-eyed friend, and when the steps of thee men were heard upon the stairs, he did not move from

the window where he had placed himself, with his back to the stone.

The steps came nearer and nearer, Monsieur the Viscount began to whistle;—the key was rattled into the lock, and Monsieur the Viscount heard a bit of bread fall, as the toad hastily descended to hide itself as usual in the corners. In a moment his resolution was gone; another second, and it would be too late. He dashed after the creature, picked it up, and when the men came in he was standing with his hands behind him, in which Monsieur Crapaud was quietly and safely seated.

The room was swept, and Antoine was preparing to go, when the other, who had been eyeing the prisoner suspiciously, stopped and said with a sharp sneer, "Does the citizen always preserve that position?"

"Not he," said the gaoler, good-naturedly. "He spends most of his time in bed, which saves his legs. Come along Francois."

"I shall not come," said the other, obstinately. "Let the citizen show me his hands."

"Plague take you!" said Antoine, in a whisper. "What sulky fit possesses you, my comrade! Let the poor wretch alone. What wouldst thou with his hands? Wait a little, and thou shalt have his head."

"We should have few heads or prisoners either, if thou hadst the care of them," said Francois sharply. "I say that the prisoner secretes something, and that I will see it. Show your hands, dog of an aristocrat!"

Monsieur the Viscount set his teeth to keep himself from speaking, and held out his hands in silence, toad and all.

Both the men started back with an exclamation, and Francois got behind his comrade, and swore over his shoulder.

Monsieur the Viscount stood upright and still, with a smile on his white face. "Behold, citizen, what I secrete, and what I desire to keep. Behold all that I have left to secrete or to desire! There is nothing more."

"Throw it down!" screamed Francois; "many a witch has been burnt for less—throw it down."

The color began to flood over Monsieur the Viscount's face; but still he spoke gently, and with bated breath. "If you wish me to suffer, citizen, let this be my witness that I have suffered. I must be very friendless to desire such a friend. I must be brought very low to ask such a favor. Let the Republic give me this."

"The Republic has one safe rule for aristocrats," said the other; "she gives them nothing but their keep till she pays for their shaving—once for all. She gave one of these dogs a few rags to dress a wound on his back with, and he made a rope of his dressings, and let himself down from the window. We will have no more such games. You may be training the beast to spit poison at good citizens. Throw it down and kill it."

Monsieur the Viscount made no reply. His hands had moved towards his breast, against which he was holding his golden-eyed friend. There are times in life when the brute creation contrasts favorably with the lords thereof, and this was one of them. It was hard to part just now.

Antoine, who had been internally cursing his own folly in bringing such a companion into the cell, now interfered. "If you are going to stay here to be bitten or spit at, Francois, my friend," said he, "I am not. Thou art zealous, my comrade, but dull as an owl. The Republic is far-sighted in her wisdom beyond thy coarse ideas, and has more ways of taking their heads from these aristocrats than one. Dost thou not see?" And he tapped his forehead significantly, and looked at the

prisoner; and so, between talking and pushing, got his sulky companion out of the cell, and locked the door after them.

"And so, my friend—my friend!" said Monsieur the Viscount, tenderly, "we are safe once more; but it will not be for long, my Crapaud. Something tells me that I cannot much longer be overlooked. A little while, and I shall be gone; and thou wilt have, perchance, another master, when I am summoned before mine."

Monsieur the Viscount's misgivings were just. Francois, on whose stupidity Antoine had relied, was (as is not uncommon with people stupid in other respects) just clever enough to be mischievous. Antoine's evident alarm made him suspicious, and he began to talk about the too-elegant-looking young lawyer who was imprisoned "in secret," and permitted by the gaoler to keep venomous beasts. Antoine was examined and committed to one of his own cells, and Monsieur the Viscount was summoned before the revolutionary tribunal.

There was little need even for the scanty inquiry that in those days preceded sentence. In every line of his beautiful face, marred as it was by sickness and suffering—in the unconquerable dignity, which dirt and raggedness were powerless to hide, the fatal nobility of his birth and breeding were betrayed. When he returned to the anteroom, he did not positively know his fate; but in his mind there was a moral certainty that left him no hope.

The room was filled with other prisoners awaiting trial; and as he entered, his eyes wandered round it to see if there were any familiar faces. They fell upon two figures standing with their backs to him—a tall, fierce-looking man, who, despite his height and fierceness, had a restless, nervous despondency expressed in all his movements; and a young girl who leant on his arm as if for support, but whose steady quietude gave her more the air of a supporter. Without seeing their faces, and for no reasonable reason, Monsieur the Viscount decided

with himself that they were the Baron and his daughter, and he begged the man who was conducting him, for a moment's delay. The man consented. France was becoming sick of unmitigated carnage, and even the executioners sometimes indulged in pity by way of a change.

As Monsieur the Viscount approached the two they turned round, and he saw her face—a very fair and very resolute one, with ashen hair and large eyes. In common with almost all the faces in that room, it was blanched with suffering; and it is fair to say, in common with many of them, it was pervaded by a lofty calm. Monsieur the Viscount never for an instant doubted his own conviction; he drew near and said in a low voice, "Mademoiselle de St. Claire!"

The Baron looked first fierce, and then alarmed. His daughter's face illumined; she turned her large eyes on the speaker, and said simply,

"Monsieur le Vicomte?"

The Baron apologized, commiserated, and sat down on a seat near, with a look of fretful despair; and his daughter and Monsieur the Viscount were left standing together. Monsieur the Viscount desired to say a great deal and could say very little. The moments went by and hardly a word had been spoken.

Valerie asked if he knew his fate.

"I have not heard it," he said; "but I am morally certain. There can be but one end in these days."

She sighed. "It is the same with us. And if you must suffer, Monsieur, I wish that we may suffer together. It would comfort my father—and me."

Her composure vexed him. Just, too, when he was sensible that the desire of life was making a few fierce struggles in his own breast.

"You seem to look forward to death with great cheerfulness, Mademoiselle."

The large eyes were raised to him with a look of surprise at the irritation of his tone.

"I think," she said gently, "that one does not look forward to, but *beyond* it." She stopped and hesitated, still watching his face, and then spoke hurriedly and diffidently:—

"Monsieur, it seems impertinent to make such suggestions to you, who have doubtless a full fund of consolation; but I remember, when a child, going to hear the preaching of a monk who was famous for his eloquence. He said that his text was from the Scriptures—it has been in my mind all to-day—'*There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest.*' The man is becoming impatient. Adieu! Monsieur. A thousand thanks and a thousand blessings."

She offered her cheek, on which there was not a ray of increased color, and Monsieur the Viscount stooped and kissed it, with a thick mist gathering in his eyes, through which he could not see her face.

"Adieu! Valerie!"

"Adieu! Louis!"

So they met, and so they parted; and as Monsieur the Viscount went back to his prison, he flattered himself that the last link was broken for him in the chain of earthly interests.

When he reached the cell he was tired, and lay down, and in a few seconds a soft scrambling over the floor announced the return of Monsieur Crapaud from his hiding place. With one wrinkled leg after another he clambered on to the stone, and Monsieur the Viscount started when he saw him.

"Friend Crapaud! I had actually forgotten thee. I fancied I had said

adieu for the last time;" and he gave a choked sigh, which Monsieur Crapaud could not be expected to understand. In about five minutes he sprang up suddenly. "Monsieur Crapaud, I have not long to live, and no time must be lost in making my will." Monsieur Crapaud was too wise to express any astonishment; and his master began to hunt for a tidy-looking stone (paper and cambric were both at an end). They were all rough and dirty; but necessity had made the Viscount inventive, and he took a couple and rubbed them together till he had polished both. Then he pulled out the little pencil, and for the next half hour wrote busily. When it was done he lay down, and read it to his friend. This was Monsieur the Viscount's last will and testament:—

"*To my successor in this cell.*

"To you whom Providence has chosen to be the inheritor of my sorrows and my captivity, I desire to make another bequest. There is in this prison a toad. He was tamed by a man (peace to his memory!) who tenanted this cell before me. He has been my friend and companion for nearly two years of sad imprisonment. He has sat by my bedside, fed from my hand, and shared all my confidence. He is ugly, but he has beautiful eyes; he is silent, but he is attentive; he is a brute, but I wish the men of France were in this respect more his superiors! He is very faithful. May you never have a worse friend! He feeds upon insects, which I have been accustomed to procure for him. Be kind to him; he will repay it. Like other men, I bequeath what I would take with me if I could.

"Fellow-sufferer, adieu! God comfort you as He has comforted me! The sorrows of this life are sharp but short; the joys of the next life are eternal. Think some times on him who commends his friend to your pity, and himself to your prayers.

"This is the last will and testament of Louis Archambaud Jean-Marie Arnaud, Vicomte de B——."

Monsieur the Viscount's last will and testament was with difficulty squeezed into the surface of the larger of the stones. Then he hid it where the priest had hid his bequest long ago, and then lay down to dream of Monsieur the Preceptor, and that they had met at last.

The next day was one of anxious suspense. In the evening, as usual, a list of those who were to be guillotined next morning, was brought into the prison; and Monsieur the Viscount begged for a sight of it. It was brought to him. First on the list was Antoine! Halfway down was his own name, "Louis de B—," and a little lower his fascinated gaze fell upon names that stirred his heart with such a passion of regret as he had fancied it would never feel again, "Henri de St. Claire, Valerie de St. Claire."

Her eyes seemed to shine on him from the gathering twilight, and her calm voice to echo in his ears. "*It has been in my mind all to-day. There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest.*"

There! He buried his face and prayed.

He was disturbed by the unlocking of the door, and the new gaoler appeared with Antoine! The poor wretch seemed overpowered by terror. He had begged to be imprisoned for this last night with Monsieur the Viscount. It was only a matter of a few hours, as they were to die at daybreak, and his request was granted.

Antoine's entrance turned the current of Monsieur the Viscount's thoughts. No more selfish reflections now. He must comfort this poor creature, of whose death he was to be the unintentional cause. Antoine's first anxiety was that Monsieur the Viscount should bear witness that the gaoler had treated him kindly, and so earned the blessing and not the curse of Monsieur le Curé, whose powerful presence seemed to haunt him still. On this score he was soon set at rest, and then came the old, old story. He had been but a bad man. If

his life were to come over again, he would do differently. Did Monsieur the Viscount think that there was any hope?

Would Monsieur the Viscount have recognized himself, could he, two years ago, have seen himself as he was now? Kneeling by that rough, uncultivated figure, and pleading with all the eloquence that he could master to that rough uncultivated heart, the great Truths of Christianity,—so great and few and simple in their application to our needs! The violet eyes had never appealed more tenderly, the soft voice had never been softer than now, as he strove to explain to this ignorant soul, the cardinal doctrines of Faith and Repentance, and Charity, with an earnestness that was perhaps more effectual than his preaching.

Monsieur the Viscount was quite as much astonished as flattered by the success of his instructions. The faith on which he had laid hold with such mortal struggles, seemed almost to "come natural" (as people say) to Antoine. With abundant tears, he professed the deepest penitence for his past life, at the same time that he accepted the doctrine of the Atonement as a natural remedy, and never seemed to have a doubt in the Infinite Mercy that should cover his infinite guilt.

It was all so orthodox that even if he had doubted (which he did not) the sincerity of the gaoler's contrition and belief, Monsieur the Viscount could have done nothing but envy the easy nature of Antoine's convictions. He forgot the difference of their respective capabilities!

When the night was far advanced the men rose from their knees, and Monsieur the Viscount persuaded Antoine to lie down on his pallet, and when the gaoler's heavy breathing told that he was asleep, Monsieur the Viscount felt relieved to be alone once more; alone, except for Monsieur Crapaud, whose round fiery eyes were open as usual.

The simplicity with which he had been obliged to explain the truths of Divine Love to Antoine, was of signal service to Monsieur the Viscount himself. It left him no excuse for those intricacies of doubt, with which refined minds too often torture themselves; and as he paced feebly up and down the cell, all the long-withheld peace for which he had striven since his imprisonment seemed to flood into his soul. How blessed—how undeservedly blessed—was his fate! Who or what was he that after such short, such mitigated sufferings, the crown of victory should be so near? The way had seemed long to come, it was short to look back upon, and now the golden gates were almost reached, the everlasting doors were open. A few more hours, and then—! and as Monsieur the Viscount buried his worn face in his hands, the tears that trickled from his fingers were literally tears of joy.

He groped his way to the stone, pushed some straw close to it, and lay down on the ground to rest, watched by Monsieur Crapaud's fiery eyes. And as he lay, faces seemed to him to rise out of the darkness, to take the form and features of the face of the Priest, and to gaze at him with unutterable benediction. And in his mind, like some familiar piece of music, awoke the words that had been written on the fly-leaf of the little book; coming back, sleepily and dreamily, over and over again—

"*Souvenez-vous du Sauveur! Souvenez-vous du Sauveur!*"
(Remember the Saviour!)

In that remembrance he fell asleep.

Monsieur the Viscount's sleep for some hours was without a dream. Then it began to be disturbed by that uneasy consciousness of sleeping too long, which enables some people to awake at whatever hour they have resolved upon. At last it became intolerable, and wearied as he was, he awoke. It was broad daylight, and Antoine was snoring beside him. Surely the cart would come soon, the executions were generally at an early hour. But time went on, and no

one came, and Antoine awoke. The hours of suspense passed heavily, but at last there were steps and a key rattled into the lock. The door opened, and the gaoler appeared with a jug of milk and a loaf. With a strange smile he set them down.

"A good appetite to you, citizens."

Antoine flew on him. "Comrade! we used to be friends. Tell me, what is it? Is the execution deferred?"

"The execution has taken place at last," said the other, significantly; "*Robespierre is dead!*" and he vanished.

Antoine uttered a shriek of joy. He wept, he laughed, he cut capers, and flinging himself at Monsieur the Viscount's feet, he kissed them rapturously. When he raised his eyes to Monsieur the Viscount's face, his transports moderated. The last shock had been too much, he seemed almost in a stupor. Antoine got him on the pallet, dragged the blanket over him, broke the bread into the milk, and played the nurse once more.

On that day thousands of prisoners in the city of Paris alone awoke from the shadow of death to the hope of life. The Reign of Terror was ended!

CHAPTER III.

It was a year of grace early in the present century.

We are again in the beautiful country of beautiful France. It is the chateau once more. It is the same, but changed. The unapproachable elegance, the inviolable security, have witnessed invasion. The right wing of the chateau is in ruins, with traces of fire upon the blackened walls; while here and there, a broken statue or a roofless temple, are sad memorials of the Revolution. Within the restored part of the chateau, however, all looks well. Monsieur the Viscount has been fortunate, and if not so rich a man as his father, has yet regained enough of his property to live with comfort, and, as he thinks, luxury. The long rooms are little less elegant than in former days, and Madame the present Viscountess's boudoir is a model of taste. Not far from it is another room, to which it forms a singular contrast. This room belongs to Monsieur the Viscount. It is small, with one window. The floor and walls are bare, and it contains no furniture; but on the floor is a worn-out pallet, by which lies a stone, and on that a broken pitcher, and in a little frame against the wall is preserved a crumpled bit of paper like the fly-leaf of some little book, on which is a half-effaced inscription, which can be deciphered by Monsieur the Viscount if by no one else. Above the window is written in large letters, a date and the word REMEMBER. Monsieur the Viscount is not likely to forget, but he is afraid of himself and of prosperity lest it should spoil him.

It is evening, and Monsieur the Viscount is strolling along the terrace with Madame on his arm. He has only one to offer her, for where the other should be an empty sleeve is pinned to his breast, on which a bit of ribbon is stirred by the breeze. Monsieur the Viscount has not been idle since we saw him last; the faith that taught him to die, has

taught him also how to live,—an honorable, useful life.

It is evening, and the air comes up perfumed from a bed of violets by which Monsieur the Viscount is kneeling. Madame (who has a fair face and ashen hair) stands by him with her little hand on his shoulder and her large eyes upon the violets.

"My friend! My friend! My friend!" It is Monsieur the Viscount's voice, and at the sound of it, there is a rustle among the violets that sends the perfume high into the air. Then from the parted leaves come forth first a dirty wrinkled leg, then a dirty wrinkled head with gleaming eyes, and Monsieur Crapaud crawls with self-satisfied dignity on to Monsieur the Viscount's outstretched hand.

So they stay laughing and chatting, and then Monsieur the Viscount bids his friend good-night, and holds him towards Madame, that she may do the same. But Madame (who did not enjoy Monsieur Crapaud's society in prison) cannot be induced to do more than scratch his head delicately with the tip of her white finger. But she respects him greatly, at a distance, she says. Then they go back along the terrace, and are met by a man-servant in Monsieur the Viscount's livery. Is it possible that this is Antoine, with his shock head covered with powder?

Yes; that grating voice which no mental change avails to subdue, is his, and he announces that Monsieur le Curé has arrived. It is the old Curé of the village (who has survived the troubles of the Revolution), and many are the evenings he spends at the chateau, and many the times in which the closing acts of a noble life are recounted to him, the life of his old friend whom he hopes ere long to see,—of Monsieur the Preceptor. He is kindly welcomed by Monsieur and by Madame, and they pass on together into the chateau. And when Monsieur the Viscount's steps have ceased to echo from the terrace, Monsieur Crapaud buries himself once more among the violets.

Monsieur the Viscount is dead, and Madame sleeps also at his side; and their possessions have descended to their son.

Not the least valued among them, is a case with a glass front and sides, in which, seated upon a stone is the body of a toad stuffed with exquisite skill, from whose head gleam eyes of genuine topaz. Above it in letters of gold is a date, and this inscription:—

"Monsieur the Viscount's Friend."
Adieu!

THE YEW-LANE GHOSTS.

CHAPTER I.

"Cowards
are
cruel."

Old Proverb.

This story begins on a fine autumn afternoon, when at the end of a field over which the shadows of a few wayside trees were stalking like long thin giants, a man and a boy sat side by side upon a stile. They were not a happy looking pair. The boy looked uncomfortable, because he wanted to get away, and dared not go. The man looked uncomfortable also; but then no one had ever seen him look otherwise, which was the more strange as he never professed to have any object in life but his own pleasure and gratification. Not troubling himself with any consideration of law or principle—of his own duty or other people's comfort—he had consistently spent his whole time and energies in trying to be jolly; and though now a grown-up young man, had so far had every appearance of failing in the attempt. From this it will be seen that he was not the most estimable of characters, and we shall have no more to do with him than we can help; but as he must appear in the story, he may as well be described.

If constant self-indulgence had answered as well as it should have done, he would have been a fine-looking young man; as it was, the habits of his life were fast destroying his appearance. His hair would have been golden if it had been kept clean. His figure was tall and strong; but the custom of slinking about places where he had no business to be, and lounging in corners where he had nothing to do, had given it such a hopeless slouch, that for the matter of beauty he

might almost as well have been knock-kneed. His eyes would have been handsome if the lids had been less red; and if he had ever looked you in the face, you would have seen that they were blue. His complexion was fair by nature, and discolored by drink. His manner was something between a sneak and a swagger, and he generally wore his cap a-one-side, carried his hands in his pockets, and a short stick under his arm, and whistled when any one passed him. His chief characteristic perhaps was a habit he had of kicking. Indoors he kicked the furniture; in the road he kicked the stones; if he lounged against a wall he kicked it; he kicked all animals, and such human beings as he felt sure would not kick him again.

It should be said here that he had once announced his intention of "turning steady, and settling, and getting wed." The object of his choice was the prettiest girl in the village, and was as good as she was pretty. To say the truth, the time had been when Bessy had not felt unkindly towards the yellow-haired lad; but his conduct had long put a gulf between them, which only the conceit of a scamp would have attempted to pass. However, he flattered himself that he "knew what the lasses meant when they said no;" and on the strength of this knowledge he presumed far enough to elicit a rebuff so hearty and unmistakable, that for a week he was the laughing-stock of the village. There was no mistake this time as to what "no" meant; his admiration turned to a hatred almost as intense, and he went faster "to the bad" than ever.

It was Bessy's little brother who sat by him on the stile; "Beauty Bill," as he was called, from the large share he possessed of the family good looks. The lad was one of those people who seem born to be favorites. He was handsome and merry and intelligent; and being well brought up, was well-conducted and amiable—the pride and pet of the village. Why did Mother Muggins of the shop let the goody side of her scales of justice drop the lower by one lollipop for Bill than for any other lad, and exempt him by unwonted smiles from her general anathema on the urchin race? There were other honest boys in the

parish who paid for their treacle-sticks in sterling copper of the realm! The very roughs of the village were proud of him, and would have showed their good nature in ways little to his benefit, had not his father kept a somewhat severe watch upon his habits and conduct. Indeed, good parents and a strict home counterbalanced the evils of popularity with Beauty Bill, and on the whole he was little spoilt, and well deserved the favor he met with. It was under cover of friendly patronage that his companion was now detaining him; but all the circumstances considered, Bill felt more suspicious than gratified, and wished Bully Tom anywhere but where he was.

The man threw out one leg before him like the pendulum of a clock—

"Night school's opened, eh?" he inquired; and back swung the pendulum against Bill's shins.

"Yes;" and the boy screwed his legs on one side.

"You don't go, do you?"

"Yes, I do," said Bill, trying not to feel ashamed of the fact. "Father can't spare me to the day-school now, so our Bessy persuaded him to let me go at nights."

Bully Tom's face looked a shade darker, and the pendulum took a swing which it was fortunate the lad avoided; but the conversation continued with every appearance of civility.

"You come back by Yew-lane, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Why, there's no one lives your way but old Johnson; you must come back alone?"

"Of course I do," said Bill, beginning to feel vaguely uncomfortable.

"It must be dark now before school looses?" was the next inquiry; and

the boy's discomfort increased, he hardly knew why, as he answered —

"There's a moon."

"So there is," said Bully Tom, in a tone of polite assent; "and there's a weathercock on the church steeple; but I never heard of either of 'em coming down to help a body, whatever happened."

Bill's discomfort had become alarm.

"Why, what could happen?" he asked. "I don't understand you."

His companion whistled, looked up in the air, and kicked vigorously, but said nothing. Bill was not extraordinarily brave, but he had a fair amount both of spirit and sense; and having a shrewd suspicion that Bully Tom was trying to frighten him, he almost made up his mind to run off then and there. Curiosity, however, and a vague alarm which he could not throw off, made him stay for a little more information.

"I wish you'd out with it!" he exclaimed impatiently. "What could happen? No one ever comes along Yew-lane; and if they did, they wouldn't hurt me."

"I know no one ever comes near it when they can help it," was the reply; "so to be sure you couldn't get set upon; and a pious lad of your sort wouldn't mind no other kind. Not like ghosts or anything of that."

And Bully Tom looked round at his companion; a fact disagreeable from its rarity.

"I don't believe in ghosts," said Bill, stoutly.

"Of course you don't," sneered his tormentor; "you're too well educated. Some people does, though. I suppose them that has seen them does. Some people thinks that murdered men walk. P'raps some people thinks the man as was murdered in Yew-lane walks."

"What man?" gasped Bill, feeling very chilly down the spine.

"Him that was riding by the cross roads and dragged into Yew-lane, and his head cut off and never found, and his body buried in the churchyard," said Bully Tom, with a rush of superior information; "and all I know is, if I thought he walked in Yew-lane, or any other lane, I wouldn't go within five mile of it after dusk—that's all. But then I'm not book-larned."

The two last statements were true if nothing else was that the man had said; and after holding up his feet and examining his boots with his head a-one-side, as if considering their probable efficiency against flesh and blood, he slid from his perch, and "loafed" slowly up the street, whistling and kicking the stones as he went along. As to Beauty Bill, he fled home as fast as his legs would carry him. By the door stood Bessy, washing some clothes, who turned her pretty face as he came up.

"You're late, Bill," she said. "Go in and get your tea, it's set out. It's night-school night, thou knows, and Master Arthur always likes his class to time." He lingered, and she continued—"John Gardener was down this afternoon about some potatoes, and he says Master Arthur is expecting a friend."

Bill did not heed this piece of news, any more than the slight flush on his sister's face as she delivered it; he was wondering whether what Bully Tom said was mere invention to frighten him, or whether there was any truth in it.

"Bessy!" he said, "was there a man ever murdered in Yew-lane?"

Bessy was occupied with her own thoughts, and did not notice the anxiety of the question.

"I believe there was," she answered carelessly, "somewhere about there. It's a hundred years ago or more. There's an old gravestone

over him in the churchyard by the wall, with an odd verse on it. They say the parish clerk wrote it. But get your tea, or you'll be late, and father'll be angry;" and Bessy took up her tub and departed.

Poor Bill! Then it was too true. He began to pull up his trousers and look at his grazed legs; and the thoughts of his aching shins, Bully Tom's cruelty, the unavoidable night-school, and the possible ghost, were too much for him, and he burst into tears.

CHAPTER II.

"There are birds out on the bushes,
In the meadows lies the lamb;
How I wonder if they're ever
Half as frightened as I am?"

C. F. Alexander.

The night-school was drawing to a close. The attendance had been good, and the room looked cheerful. In one corner the Rector was teaching a group of grown-up men, who (better late than never) were zealously learning to read; in another the schoolmaster was flourishing his stick before a map as he concluded his lesson in geography. By the fire sat Master Arthur, the Rector's son, surrounded by his class, and in front of him stood Beauty Bill. Master Arthur was very popular with the people, especially with his pupils. The boys were anxious to get into his class, and loath to leave it. They admired his great height, his merry laugh, the variety of walking-sticks he brought with him, and his very funny way of explaining pictures. He was not a very methodical teacher, and was rather apt to give unexpected lessons on subjects in which he happened just then to be interested himself; but he had a clear simple way of explaining anything, which impressed it on the memory, and he took a great deal of pains in his own way. Bill was especially devoted to him. He often wished that Master Arthur could get very rich, and take him for his man-servant; he thought he should like to brush his clothes and take care of his sticks. He had a great interest in the growth of his mustache and whiskers. For some time past Master Arthur had had a trick of pulling at his upper lip while he was teaching; which occasionally provoked a whisper of "Moostarch, guvernor!" between two unruly members of his class; but never till to-night had Bill seen

anything in that line which answered his expectations. Now, however, as he stood before the young gentleman, the fire-light fell on such a distinct growth of hair, that Bill's interest became absorbed to the exclusion of all but the most perfunctory attention to the lesson on hand. Would Master Arthur grow a beard? Would his mustache be short like the pictures of Prince Albert, or long and pointed like that of some other great man whose portrait he had seen in the papers? He was calculating on the probable effect of either style, when the order was given to put away books, and then the thought which had been for a time diverted came back again,—his walk home.

Poor Bill! his fears returned with double force from having been for a while forgotten. He dawdled over the books, he hunted in wrong places for his cap and comforter, he lingered till the last boy had clattered through the door-way and left him with the group of elders who closed the proceedings and locked up the school. But after this, further delay was impossible. The whole party moved out into the moonlight, and the Rector and his son, the schoolmaster and the teachers, commenced a sedate parish gossip, while Bill trotted behind, wondering whether any possible or impossible business would take one of them his way. But when the turning-point was reached, the Rector destroyed all his hopes.

"None of us go your way, I think," said he, as lightly as if there were no grievance in the case; "however, it's not far. Good-night, my boy!"

And so with a volley of good-nights, the cheerful voices passed on up the village. Bill stood till they had quite died away, and then, when all was silent, he turned into the lane.

The cold night-wind crept into his ears, and made uncomfortable noises among the trees, and blew clouds over the face of the moon. He almost wished that there were no moon. The shifting shadows under his feet, and the sudden patches of light on unexpected objects, startled him, and he thought he should have felt less

frightened if it had been quite dark. Once he ran for a bit, then he resolved to be brave, then to be reasonable; he repeated scraps of lessons, hymns, and last Sunday's Collect, to divert and compose his mind; and as this plan seemed to answer, he determined to go through the Catechism, both question and answer, which he hoped might carry him to the end of his unpleasant journey. He had just asked himself a question with considerable dignity, and was about to reply, when a sudden gleam of moonlight lit up a round object in the ditch. Bill's heart seemed to grow cold, and he thought his senses would have forsaken him. Could this be the head of—? No! on nearer inspection it proved to be only a turnip; and when one came to think of it, that would have been rather a conspicuous place for the murdered man's skull to have been lost in for so many years.

My hero must not be ridiculed too much for his fears. The terrors that visit childhood are not the less real and overpowering from being unreasonable; and to excite them is wanton cruelty. Moreover, he was but a little lad, and had been up and down Yew-lane both in daylight and dark without any fears, till Bully Tom's tormenting suggestions had alarmed him. Even now, as he reached the avenue of yews from which the lane took its name, and passed into their gloomy shade, he tried to be brave. He tried to think of the good God Who takes care of His children, and to Whom the darkness and the light are both alike. He thought of all he had been taught about angels, and wondered if one were near him now, and wished that he could see him, as Abraham and other good people had seen angels. In short, the poor lad did his best to apply what he had been taught to the present emergency, and very likely had he not done so he would have been worse; but as it was, he was not a little frightened, as we shall see.

Yew-lane—cool and dark when the hottest sunshine lay beyond it—a loitering-place for lovers—the dearly loved play-place of generations of children on sultry summer days—looked very grim and vault-like, with narrow streaks of moonlight peeping in at rare intervals to make

the darkness to be felt! Moreover, it was really damp and cold, which is not favorable to courage. At a certain point Yew-lane skirted a corner of the churchyard, and was itself crossed by another road, thus forming a "four-want-way," where suicides were buried in times past. This road was the old highroad, where the mail-coach ran, and along which, on such a night as this, a hundred years ago, a horseman rode his last ride. As he passed the church on his fatal journey, did anything warn him how soon his headless body would be buried beneath its shadow? Bill wondered. He wondered if he were old or young—what sort of a horse he rode—whose cruel hands dragged him into the shadow of the yews and slew him, and where his head was hidden and why. Did the church look just the same, and the moon shine just as brightly, that night a century ago? Bully Tom was right. The weathercock and the moon sit still, whatever happens. The boy watched the gleaming highroad as it lay beyond the dark aisle of trees, till he fancied he could hear the footfalls of the solitary horse—and yet no! The sound was not upon the hard road, but nearer; it was not the clatter of hoofs, but something—and a rustle—and then Bill's blood seemed to freeze in his veins, as he saw a white figure, wrapped in what seemed to be a shroud, glide out of the shadow of the yews and move slowly down the lane. When it reached the road it paused, raised a long arm warningly towards him for a moment, and then vanished in the direction of the churchyard.

What would have been the consequence of the intense fright the poor lad experienced is more than any one can say, if at that moment the church clock had not begun to strike nine. The familiar sound, close in his ears, roused him from the first shock, and before it had ceased he contrived to make a desperate rally of his courage, flew over the road, and crossed the two fields that now lay between him and home without looking behind him.

CHAPTER III.

"It was to her a real *grief of heart*, acute, as children's sorrows often are.

"We beheld this from the opposite windows—and, seen thus from a little distance, how many of our own and of other people's sorrows might not seem equally trivial, and equally deserving of ridicule!"

Hans Christian Andersen.

When Bill got home he found the household busy with a much more practical subject than that of ghosts and haunted yew-trees. Bessy was ill. She had felt a pain in her side all the day, which towards night had become so violent that the doctor was sent for, who had pronounced it pleurisy, and had sent her to bed. He was just coming down-stairs as Bill burst into the house. The mother was too much occupied about her daughter to notice the lad's condition; but the doctor's sharp eyes saw that something was amiss, and he at once inquired what it was. Bill hammered and stammered, and stopped short. The doctor was such a tall, stout, comfortable-looking man, he looked as if he couldn't believe in ghosts. A slight frown however had come over his comfortable face, and he laid two fingers on Bill's wrist as he repeated his question.

"Please sir," said Bill, "I've seen—"

"A mad dog?" suggested the doctor.

"No, sir."

"A mad bull?"

"No, sir," said Bill, desperately, "I've seen a ghost."

The doctor exploded into a fit of laughter, and looked more comfortable than ever.

"And *where* did we see the ghost?" he inquired in a professional voice, as he took up his coat-tails and warmed himself at the fire.

"In Yew-lane, sir; and I'm sure I did see it," said Bill, half crying; "it was all in white, and beckoned me."

"That's to say, you saw a white gravestone, or a tree in the moonlight, or one of your classmates dressed up in a table-cloth. It was all moonshine, depend upon it," said the doctor, with a chuckle at his own joke; "take my advice, my boy, and don't give way to foolish fancies."

At this point the mother spoke—

"If his father knew, sir, as he'd got any such fads in his head, he'd soon flog 'em out of him."

"His father is a very good one," said the doctor; "a little too fond of the stick, perhaps. There," he added good-naturedly, slipping sixpence into Bill's hand, "get a new knife, my boy, and cut a good thick stick, and the next ghost you meet, lay hold of him and let him taste it."

Bill tried to thank him, but somehow his voice was choked, and the doctor turned to his mother.

"The boy has been frightened," he said, "and is upset. Give him some supper, and put him to bed." And the good gentleman departed.

Bill was duly feasted and sent to rest. His mother did not mention the matter to her husband, as she knew he would be angry; and occupied with real anxiety for her daughter, she soon forgot it herself.

Consequently, the next night-school night she sent Bill to "clean himself," hurried on his tea, and packed him off, just as if nothing had happened. The boy's feelings since the night of the apparition had not been enviable. He could neither eat nor sleep. As he lay in bed at night, he kept his face covered with the clothes, dreading that if he peeped out into the room the phantom of the murdered horseman would beckon to him from the dark corners. Lying so till the dawn broke and the cocks began to crow, he would then look cautiously forth, and seeing by the gray light that the corners were empty, and that the figure by the door was not the Yew-lane Ghost, but his mother's faded print dress hanging on a nail, would drop his head and fall wearily asleep. The day was no better, for each hour brought him nearer to the next night-school; and Bessy's illness made his mother so busy that he never could find the right moment to ask her sympathy for his fears, and still less could he feel himself able to overcome them. And so the night-school came round again, and there he sat, gulping down a few mouthfuls of food, and wondering how he should begin to tell his mother that he neither dare, could, nor would, go down Yew-lane again at night. He had just opened his lips when the father came in, and asked in a loud voice "why Bill was not off." This effectually put a stop to any confidences, and the boy ran out of the house. Not, however, to school. He made one or two desperate efforts at determination, and then gave up altogether. He *could* not go!

He was wondering what he should do with himself, when it struck him that he would go while it was daylight and look for the grave with the odd verse of which Bessy had spoken. He had no difficulty in finding it. It was marked by a large ugly stone, on which the inscription was green, and in some places almost effaced.

Sacred To The Memory.

Of

He had read so far when a voice close by him said—

"You'll be late for school, young chap."

Bill looked up, and to his horror beheld Bully Tom standing in the road and kicking the churchyard wall.

"Aren't you going!" he asked, as Bill did not speak.

"Not to-night," said Bill, with crimson cheeks.

"Larking, eh?" said Bully Tom. "My eyes, won't your father give it you!" and he began to move off.

"Stop!" shouted Bill in an agony; "don't tell him, Tom. That would be a dirty trick. I'll go next time, I will indeed; I can't go to-night. I'm not larking, I'm scared. You won't tell?"

"Not this time, maybe," was the reply; "but I wouldn't be in your shoes if you play this game next night;" and off he went.

Bill thought it well to quit the churchyard at once for some place where he was not likely to be seen; he had never played truant before, and for the next hour or two was thoroughly miserable as he slunk about the premises of a neighboring farm, and finally took refuge in a shed, and began to consider his position. He would remain hidden till nine o'clock, and then go home. If nothing were said, well and good; unless some accident should afterwards betray him. But if his mother asked any questions about the school? He dared not, and he would not, tell a lie; and yet what would be the result of the truth coming out? There could be no doubt that his father would beat him. Bill thought again, and decided that he could bear a thrashing, but not the sight of the Yew-lane Ghost; so he remained where he was, wondering how it

would be, and how he should get over the next school-night when it came. The prospect was so hopeless, and the poor lad so wearied with anxiety and wakeful nights, that he was almost asleep when he was startled by the church clock striking nine; and jumping up he ran home. His heart beat heavily as he crossed the threshold; but his mother was still absorbed by thoughts of Bessy, and he went to bed unquestioned. The next day too passed over without any awkward remarks, which was very satisfactory; but then night-school day came again, and Bill felt that he was in a worse position than ever. He had played truant once with success; but he was aware that it would not do a second time. Bully Tom was spiteful, and Master Arthur might come to "look up" his recreant pupil, and then Bill's father would know all.

On the morning of the much-dreaded day, his mother sent him up to the Rectory to fetch some little delicacy that had been promised for Bessy's dinner. He generally found it rather amusing to go there. He liked to peep at the pretty garden, to look out for Master Arthur, and to sit in the kitchen and watch the cook, and wonder what she did with all the dishes and bright things that decorated the walls. To-day all was quite different. He avoided the gardens, he was afraid of being seen by his teacher, and though cook had an unusual display of pots and pans in operation, he sat in the corner of the kitchen indifferent to everything but the thought of the Yew-lane Ghost. The dinner for Bessy was put between two saucers, and as cook gave it into his hands she asked kindly after his sister, and added—

"You don't look over-well yourself, lad! What's amiss?"

Bill answered that he was quite well, and hurried out of the house to avoid further inquiries. He was becoming afraid of every one! As he passed the garden he thought of the gardener, and wondered if he would help him. He was very young and very good-natured; he had taken of late to coming to see Bessy, and Bill had his own ideas upon that point; finally, he had a small class at the night-school. Bill

wondered whether if he screwed up his courage to-night to go, John Gardener would walk back with him for the pleasure of hearing the latest accounts of Bessy. But all hopes of this sort were cut off by Master Arthur's voice shouting to him from the garden—

"Hi there! I want you, Willie! Come here, I say."

Bill ran through the evergreens, and there among the flower-beds in the sunshine he saw—first, John Gardener driving a mowing-machine over the velvety grass under Master Arthur's very nose, so there was no getting a private interview with him. Secondly, Master Arthur himself, sitting on the ground with his terrier in his lap, directing the proceedings by means of a donkey-headed stick with elaborately carved ears; and thirdly Master Arthur's friend.

Now little bits of gossip will fly; and it had been heard in the dining-room, and conveyed by the parlor-maid to the kitchen, and passed from the kitchen into the village, that Master Arthur's friend was a very clever young gentleman; consequently Beauty Bill had been very anxious to see him. As, however, the clever young gentleman was lying on his back on the grass, with his hat flattened over his face to keep out the sun, and an open book lying on its face upon his waistcoat to keep the place, and otherwise quite immovable, and very like other young gentlemen, Bill did not feel much the wiser for looking at him. He had a better view of him soon, however, for Master Arthur began to poke his friend's legs with the donkey-headed stick, and to exhort him to get up.

"Hi! Bartram, get up! Here's my prime pupil. See what we can turn out. You may examine him if you like—Willie! this gentleman is a very clever gentleman, so you must keep your wits about you. *He'll* put questions to you, I can tell you! There's as much difference between his head and mine, as between mine and the head of this stick." And Master Arthur flourished his "one-legged donkey," as he called it, in the air, and added, "Bertram! you lazy lout! *will* you get up and take

an interest in my humble efforts for the good of my fellow-creatures?"

Thus adjured, Mr. Bartram sat up with a jerk which threw his book on to his boots, and his hat after it, and looked at Bill. Now Bill and the gardener had both been grinning, as they always did at Master Arthur's funny speeches; but when Bill found the clever gentleman looking at him, he straightened his face very quickly. The gentleman was not at all like his friend ("nothing near so handsome," Bill reported at home), and he had such a large prominent forehead that he looked as if he were bald. When he had sat up, he suddenly screwed up his eyes in a very peculiar way, pulled out a double gold eye-glass, fixed it on his nose, and stared through it for a second; after which his eyes unexpectedly opened to their full extent (they were not small ones), and took a sharp survey of Bill over the top of his spectacles, and this ended, he lay back on his elbow without speaking. Bill then and there decided that Mr. Bartram was very proud, rather mad, and the most disagreeable gentleman he ever saw; and he felt sure could see as well as he (Bill) could, and only wore spectacles out of a peculiar kind of pride and vain-glory which he could not exactly specify. Master Arthur seemed to think, at any rate, that he was not very civil, and began at once to talk to the boy himself.

"Why were you not at school last time, Willie? Couldn't your mother spare you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why didn't you come?" said Master Arthur, in evident astonishment.

Poor Bill! He stammered as he had stammered before the doctor, and finally gasped—

"Please, sir, I was scared."

"Scared? What of?"

"Ghosts," murmured Bill in a very ghostly whisper. Mr. Bartram raised himself a little. Master Arthur seemed confounded.

"Why, you little goose! How is it you never were afraid before?"

"Please, sir, I saw one the other night."

Mr. Bartram took another look over the top of his eye-glass and sat bolt upright, and John Gardener stayed his machine and listened, while poor Bill told the whole story of the Yew-lane Ghost.

When it was finished, the gardener, who was behind Master Arthur, said—

"I've heard something of this, sir, in the village," and then added more which Bill could not hear.

"Eh, what?" said Master Arthur. "Willie, take the machine and drive about the garden a bit wherever you like.—Now John."

Willie did not at all like being sent away at this interesting point. Another time he would have enjoyed driving over the short grass, and seeing it jump up like a little green fountain in front of him; but now his whole mind was absorbed by the few words he caught at intervals of the conversation going on between John and the young gentleman. What could it mean? Mr. Bartram seemed to have awakened to extraordinary energy, and was talking rapidly. Bill heard the words "lime-light" and "large sheet," and thought they must be planning a magic-lantern exhibition, but was puzzled by catching the word "turnip." At last, as he was rounding the corner of the bed of geraniums, he distinctly heard Mr. Bartram ask,—

"They cut the man's head off, didn't they?"

Then they were talking about the ghost, after all! Bill gave the machine a jerk, and to his dismay sliced a branch off one of the

geraniums. What was to be done? He must tell Master Arthur, but he could not interrupt him just now; so on he drove, feeling very much dispirited, and by no means cheered by hearing shouts of laughter from the party on the grass. When one is puzzled and out of spirits, it is no consolation to hear other people laughing over a private joke; moreover, Bill felt that if they were still on the subject of the murdered man and his ghost, their merriment was very unsuitable: Whatever was going on, it was quite evident that Mr. Bartram was the leading spirit of it, for Bill could see Master Arthur waving the one-legged donkey in an ecstasy, as he clapped his friend on the back till the eye-glass danced upon his nose. At last Mr. Bartram threw himself back as if closing a discussion, and said loud enough for Bill to hear —

"You never heard of a bully who wasn't a coward."

Bill thought of Bully Tom, and how he had said he dared not risk the chance of meeting with a ghost, and began to think that this was a clever young gentleman, after all. Just then Master Arthur called to him, and he took the bit of broken geranium and went.

"Oh, Willie!" said Master Arthur, "we've been talking over your misfortunes—geranium? fiddlesticks! put it in your button-hole—your misfortunes, I say, and for to-night at any rate we intend to help you out of them. John—ahem!—will be—ahem!—engaged to-night, and unable to take his class as usual; but this gentleman has kindly consented to fill his place ("Hear, hear," said the gentleman alluded to), and if you'll come to-night, like a good lad, he and I will walk back with you; so if you do see the ghost, it will be in good company. But mind, this is on one condition. You must not say anything about it—about our walking back with you, I mean—to anybody. Say nothing; but get ready and come to school as usual. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Bill; "and I'm very much obliged to you, sir, and the other gentleman as well."

Nothing more was said, so Bill made his best bow and retired. As he went he heard Master Arthur say to the gardener—

"Then you'll go to the town at once, John. We shall want the things as soon as possible. You'd better take the pony, and we'll have the list ready for you."

Bill heard no more words; but as he left the grounds the laughter of the young gentleman rang out into the road.

What did it all mean?

CHAPTER IV.

"The night was now pitmirk; the wind soughed amid the headstones and railings of the gentry (for we all must die), and the black corbies in the steeple-holes cackled and crawed in a fearsome manner."

Mansie Wauch.

Bill was early at the night-school. No other of his class had arrived, so he took the corner by the fire, sacred to first-comers, and watched the gradual gathering of the school. Presently Master Arthur appeared, and close behind him came his friend. Mr. Bartram Lindsay looked more attractive now than he had done in the garden. When standing, he was an elegant though plain-looking young man, neat in his dress, and with an admirable figure. He was apt to stand very still and silent for a length of time, and had a habit of holding his chin up in the air, which led some people to say that he "held himself very high." This was the opinion that Bill had formed, and he was rather alarmed by hearing Master Arthur pressing his friend to take his class instead of the more backward one, over which the gardener usually presided; and he was proportionably relieved when Mr. Bartram steadily declined.

"To say the truth, Bartram," said the young gentleman, "I am much obliged to you, for I am used to my own boys, and prefer them."

Then up came the schoolmaster.

"Mr. Lindsay going to take John's class? Thank you, sir. I've put out the books; if you want anything else, sir, p'raps you'll mention it. When they have done reading, perhaps, sir, you will kindly draft them off for writing, and take the upper classes in arithmetic, if you don't object,

sir."

Mr. Lindsay did not object.

"If you have a picture or two," he said. "Thank you. Know their letters? All right. Different stages of progression. Very good. I've no doubt we shall get on together."

"Between ourselves, Bartram," whispered Master Arthur into his friend's ear, "the class is composed of boys who ought to have been to school, and haven't; or who have been, and are none the better for it. Some of them can what they call 'read in the Testament,' and all of them confound *b* and *d* when they meet with them. They are at one point of general information; namely, they all know what you have just told them, and will none of them know it by next time. *I* call it the rag-tag and bob-tail class. John says they are like forced tulips. They won't blossom simultaneously. He can't get them all to one standard of reading."

Mr. Lindsay laughed and said,—

"He had better read less, and try a little general oral instruction. Perhaps they don't remember because they can't understand;"—and the Rector coming in at that moment, the business of the evening commenced.

Having afterwards to cross the school for something, Bill passed the new teacher and his class, and came to the conclusion that they did "get on together," and very well too. The rag-tag and bob-tail shone that night, and afterwards were loud in praises of the lesson.

"It was so clear" and "He was so patient." Indeed, patience was one great secret of Mr. Lindsay's teaching; he waited so long for an answer that he generally got it. His pupils were obliged to exert themselves when there was no hope of being passed over, and everybody was waiting. Finally, Bill's share of the arithmetic lesson

converted him to Master Arthur's friend. He *was* a clever young gentleman, and a kind one too.

The lesson had been so interesting—the clever young gentleman, standing (without his eye-glass) by the blackboard, had been so strict and yet so entertaining, was so obviously competent, and so pleasantly kind, that Bill, who liked arithmetic, and (like all intelligent children) appreciated good teaching, had had no time to think of the Yew-lane Ghost till the lesson was ended. It was not till the hymn began (they always ended the night-school with singing,) that he remembered it. Then, while he was shouting with all his might Bishop Ken's glorious old lines—

"Keep me, O keep me, King of kings,"

he caught Mr. Lindsay's eyes fixed on him, and back came the thoughts of his terrible fright, with a little shame too at his own timidity. Which of us trusts as we should do in the "defence of the Most High"?

Bill lingered as he had done the last time, and went out with the "grown-ups." It had been raining, and the ground was wet and sludgy, though it was fair overhead. The wind was cold too, and Mr. Lindsay began to cough so violently, that Bill felt rather ashamed of taking him so far out of his way, through the damp, chilly lane, and began to wonder whether he could not summon up courage to go alone. The result was, that with some effort he said—

"Please, Mr. Lindsay, sir, I think you won't like to come so far this cold night. I'll try and manage, if you like."

Mr. Lindsay laid one hand on Bill's shoulder, and said quietly—

"No, thank you, my boy, we'll come with you. Thank you, all the same."

"Nevertheless, Bartram," said Master Arthur, "I wish you could keep that cough of yours quiet—it will spoil everything. A boy was eating peppermints in the shade of his copybook this very night. I did box his

ears; but I wish I had seized the goodies, they might have kept you quiet."

"Thank you," was the reply, "I abhor peppermint; but I have got some lozenges, if that will satisfy you. And when I smell ghosts, I can smother myself in my pocket-handkerchief."

Master Arthur laughed boisterously.

"We shall smell one if brimstone will do it. I hope he won't set himself on fire, or the scenic effect will be stronger than we bargained for."

This was the beginning of a desultory conversation carried on at intervals between the two young gentlemen, of which, though Bill heard every sentence, he couldn't understand one. He made one effort to discover what Master Arthur was alluding to, but with no satisfactory result as we shall see.

"Please, Master Arthur," he said desperately, "you don't think there'll be two ghosts, do you, sir?"

"I should say," said Master Arthur, so slowly and with such gravity that Bill felt sure he was making fun of him, "I should say, Bill, that if a place is haunted at all there is no limit to the number of ghosts—fifty quite as likely as one.—What do you you say, Bartram?"

"Quite so," said Bartram.

Bill made no further attempts to understand the mystery. He listened, but only grew more and more bewildered at the dark hints he heard, and never understood what it all meant until the end came; when (as is not uncommon) he wondered how he could have been so stupid, and why he had not seen it all from the very first.

They had now reached the turning point, and as they passed into the dark lane, where the wind was shuddering and shivering among the trees, Bill shuddered and shivered too, and felt very glad that the

young gentlemen were with him, after all.

Mr. Lindsay pulled out his watch.

"Well?" said his friend.

"Ten minutes to nine."

Then they walked on in silence, Master Arthur with one arm through his friend's, and the one-legged donkey under the other; and Mr. Lindsay with his hand on Bill's shoulder.

" I *should* like a pipe," said Master Arthur presently; "it's so abominably damp."

"What a fellow you are!" said Mr. Lindsay. "Out of the question! With the wind setting down the lane too! you talk of my cough—which is better, by the bye."

"What a fellow *you* are!" retorted the other. "Bartram, you are the oddest creature I know. Whatever you take up, you do drive at so. Now I have hardly got a lark afloat before I'm sick of it. I wish you'd tell me two things,—first, why are you so grave to-night? and secondly, what made you take up our young friend's cause so warmly?"

"One answer will serve both questions," said Mr. Lindsay. "The truth is, old fellow, our young friend [and Bill felt certain that the "young friend" was himself] has a look of a little chap I was chum with at school—Regy Gordon. I don't talk about it often, for I can't very well; but he was killed—think of it, man!—*killed* by such a piece of bullying as this! When they found him, he was quite stiff and speechless; he lived a few hours, but he only said two words,—my name, and amen."

"Amen?" said Master Arthur, inquiringly.

"Well, you see when the surgeon said it was no go, they telegraphed for his friends; but they were a long way off, and he was sinking

rapidly; and the old Doctor was in the room, half heart-broken, and he saw Gordon move his hands together, and he said, 'If any boy knows what prayers Gordon minor has been used to say, let him come and say them by him;' and I did. So I knelt by his bed and said them, the old Doctor kneeling too and sobbing like a child; and when I had done, Regy moved his lips and said 'Amen;' and then he said 'Lindsay!' and smiled, and then—"

Master Arthur squeezed his friend's arm tightly, but said nothing, and both the young men were silent; but Bill could not restrain his tears. It seemed the saddest story he had ever heard, and Mr. Lindsay's hand upon his shoulder shook so intolerably while he was speaking, that he had taken it away, which made Bill worse, and he fairly sobbed.

"What are you blubbering about, young 'un?" said Mr. Lindsay. "He is better off than any of us, and if you are a good boy you will see him some day;" and the young gentleman put his hand back again, which was steady now.

"What became of the other fellow?" said Master Arthur.

"He was taken away, of course. Sent abroad, I believe. It was hushed up.—And now you know," added Mr. Lindsay, "why my native indolence has roused itself to get this cad taught a lesson, which many a time I wished to God, when wishes were too late, that that other bully had been taught *in time*. But no one could thrash him; and no one durst complain. However, let's change the subject, old fellow! I've got over it long since; though sometimes I think the wish to see Regy again helps to keep me a decent sort of fellow. But when I saw the likeness this morning, it startled me; and then to hear the story, it seemed like a dream—the Gordon affair over again. I suppose rustic nerves are tougher; however, your village blackguard shan't have the chance of committing murder if we can cure him!"

"I believe you half wanted to undertake the cure yourself," said Master Arthur.

Mr. Lindsay laughed.

"I did for a minute. Fancy your father's feelings if I had come home with a black eye from an encounter with a pot-house bully! You know I put my foot into a tender secret of your man's, by offering to be the performer!"

"How?"

Mr. Lindsay lowered his voice, but not so that Bill could not hear what he said, and recognize the imitation of John Gardener.

"He said, 'I'd rather do it, if *you* please, sir. The fact is, I'm partial to the young woman myself!' After that, I could but leave John to defend his young woman's belongings."

"Gently!" exclaimed Master Arthur. "There is the Yew Walk."

From this moment the conversation was carried on in whispers, to Bill's further mystification. The young gentlemen recovered their spirits, and kept exploding in smothered chuckles of laughter.

"Cold work for him, if he's been waiting long!" whispered one.

"Don't know. His head's under cover remember!" said the other: and they laughed.

"Bet you sixpence he's been smearing his hand with brimstone for the last half hour."

"Don't smell him yet, though."

"He'll be a patent aphis-destroyer in the rose-garden for months to come."

"Sharp work for the eyelids if it gets under the sheet."

They were now close by the Yews, out of which the wind came with a

peculiar chill, as if it had been passing through a vault. Mr. Bartram Lindsay stooped down, and whispered in Bill's ear: "Listen, my lad. We can't go down the lane with you, for we want to see the ghost, but we don't want the ghost to see us. Don't be frightened, but go just as usual. And mind—when you see the white figure, point with your own arm *towards the Church* and scream as loud as you like. Can you do this?"

"Yes, sir," whispered Bill.

"Then off with you. We shall creep quietly on behind the trees; and you shan't be hurt, I promise you."

Bill summoned his courage, and plunged into the shadows. What could be the meaning of Mr. Lindsay's strange orders? Should he ever have courage to lift his arm towards the church in the face of that awful apparition of the murdered man? And if he did, would the unquiet spirit take the hint, and go back into the grave, which Bill knew was at that very corner to which he must point? Left alone, his terrors began to return; and he listened eagerly to see if, amid the ceaseless soughing of the wind among the long yew branches, he could hear the rustle of the young men's footsteps as they crept behind. But he could distinguish nothing. The hish-wishing of the thin leaves was so incessant, the wind was so dexterous and tormenting in the tricks it played and the sounds it produced, that the whole place seemed alive with phantom rustlings and footsteps; and Bill felt as if Master Arthur was right, and that there was "no limit" to the number of ghosts!

At last he could see the end of the avenue. There among the last few trees was the place where the ghost had appeared. There beyond lay the white road, the churchyard corner, and the tall gray tombstone glimmering in the moonlight. A few steps more, and slowly from among the yews came the ghost as before, and raised its long white arm. Bill determined that, if he died for it, he would do as he had

been told; and lifting his own hand he pointed towards the tombstone, and gave a shout. As he pointed, the ghost turned round, and then—rising from behind the tombstone, and gliding slowly to the edge of the wall which separated the churchyard from the lower level of the road—there appeared a sight so awful that Bill's shout merged into a prolonged scream of terror.

Truly Master Arthur's anticipations of a "scenic effect" were amply realized. The walls and buttresses of the old Church stood out dark against the sky; the white clouds sailed slowly by the moon, which reflected itself on the damp grass, and shone upon the flat wet tombstones till they looked like pieces of water. It was not less bright upon the upright ones, upon quaint crosses, short headstones, and upon the huge, ungainly memorial of the murdered Ephraim Garnett. But *the* sight on which it shone that night was the figure now standing by Ephraim Garnett's grave, and looking over the wall. An awful figure, of gigantic height, with ghostly white garments clinging round its headless body, and carrying under its left arm the head that should have been upon its shoulders. On this there was neither flesh nor hair. It seemed to be a bare skull, with fire gleaming through the hollow eye-sockets and the grinning teeth. The right hand of the figure was outstretched as if in warning; and from the palm to the tips of the fingers was a mass of lambent flame. When Bill saw this fearful apparition he screamed with hearty good-will; but the noise he made was nothing to the yell of terror that came from beneath the shroud of the Yew-lane Ghost, who, on catching sight of the rival spectre, flew wildly up the lane, kicking the white sheet off as it went, and finally displaying, to Bill's amazement, the form and features of Bully Tom. But this was not all. No sooner had the first ghost started, than the second (not to be behind-hand) jumped nimbly over the wall and gave chase. But fear had put wings on to Bully Tom's feet; and the second ghost, being somewhat encumbered by his costume, judged it wisdom to stop; and then taking the fiery skull in its flaming hands, shied it with such dexterity that it hit Bully Tom in the middle of his

back, and falling on to the wet ground, went out with a hiss. This blow was an unexpected shock to the Bully, who thought the ghost must have come up to him with supernatural rapidity, and falling on his knees in the mud, began to roar most lustily:—

"Lord, have mercy upon me! I'll never do it no more!"

Mr. Lindsay was not likely to alter his opinion on the subject of bullies. This one, like others, was a mortal coward. Like other men, who have no fear of God before their eyes, he made up for it by having a very hearty fear of sickness, death, departed souls, and one or two other things, which the most self-willed sinner knows well enough to be in the hands of a Power which he cannot see, and does not wish to believe in. Bully Tom had spoken the truth when he said that if he thought there was a ghost in Yew-lane he wouldn't go near it. If he had believed the stories with which he had alarmed poor Bill, the lad's evening walk would never have been disturbed, as far as he was concerned. Nothing but his spite against Bessy would have made him take so much trouble to vex the peace, and stop the schooling, of her pet brother; and as it was, the standing alone by the churchyard at night was a position so little to his taste, that he had drunk pretty heavily in the public-house for half an hour before-hand, to keep up his spirits. And now he had been paid back in his own coin, and lay grovelling in the mud, and calling profanely on the Lord, whose mercy such men always cry for in their trouble, if they never ask it for their sins. He was so confused and blinded by drink and fright, that he did not see the second ghost divest himself of his encumbrances, or know that it was John Gardener, till that rosy-cheeked worthy, his clenched hands still flaming with brimstone, danced round him, and shouted scornfully, and with that vehemence of aspiration in which he was apt to indulge when excited;—

"Get hup, yer great cowardly booby, will yer? So you thought you was coming hout to frighten a little lad, did ye? And you met with one of your hown size, did ye? Now *will* ye get hup and take it like a man, or

shall I give it you as ye lie there?"

Bully Tom chose the least of two evils, and staggering to his feet with an oath, rushed upon John. But in his present condition he was no match for the active little gardener, inspired with just wrath and thoughts of Bessy; and he then and there received such a sound thrashing as he had not known since he first arrogated the character of village bully. He was roaring loudly for mercy, and John Gardener was giving him a harmless roll in the mud by way of conclusion, when he caught sight of the two young gentlemen in the lane,—Master Arthur in fits of laughter at the absurd position of the ex-Yew-lane Ghost, and Mr. Lindsay standing still and silent, with folded arms, set lips, and the gold eye-glass on his nose. As soon as he saw them, he began to shout, "Murder! help!" at the top of his voice.

"I see myself," said Master Arthur, driving his hands contemptuously into his pockets,—"I see myself helping a great lout who came out to frighten a child, and can neither defend his own eyes and nose, nor take a licking with a good grace when he deserves it!"

Bully Tom appealed to Mr. Lindsay:—

"Yah! yah!" he howled. "Will you see a man killed for want of help?"

But the clever young gentleman seemed even less inclined to give his assistance.

"Killed!" he said contemptuously; "I *have* seen a lad killed on such a night as this, by such a piece of bullying! Be thankful you have been stopped in time! I wouldn't raise my little finger to save you from twice such a thrashing. It has been fairly earned! Give the ghost his shroud, Gardener, and let him go; and recommend him not to haunt Yew-lane in future."

John did so, with a few words of parting advice on his own account.

"Be hoff with you," he said. "Master Lindsay, he speaks like a book.

You're a disgrace to your hage and sect, you are! I'd as soon fight with an old char-woman.—Though bless you, young gentlemen," he added, as Bully Tom slunk off muttering, "he is the biggest blackguard in the place; and what the Rector'll say, when he comes to know as you've been mingled up with him, passes me."

"He'll forgive us, I dare say," said Master Arthur. "I only wish he could have seen you emerge from behind that stone! It was a sight for a century! I wonder what the youngster thought of it!—Hi, Willie, here, sir! What did you think of the second ghost?"

Bill had some doubts as to the light in which he ought to regard that apparition; but he decided on the simple truth.

"I thought it looked very horrid, sir."

"I should hope it did! The afternoon's work of three able-bodied men has been marvellously wasted if it didn't. However, I must say you halloed out loud enough!"

Bill colored; the more so, as Mr. Lindsay was looking hard at him over the top of his spectacles.

"Don't you feel rather ashamed of all your fright, now you've seen the ghosts without their sheets?" inquired the clever young gentleman.

"Yes, sir," said Bill, hanging his head. "I shall never believe in ghosts again, sir, though."

Mr. Bartram Lindsay took off his glasses and twiddled them in his fingers.

"Well, well," he said in a low hurried voice; "I'm not the parson, and I don't pretend to say what you should believe and what you shouldn't. We know precious little as to how much the spirits of the dead see and know of what they have left behind. But I think you may venture to assure yourself that when a poor soul has passed the waves of this

troublesome world, by whatever means, it doesn't come back kicking about under a white sheet in dark lanes, to frighten little boys from going to school."

"And that's very true, sir," said John Gardener, admiringly.

"So it is," said Master Arthur. "I couldn't have explained that myself, Willie; but those are my sentiments; and I beg you'll attend to what Mr. Lindsay has told you."

"Yes, sir," said Bill.

Mr. Lindsay laughed, though not quite merrily, and said,—

"I could tell him something more, Arthur, though he's too young to understand it; namely, that if he lives, the day will come, when he would be only too happy if the dead might come back and hold out their hands to us, anywhere, and for however short a time."

The young gentleman stopped abruptly; and the gardener heaved a sympathetic sigh.

"I tell you what it is, Bartram," muttered Master Arthur, "I suppose I'm too young too, for I've had quite enough of the melancholies for one night. As to you, you're as old as the hills; but it's time you came home; and if I'd known before what you told me to-night, old fellow, you shouldn't have come out on this expedition.—Now, for you, Willie," added the young gentleman, whirling sharply round, "if you're not a pattern Solomon henceforth, it won't be the fault of your friends. And if wisdom doesn't bring you to school after this, I shall try the argument of the one-legged donkey."

"I don't think I shall miss next time, sir."

"I hope you won't.—Now, John, as you've come so far, you may as well see the lad home; but don't shake hands with the family in the present state of your fists, or you might throw somebody into a fit.

Good-night!"

Yew-lane echoed a round of "Good-nights," and Bill and the gardener went off in high spirits. As they crossed the road, Bill looked round, and under the trees saw the young gentlemen strolling back to the Rectory, arm in arm. Mr. Bartram Lindsay with his chin high in the air, and Master Arthur vehemently exhorting him on some topic, of which he was pointing the moral with flourishes of the one-legged donkey.

For those who like to know "what became of" everybody, these facts are added:—

The young gentlemen got safely home; and Master Arthur gave such a comical account of their adventure, that the Rector laughed too much to scold them, even if he had wished.

Beauty Bill went up and down Yew-lane on many a moonlight night after this one, but he never saw another ghost, or felt any more fears in connection with Ephraim Garnett. To make matters more entirely comfortable, however, John kindly took to the custom of walking home with the lad after night-school was ended. In return for this attention, Bill's family were apt to ask him in for an hour; and by their fireside he told the story of the two ghosts so often—from the manufacture in the Rectory barn, to the final apparition at the cross-roads—that the whole family declare they feel just as if they had seen it.

Bessy, under the hands of the cheerful doctor, got quite well, and eventually married. As her cottage boasts the finest window plants in the village, it is shrewdly surmised that her husband is a gardener.

Bully Tom talked very loudly for some time of "having the law of" the rival ghost; but finding, perhaps, that the story did not redound to his credit, was unwilling to give it further publicity, and changed his mind.

Winter and summer, day and night, sunshine and moonlight, have

passed over the lane and the churchyard, and the wind has had many a ghostly howl among the yews, since poor Bill learnt the story of the murder; but he knows now that the true Ephraim Garnett has never been seen on the cross-roads since a hundred years ago, and will not be till the Great Day.

In the ditch by the side of Yew-lane, shortly after the events I have been describing, a little lad found a large turnip, in which some one had cut eyes, nose and mouth, and put bits of stick for teeth. The turnip was hollow, and inside it was fixed a bit of wax candle. He lighted it up, and the effect was so splendid, that he made a show of it to his companions at the price of a marble each, who were well satisfied. And this was the last of the Yew-lane Ghosts.

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