

WHEAT IN THE EAR

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BY

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"The Majesty of Man," etc.*

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CHAPTER I.

THE CRY OF THE CHILD.

THE autumn wind, travelling from the east and the Pacific Ocean, ruffled in its course the surface of mighty snow-rivers, and sweeping the vast Canterbury plains, bent the long tussock-grass, with an undulating motion like sea-waves; dun waves in evening shadow, except where a shaft of sunset gold—travelling from the “Southern Alps,” bordering the western horizon—glinted with fleeting magic upon the heaving expanse.

The warm tint of the native New Zealand grass robbed the wide plains of barrenness; miles of unbroken land spread out in plenitude of promise to the distant blue-black mountain range; here and

there clumps of trees relieved the monotony of the landscape, and, above the trees, the outline of a roof was sometimes visible with ascending smoke from domestic fires; while near the homesteads, cloud-like flocks of grazing sheep nibbled the short, soft grass that grew between the silky tussock tufts.

The deep silence was unbroken, save for the muffled rhythmic thud of horse-hoofs upon the turf. As horse and rider went mountain-ward in the glow from the west, there was something in the appearance of both that suggested they were not strange to that part of the country, but were consciously journeying homeward, one to a fireside and companionship, the other to stable and corn. Both man and beast looked in keeping with the scene, more weather-proof than picturesque, and hardened to the beating and buffeting of storms. The man rode with characteristic ease and inelegance; his seat was firm, but his long legs, covered to his leather leggings with a rough coat, stuck out from the horse's sides; the brim of his oilskin sou'-wester flapped with each step, and the leather bag strapped to his back bulged out behind; his short, grizzled beard was blown by the wind; and altogether he presented rather an aggressive and disreputable appearance, in-

stead of looking what he was, a prosperous, simple-hearted farmer, riding home to his wife.

Memory had been appealing to him. The glimpse caught of the sunset glow shining upon clouds of fantastic shape appeared like the spires and domes of a lighted city, and transported him to "the lights o' London" and the days of youth, when as a young engineer, barren of opportunity, but full of ardour and faith, he had married Janet, and trusted to Providence. Janet was that providence. With serious sweetness she objected to starvation, and, bringing the vitality of her persuasion to bear upon her young husband's ambition and energy, directed his force from vague contemplation of Divine intervention, to external and practical ways and means of progression; with the result that, fifteen years ago, they had brought their struggle to a new land.

Tom Jefferies did not look like a man who had missed his destiny. When he lifted his rugged face in the fading light there was no sadness upon it. His grey eyes sparkled with the enthusiasm of twenty, although each one of his forty years had left a line upon his face to mark a battle—the battle of an honest, hard-headed man, who, leaving his native country in his first years of adaptability and courage,

combats willingly and with hardihood every opponent on the new path, till, having conquered, he calls the strange place "home." There was a touch of pathos to the man in the consciousness that, with the passage of time, he had ceased to dream of return to the land of his birth ; that the passionate love he bore to his adopted country rivalled the affection he still had for old scenes. But thought of England brought a smile to his eyes, for he had taken into exile with him one of her best productions—an English woman, Janet, his girl wife, who without hesitation had vowed that his people should be her people ; that whither he went there would she go also. And they had travelled some rough ways to comparative success. Janet's bridal home had been a sod hut of two rooms, with a floor of earth and roof of shingle, built by Tom upon the fifty-acre section he had purchased on the banks of the Otira Gorge, a swift-flowing stream that had its birth in the white snows of the mountains. The hut had not been weather-proof, and when sou'-westers raged, the young bride and bridegroom had frequently sat at their domestic hearth under the shelter of a large umbrella. But hardship had crushed neither romance nor energy ; acre had been added to acre, with goodly flocks and herds ;

and a substantial house now stood upon the old site of the hut, whose tiny window had glowed like a beacon on many a dark night when the man had pressed blithely towards it across the tussock sea.

The crimson shaft drew in from the west, day had sheathed its sword, and the short twilight momentarily deepened, as the man rode forward with the promise of his wife's welcome in his heart. Many hundred times he had ridden through storm or starlight towards the home-rays, with one unchanging thought—Janet. He was not a sentimental man; he had practicably pursued this world's good, and prided in achievement; the enterprise and demand of his active life had engendered self-reliance. Contradictory inclinations had made no chaos for him; indecision had never once caused him to waver in his determination to reach his goal. He was not always disinterested or impersonal in his motives, but simple faith in Janet had kept green his heart.

Janet had been a sign and symbol to him of things spiritual. He would have been surprised if this truth had been made clear to him, for, while he listened to her in good-humoured sympathy, he was

unaware of her influence, that she was the harmony among discords, and the strain of poetry amid much prose. In his large sense of protectiveness, he imagined that he absorbed her, and stood between her and every adverse wind that blew. But Janet had one eccentricity that her husband had consciously failed to eradicate, and it dated to the days of the sod hut. With all her heart and understanding she craved for a child—and there had been no child. Janet had refused to take the disappointment of years seriously. At first she had wept abundantly in secret; but nothing destroyed her cherished hope, and when she left weeping, she worked and planned industriously to one end. She left the finger-marks of the mother upon all she did. She engaged in no enterprise, indulged in no dreams, lent herself to no circumstance without the mental reservation—how would it affect the child's future? Tom Jefferies had at first laughed, then tried to console, then fallen under the glamour of his wife's wish, and, with much simplicity, surpassed her in preparations for the son and heir, consulting the non-existent wishes of the unborn regarding agricultural concerns, which, after Janet, were the delight of the man's life.

The simple couple saw nothing extraordinary in acting as the agents of an unborn child—a child long unpromised save by their wish. The borders of pastures were extended, cattle multiplied, green wheat ripened to the ear, rains of seed time and sunshine of harvest imparted year by year a deeper tinge of yellow to the white stone house on the gorge, and then the woman's deferred hope became prophetic—her yearning maternity was near its satisfaction.

The man urged on his horse; his thoughts, in their backward travel, had gathered a thousand tender and vagrant memories, which in accumulation moved him with half-forgotten enthusiasm—the enthusiasm of the lover, that, reasserting itself, made him impatient for the presence he at no time regarded critically. From the tenderness of his thought, a new fear arose, and stalked like a ghost through the twilight; the firm hands that held the bridle trembled—until this moment, in gladness concerning the child, he had missed fear for the mother. But suddenly it seemed that the air became laden with the anguish of woman's travail; the wind sighing through the grass, the bleating of distant sheep, smote his ears with the

appeal of pain. His lips compressed, his eyes strained through the gloom for the coveted light of the farm-house windows. Material facts diminished in significance; the habit of mathematical calculation fell from him like leaves shaken by a strong wind from an autumn tree; at that moment there was but one question to him in heaven and on earth that he had consciousness to consider—the safety of his wife. His flesh contracted; his bones ached with anxiety to know how she fared. He dug his spurs into the willing horse, then, feeling the quivering flesh beneath him, repented of the sufferings he had inflicted on a dumb brother. It was a strong man's first initiation into the mystery of pain, and it put him in love with mercy. Years after that night, Tom Jefferies told a despairing girl on those same plains how it was there, with the wind shrieking round him like a woman in agony, that he got his first real glimpse of what loss might be, and how, when staggering in from the darkness, weakened by the human conflict of fear, the sound that thrilled him on the threshold with new manhood was the cry of the child.

CHAPTER II.

FATHER AND MOTHER.

OTIRA GORGE FARM took its name from the stream upon whose banks it stood—a burn-like stream that tumbled helter-skelter from the mountains, and made much ado to clamber over rocky boulder, and force its way through fragrant fern, to reach the level land; here, with occasional rebellious swirl and eddy, it gradually quieted to a less impetuous flow, narrowing in parts to a steel-like blade that flashed between long grasses, then, with swift curve, grew opulent and broad, and—as though conscious of the dignity of its ministry to the thirsty plains—still.

The farm-house stood back from the stream, its grey whiteness thrown into relief by a dark patch of native bush at its rear. The house was of stone, with bulging windows, and porch massed with a late-flowering vine. Round three sides of the house was the orchard, despoiled of its late harvest, and a well-

kept lawn spread beneath the fruit trees; outside extending to the encircling meadows bordered by the gorge, and beyond the gorge the far-reaching plains. The back of the house faced the bush and the mountain ridge. In the space between the veranda, which ran the length of the house, and the skirt of the forest, a small world intervened. Flower-gardens, kitchen-gardens, yards, dairies, butteries, hen-coops, and cow-sheds, with the combined effect of blazing autumn blossoms, yellow pumpkins and white-hearted cauliflowers, red tiles, brown-thatched roofs, glinting milk pans, and all the stir of the principalities and powers of the feathered tribes—ducks, fowls, geese, turkeys, flaunted their colours in the autumn sunlight, and each contributed its note to the symphony of the farm-yard, accompanied by the distant bleating of sheep, the lowing of kine, and the occasional bark of the watch-dog.

The great kitchen and the living-room of the house overlooked this scene of life from the windows beneath the veranda. The kitchen was spotless, and, in spite of an intimate knowledge of the strength of the muscles of Mercy, the handmaid, who ruled there, the boards and shining steel about the stove continued to be a marvel to the farm-

hands, who three times daily gathered round the tremendous table occupying the centre of the room. The roof was unceiled; great hams, flitches of bacon, and yellow pumpkins hung from the rafters; and from the large presses, which occupied the spaces on both sides of the fireplace, a faint aroma escaped, suggestive of dried apples and preserves. Over the mantelshelf the dish-covers flashed like breast-plates of steel, and the delf and china upon a huge dresser reflected a miniature kitchen wherever they caught the light. A tabby cat was snoozing before the fire with her fore-paws upon the fender, the only occupant of the room, for Mercy was upstairs "cleaning herself."

The first impression upon one entering the living-room was that of snow-white and crimson, and the scent of lavender. The floor, like the kitchen, was uncarpeted, save for numerous sheep-skin rugs, which, bleached and combed, were spread luxuriously before the fire, under the handsome mahogany dining-table, and in every available spot. The ceiling was also white, and the wall-paper a deep crimson, which colour was reproduced in the upholstery of a wide, low couch and deep-seated chairs, and in the large feather pillows that

made them luxurious. On one side of the room stood an American organ, facing it a sideboard that matched the table. The deep-silled window blazed with geraniums, and was curtained with crimson. The lavender that perfumed the apartment bulged from two large bronze bowls that stood on the mantelpiece, one on each side of the eight-day clock.

The room was redeemed from primness by the living picture of a woman, who sat on a low rocker upon the hearth-rug nursing a child. Janet Jefferies was essentially a fireside woman, and belonged to a race of faithful wives, affectionate mothers, and able managers. Her presence gave vital meaning to the details of the room.

Mother and child appeared to be both asleep, lulled by the stillness; but a closer look revealed the fact that the woman's downcast eyes rested in reverie upon the face of the babe at her breast.

The face of Janet Jefferies was not young, for it told the story of thirty-five years; not years of indolent inactivity, polite hypocrisy, and mock scepticism, but of energetic, hopeful activity, honest prejudice, undisguised love, and anxious faith. Work and apprehension had drawn a mark or two

across the forehead, but hope and affection had kept her mouth soft and her drooping brown eyes bright. The delicacy of recent maternity had toned the natural ruddiness of her cheeks to a tender flush, and, as she sat in the fading light of the afternoon, the brooding gentleness of the Madonna look, with its yearning and hint of regret, as of some harboured thought of personal unworthiness, gave the woman more attractions than the rosy charm of girlhood had given her teens. Her hair was soft and abundant, silky and waving from the parting to the back of her head, where close, thick plaits held it in bondage. Her gown was of soft, grey woollen stuff, and a white muslin collar adorned her neck.

Except for the sex of the child, all things had eventuated as she and "Father" had desired. Tom was no longer merely lover and husband. After his first profound joy and thankfulness, Father's next sensation was that he had been trifled with. He, like Janet, had confidently expected a son; thus their ideas were doomed to readjustment. Father did this slowly, with laboured thought, for "*His name shall be called John*" he had decided; his career had been sketched, even to detail; he was to be a second John the Baptist, brilliant in the

public eye, and unwearied by manual labour. Tom himself had been denied much learning; but, with the intelligent appreciation of the scholar, he had devised great attainments for his son. With this ideal in view, every time Tom Jefferies rode back from the township, the leather bag bulged with biographies obtained from Christchurch, the distant "City of the plains." These he had read to Janet while she had stitched.

Janet, unlike the man, did not feel that fate had robbed her when it had denied her a modern John the Baptist; the first cry of the girl had drowned all sense of loss. She mentally counted the linen sheets she would give her daughter at her wedding.

A stir in the kitchen announced the fact that Mercy had come downstairs. Presently she appeared in the living-room with her mistress's tea. She was a tall, gaunt woman of twenty-five, with the muscles of Hercules and a mahogany complexion. Her chief characteristics were unmitigated scorn for the opposite sex and devotion to her own; her accomplishments, cooking and scrubbing; her reputation, a bitter tongue; and her religion, honesty.

Allusions to the expected "he" had hardened her heart. She wondered at her mistress. "The master"

she could tolerate; he might have been worse; but what a comfortable, happily disposed couple, who had lived fifteen years together with very little to distress them, wanted with a boy about the house, she failed to see. He'd be a daily vexation, she knew; his boot-nails would ruin the floors; he'd steal the jam and grow to idleness, and spend his father's substance in riotous living, and overwhelm his mother with affliction. The shadow of coming disaster had cleared from Mercy's brow at the magic word girl; her temper perceptibly softened, and, although she did not speak her thought, it was clear that her respect for her mistress had increased.

Mercy deposited the tray at Janet's hand, then speedily departed in fear lest she should be requested to hold the child, which she feared to break. In her haste she precipitated herself against her master, who was entering the room. He had made no noise in his entry, because he had left his boots in the lobby—the place of the child was holy ground; he just learnt to step softly in reverence for her sleep. He came forward in his grey worsted stockings, and stood six feet upon the hearth-rug, looking down upon his woman-kind with much satisfaction. In his shaggy greatcoat, he had the look of a great sheep-

dog, and brought in with him a whiff of frosty freshness and scent of tussock-grass. He wrinkled his brows as with a mental effort to take the correct measurement of the situation, then put forth a strong roughened hand and touched Janet's hair.

"Well, Mother!" he said, in a hearty voice, as though there was no doubt about it.

"Well, Father," she replied, "you've got back. You've done for to-day? Go and get your supper, then come and tell me all about it. You've registered her Joan?"

The roughly-carved, bronzed face of the man lit up good-humouredly. He made no movement supper-ward, but drew himself straight where he stood, and, in the tone of one bestowing a benediction, made reply:

"Joan—Joan Jefferies, daughter of Tom and Janet Jefferies, of Otira Gorge Farm, Otira Gorge, province of Canterbury, New Zealand."

Janet hummed softly in contentment:

"Heigh, ho! daisies and buttercups,
Fair yellow daffodils, stately and tall!
When the wind wakes how they rock in the grasses,
And dance with the cuckoo-buds, slender and small.
Here's two bonny boys, and here's mother's own lasses
Eager to gather them all.'"

"Joan," reiterated Father, as though the bestowal of the name upon Janet's baby must for ever add new dignity to the memory of the woman who made it famous. "Joan of Arc—Joan Jefferies! the name of a noble heroine"—he pronounced it *heroine*—"fearless in danger; lamb-like in gentleness."

"'Heigh, ho! daisies and buttercups,
Mother shall thread them a daisy chain:
Sing them a song of the pretty hedge-sparrow—'"

"A woman," broke in Father's voice, his face flushed with enthusiasm, "who trusted God and did the right; who renounced self, and—"

"'That loved her brown little ones, loved them full fain.
Sing, 'Heart, thou art wide, though the house be but
narrow'—
Sing once and sing it again.'"

Tom went to the kitchen and left Janet to her rocking. Later the man returned to the room, his feet in carpet slippers of a gorgeous hue. His wife noted the slippers, but made no comment; she knew why they were worn. Tom carried the leather bag in his hand. He sat down opposite to Janet, and unfastened it, and drew forth a rattle,

an india-rubber doll, a skipping-rope, and a Bible.

Janet watched him. It was the first time the old bag had not produced a present for herself. She held the child a little closer. But she suffered only for a moment; the next she congratulated herself upon being a most fortunate woman.

“Heigh ho ! daisies and buttercups,
Fair yellow daffodils, stately and tall ;
A sunshiny world full of laughter and leisure,
And fresh hearts unconscious of sorrow and thrall ;
Send down on their pleasure smiles passing its measure,
God that is over us all.”

CHAPTER III.

HER NAME WAS CALLED JOHN.

By the time Joan had cut her teeth, the evolution of the father in Tom had abundantly developed, and Janet sometimes wished he would mind his own business; but, with the spirit of the true egotist, Tom could not take a commonplace view of anything. In all departments of his realm the electricity of his enthusiasm sooner or later made itself felt.

Joan was developing tantrums, and her father, desiring to build up her character, in the third year of her reign brought home a little birch. Not that he meant to use it, but he thought it would convince everyone concerned—himself included—that he was not one of those reprehensively weak fathers who spare the rod and spoil the child.

But the incident so incensed his wife that she peremptorily directed her husband's attention to

his sheep and calves. When he gently expostulated pointing out that the child was mistress of the situation, Janet asked what he could expect.

"It's your own identical manner, it is," said she. "You never would come second to anybody, nor take a decent time to get in first. An' Joan's like you, bless her little heart!"

Tom betook himself to the calves, and mentally registered a vow to curb himself for the sake of example.

Although the man still followed his agricultural pursuits with ardour, and packed his days with energetic action, he was conscious of a new joyousness—a new sensibility. The toiling, patient oxen looked at him with the child's wistful eyes.

The child developed the latent poetry and religion in the man; but it was Janet who carried Joan into the camp of the Christians. While busy with her maidens, with a keen eye to the dairy and the presses, she yet was observant of the child's slightest mood. Her religious sense had never moved her to fervour, but she wanted the best possible for her child. For her sake she was greedy to snatch out of the here and hereafter all that she could. By her own thrift she would secure the child a goodly

portion of this world's goods ; but she was not custodian of the next. If there was any virtue in infant baptism, it would be a pity to miss it. Tom knew by the quiet manner in which Janet spoke that her mind was made up, and submitted gallantly.

The morning that was to initiate Joan into spiritual grace and favour was one in early winter, keen, sweet, and dusted with silver hoar-frost ; a morning for the world and the flesh to revel in. Before the sun had dried the mist off the cobwebs on the gorse hedges, the buggy was bowling from the farm door, with Tom driving, and mother seated behind holding a bundle well down under the rugs. There was a drive of fifteen miles to the church, so an early start was necessary. When they passed through the home enclosures and paddocks the sun was not yet high enough in the heavens to disperse the clinging vapour billows which rolled over the plains, and the scene opened up to them only as they advanced. Here loomed the granaries and woolsheds, there a hayrick, now a plough with horses and driver, and long, newly-turned furrows of brown earth. The fresh, ferny smell of tussock, the swift movement through the

crisp air, the trip, trop, trop of the horse's hoofs, and Tom's cheerful and strong man's talk,—all combined to make the woman's blood run warm with a half-forgotten sense of youth and well-being. The cramping influence of four walls, and the infinitesimal worries of churning and baking were removed; and the ever-widening view of an illimitable distance thrilled her with anticipation. Of late she had been losing touch with Nature and the impersonal, feeling no connection, no sympathy with the world at large; and she caught a dim idea that, in pursuance of the child's good, she would get at the great heart of things. She had been imprisoned in a dead materialism; the child would be her emancipator from a pulseless egotism. She drew it closer, but little Joan strained from the encircling arms, and craned her neck to see all of the world she could with two wide, bright grey eyes.

The little church was built on the outskirts of the straggling township—a cheerless building with a corrugated iron roof, standing in an uncultivated paddock. The incumbent of the parish was away on a holiday, and when Tom and Janet led their offspring up the church steps, and passed out of

the sunshine along the strip of cocoa-nut matting to the font, they were received by a severe-faced stranger, very old, very bald, and very deaf, from whose pinched and regular features the last memory of youth and freshness had departed long ago. He fixed his penetrating eyes first upon Janet, who trembled, and coughed apologetically for having to trouble him, then upon Tom the unabashed, and lastly upon the rosy-cheeked darling of their hearts, as though he were seriously displeased and desired them to know it. Mother burned at the stern look directed towards her lambkin; she had a sudden impulse to snatch up her treasure and run. She was arrested by a bright effulgence surrounding Joan, touching her short brown locks, shining on her long fringe-like eyelashes, softening her tinted cheeks, and splashing with purple and crimson the white of her frock. Turning to follow the transformation to its source, her eyes were riveted by a stained glass window representing Christ wearing His thorn crown in simple majesty. From His outstretched hands the light shaft streamed upon the child.

Janet smiled. When her emotion had passed she became aware that the old man had drawn Joan near, and that Joan was bridling.

"Name this child."

"Joan," said Tom, with his head in the air and shoulders back, and an expression which affirmed that he should like to know why not.

"*John!*" snapped the deaf clergyman, ". . . and do sign him with the sign . . . in token that he shall not be ashamed . . . and manfully to fight—"

But Joan's growing sense of insult had culminated at the indignity of having cold water thrown into her face, and with crimson cheeks and flashing eyes, she clenched her little fists, and said, in a tone that rang rebelliously through the sacred edifice:

"I 'on't fight! I 'on't—I 'on't—I 'on't!"

And she never did—not as an orthodox Christian.

CHAPTER IV.

JOAN'S BOYHOOD.

To the last day of her life mother blamed the christening for Joan's shortcomings; what chance had a girl with the name of a boy?

She had nothing to say in disparagement of John the Baptist, far be it from her, nor against old men. She hoped to be old herself one day, and quite expected to be deaf; but, what with Father's fad about the one, and the bungling of the other, her child had been called as no other Christian girl had been called before her. No wonder the child was tom-boyish. Who could expect otherwise? It did not occur to Mother that physical law, and her own shaping of her child's destiny, had anything to do with it.

"Johnnie" was first a term of reproach to bring Joan to a sense of what was fitting and proper in the behaviour of a little girl, when she so far forgot the

conventionalities as to sit sideways on her chair, and dangle her legs over the rail, or tear up her muslin pinafore to make a tail for a kite.

Mercy shook her head. She had no doubt whatever that it was all a punishment for wishing for a boy at all.

Father laughed at fear, and prayed for the true chivalry of Johnnie, and gave it out as his fixed idea that a blending of the honour of a gentleman with the sweetness of a woman would add much to the soundness of the feminine method.

"What I think is this," said Tom, in his strong, cheerful voice, "the word of a gentleman is his bond; he's courageous an' honourable; graft that to the patience an' gentleness of a woman, an' what have you?"

"We've her father's own girl here," answered Janet, with conviction. "She won't stand the whip, nor yet the curb, bless her!"

Each parent created a separate world for the child, made up of staid philosophies, middle-aged experiences, and the grit of individual knowledge; but Joan, with a young soul's prerogative, went a new way of her own. So soon as she could balance herself on an unmade path, she was outside the

home enclosure, incredulous of Mother's cautious fears, readily paying tumbles and scratches as toll for curiosity. The cattle were made acquaintance with in field and byre, invested with human individuality, and treated to child converse; every ethical advance made by Joan she sought to exact from the beasts, or reproved them for the lack of, in the true spirit of the dogmatic reformer, making no allowance for environment.

Before she was seven years old, Joan knew the feel of every wind that blew, and the history of every live creature about the farm. The seasons could be told by the smell of her garments, for they bore the scent of the newly-turned earth, the fresh-mown hay, or the mellow odour of clover and ripe corn. Janet dressed her in scarlet, because the colour could be seen afar; and it vexed the woman's housewifely and orderly soul that her child took so kindly to the fields. She looked for a daughter thrifty, domesticated, responsible; and the child so far scandalised her sex as to refuse a doll, and practise whistling.

It was necessary for economy's sake to keep Joan's skirts short to the knees, and her sleeves to the elbows, thus leaving bare her brown arms and legs. She was clothed in serge, and as little of that as was

consistent with decorum. But for all that Joan looked picturesque. Her dark brown hair curled in short, silky waves all over her head ; a red fez topped the curls, and beneath them, large, bright, grey eyes looked out with the intent gaze of Mother, and about them a suggestion of Father's humorous wrinkles. The face was small and oval, delicately tinted in brown and red ; the mouth, when it was not pursed up singing, or open whistling, was set in decisive curves.

Joan had not yet emerged from the animal state ; but Mother, who had made strides in civilisation, was anxious for the progress of her little woman. One day Janet took the tiny hand in her work-worn palm, and looked critically at it.

"Sakes !" she exclaimed wonderingly, "what a mite of a thing !" Then, as though a happy thought had struck her, she added ingratiatingly, "It's a hand to do beautiful needlework."

Joan looked her mother full in the eye, then glanced at the imprisoned right hand disapprovingly ; the delicate lines of the little chin began to harden.

"I never could get the way of that marvellous embroidery myself," proceeded Mother. "A bit of muslin an' a fine needle were lost in my hands ;

still," catching the sigh of relief that heaved Joan's breast, she added hastily, "when I was your age I could sew my seam."

Joan withdrew her offending member from her mother's grasp, put it behind her, and looked steadily from under the dark curls that lay so charmingly about her forehead. Mother smiled benignly into the wondering orbs regarding her.

"Yes," she reiterated, "I could sew my seam, and dress my doll; my doll was neat as a real lady."

Joan glanced quickly at a dilapidated object on the couch; from under a rakish and ragged hat the acquaintance leered knowingly. Joan shifted her position, interposing her small person between it and her mother. Janet, with some difficulty, repressed a smile, much enamoured of the small culprit before her. She smoothed her apron, passed her hand over her hair, then followed up the impression she had made.

"My mother did not believe in too much play. 'Work first and play after,' she used to say; and, when I was restless and impatient for the fields, she would pin me to her knee, dearie—pin me till I had finished my seam."

Joan stood on tiptoe and brought the anxious face above her on a level with her own.

"How miser'ble you must have been ; I'm sorry for you." Then, imprinting a sympathetic kiss with her rosy lips, she bounded out into the sunshine.

Mercy joined her mistress, and the two watched her gambols.

"Children is the climax o' misfortune. Man an' marriage is affliction ; but by grace an' good muscles a woman may fight through ; for a man knows when he meets his master, an' havin' met her, he tempers his tyranny with humility—tempers his tyranny with humility," repeated Mercy, who had read something like it somewhere, and loved high-sounding words.

"But you'll temper me with something that isn't humility," interrupted her mistress tartly ; "get indoors—do."

Mercy cast a reproachful look at Janet—a long, lingering, offended, lover-like look—and, squaring her shoulders, strode kitchenward. She made a good deal of clatter there for about an hour ; then she flicked at the cat viciously with a duster.

"They are a burden and a bitterness, the sowers

of a whirlwind. The unborn millions will be the ruin of the country."

She fixed the cat with her eye, and, although puss knew Mercy's ways, and, on the whole, bore with them well, this aspersion was a little too much; there was a limit even to a cat's endurance. She drew up her head, blinked in Mercy's condemning face disdainfully, then turned majestically and left the room.

"Mercy's jealous!" said Mother to herself smilingly, as she proceeded to tidy things.

There was no regret in her face when she thought of the unlittered room of the olden days, she sighed to remember. She gazed with shining eyes at the evidences of her possession; the sun-hat on the lobby peg, the doll upon the sofa, a gleam of a bright-hued sash; a buckle of a tiny shoe in the work-basket, broken doll's tea-cups, a posie jammed into a jug, and a scarlet frock airing in the sunshine.

She sat down now, and while she plied a rapid needle, thought of the look on Father's face when he sat opposite, and their young princess came bounding in and kissed him, and sat upon his knee, and twined her arm about his neck, looking over at

Mother half shyly, half coyly, in a manner which said, "This is *my* Father, he belongs to me," when Mother gently hints that she is getting too big to be nursed. She could see the half-abashed, half-defiant glance of the child when she was told she must not romp, nor be rude, nor shout, nor scream, nor say "I won't," nor climb trees, nor play in the mud, because she was a little girl; but must always be gentle and obedient, and grow with the wisdom of a serpent, and harmlessness of a dove, to pleasure Father and Mother. All that was imperative, and more, for the world demands from its women honesty, purity, loyalty, tenderness; a girl must dawn upon the world, "where the brook and river meet," with sweet surprise in her eyes; she must be wise without experience to walk through rough and miry ways, unblemished and unhurt, and in the evening of her days, depart with grace and faith.

At present Joan showed no marked predilection for woman's mission; she dearly liked having it out with her aggressors, and hit back with spontaneous and genuine relish. Father said, let her alone, it showed a manly spirit; if women blacked each other's eyes oftener, they would blacken one another's reputation less with their tongues. Mother

looked doubtful and shook her head. Mercy bided her time.

If one waits long enough for an opportunity, it is sure to overtake one, and is frequently unappreciated because it finds us with a changed mind ; but Joan's tomboyism had excited durable feelings in Mercy's square breast, and when her chance of reproving arrived, she seized it.

The cat had regained its equanimity, and Mother, her sewing done, had gone to watch the shearing. Mercy, her face shining from her afternoon ablutions, sat with folded arms resting till it was time to prepare the evening meal. Mercy was never more unapproachable than at this hour ; her freshly-starched dress seemed to bristle with the consciousness of its purity. She was alert for warfare, and glowered at nothing in particular in a truly formidable manner.

Presently her quick ear caught the faintest creaking of the kitchen door. She turned with the agility of a cat watching for a mouse. A dripping object stood in the doorway, two interrogative eyes peered from beneath a tangle of damp hair.

Mercy rose slowly and squared herself, her hands upon her hips.

"Hallo!" said a small voice ingratiatingly.

"Hall-o!" responded a triumphant bass.

"I felled in," apologised the treble; "I've got wet."

"Wet?" queried Mercy sardonically. "Not wet?"

The dripping head nodded emphatically.

Mercy strode forward, lifted the drenched object as she would a drowned kitten, and carried her into the bathroom; here, depositing her in the bath, she stripped and treated her to a vigorous rubbing with a coarse towel; then, still without a word, robed the child in her night-dress and carried her to bed, and, sat down, a threatening figure, by the bedside.

Joan glanced at the open window lovingly, at the patch of sunlight on the floor, and then at her silent jailor.

"I was swimming a duck," remarked Joan, in an explanatory way; "such a dee wee duck. It wanted to go in. Its mother is a hen, an' couldn't teach it."

Mercy leant forward, the afternoon light shining full on her hard-featured face, revealing with pitiless truth the lines that an unloved childhood and

youth had drawn. Her look would have repelled most children, and Joan was somewhat abashed.

"Say something," she pleaded; "you frighten me."

Mercy drew her breath deeply.

"Johnnie Jefferies," she said, with unutterable scorn condensed into the word "Johnnie," "I have never pined for children, but I wish that for one hour I could be your mother."

"Why?" faltered the young person addressed, not detecting any maternal tenderness in Mercy's glance.

"I've got my reasons," replied Mercy meaningly, "and my hand itches to express 'em."

Joan tucked the bedclothes well round her, and changed her tactics.

"It wasn't my bes' frock; I've got lots more," she suggested anxiously.

Mercy never less personified her name. She rose in judgment. The unfettered and lawless one slunk a little lower under the bedclothes, but never for a moment removing her gaze.

"You've got lots more. Unto him that hath shall be given; there ain't no limit to your privileges!" gasped Mercy. "When I was your age I

had one frock—an' only one—a solitary, only one—without any connections. A lone frock, dingy an' thin, to say nothink of scragginess. I wore it week in an' week out, an' it were washed o' Saturday nights to be clean o' Sundays. I ran my errants in it, an' did my devotions in it; it were turned top to bottom when the bottom got thin, an' then turned bottom to top. When the colour faded on the right side it were turned to the wrong, an' when the wrong side grew shabby it were turned right side out agen. When I growed out of it, the tuck were let out at the bottom, an' when I growed out o' that my grandmother just put on a false hem. I hadn't got no mother to pamper me; I hadn't ne'er a one," reiterated Mercy, with a gulp, as though trying to swallow the unfair distribution of things. "An' when the wind blew, I knew it. No purple an' fine linen covered me; an' the heat o' summer got in through the holes, an' the cold o' winter likewise."

Joan felt dazed, and slipped up a little from the bedclothes in sympathy for the image just presented. She blinked hard to meet Mercy's glance with impersonal interest.

"Only one frock, and no mother. Didn't

ou never have no farver, too?" she returned politely.

Mercy snorted so loudly that Joan went down under it instantly, eyes and all. When her ears once more reached the surface she gathered the following :

"Gaol cut *his* hanky-pankys short. No longer as a roaring lion might he seek whom he could devour. Prize your privileges, Miss Joan. Be an honour to the noble sect, an' don't bring the hairs of that gentle lamb your mother with sorrow to the grave; for Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do. Think of 'how doth the little busy bee,' an' curtail your disposition to be wilful."

Joan was greatly impressed; she lay still for fully two minutes after Mercy left her, staring fixedly at the door. Then she sighed deeply and sat up. The discourse had left a distinct impression that Mercy's father was a lion caged up somewhere, and that Satan didn't like little girls. Her imagination adhered to the last conclusion, and, pondering it with her chin between her hands, she brightened suddenly, and knelt up in bed. With the face and smile of a coquette cajoling her lover, she first looked up; then, recollecting, re-adjusted her attitude and looked down.

"Dee Satan," she murmured sweetly, "the duck I falled in with was a very weeny one, an' if you'll please not find any more mischuff for my idle hands to do, I'll be a good girl—but I like to do it."

Feeling that she had set herself right with the powers of evil, she lay down with a satisfied sigh and went to sleep.

Father, who had been arrested on the threshold by his child's prayer, went downstairs thoughtfully to talk to Mother.

CHAPTER V.

FATHER PUTS HIS FOOT DOWN.

"I'LL do it!" affirmed Father, with much decision.

The evening meal was over, and his great arm-chair drawn to the open window, where he smoked and ruminated.

"Do what?" queried Mother, coming to a sudden stop in her journey across the room. She knew her man, and one glance into his face decided her he had come to some weighty decision.

"Yes, I'll do it," reiterated he, knocking the ashes out of his pipe upon the window-sill.

Janet drew the ash-tray near as a reminder; but Tom was too preoccupied to take the hint.

"I'll put my foot down," he declared, with emphasis.

Janet looked her desire for an explanation.

"On Johnnie," asserted Father; "on Joan—John Jefferies."

Janet's gentle heart took instant alarm. She sat down on a low chair opposite, and tried to appear unaware of the sleeping culprit's latest prank. In inward trepidation, she smoothed the creases out of her apron as though smoothing them out of Tom's forehead.

"Why, bless me! whatever has the child done now?" she asked. "Falling in the creek's none so serious."

"But praying to Satan is," responded Tom, with a tragic and dismal air.

"Satan? — prays to him? — who prays to him?"

The most casual observer could have told that Mother needed no answer to her questions. She feigned amazement.

"Joan—John Jefferies does," asserted Father, with a grave shake of his shaggy head. "I heard her with my own ears. And not displeased she looked to do it. 'Keep my idle hands from mischief,' says she; 'but I like to do it.'"

Father met Mother's eyes. The humorous wrinkles round his took a deep indent. Mother sighed with relief, and ventured on a smile.

"A harmless, innocent dear!" she murmured;

then checked herself repentantly when Father straightened himself.

"I like to do it!" repeated he. "Do you notice that, Mother?"

Janet slightly flushed, and looked embarrassed.

"It was very unbecoming," she declared. "Still, it's human nature. The child ain't crafty with all her tricks. She owns that she likes mischief, which ain't the way o' most folks. Joan's aggravating, but no sneak. Furthermore, she said she'd never fight—"

"What she said, an' what she's got to do, have nothink whatever to do with each other—nothink whatever," interrupted Tom.

"You won't be hard on a baby like that?" questioned Janet, who didn't like the look of Tom's mouth. It reminded her of when he took a colt in hand to break.

"Discipline is more or less hard," replied he, with scant comfort; "an' that's what Joan's comin' to—discipline. Nobody can escape from it with profit, so don't make your face look like a diagram of angles, Mother," he proceeded cheerfully. "The little 'un will be as happy as she can be when she gets used to it."

Mother's face did not acquiesce. She glanced at the unused rod in the chimney-corner. Father guessed what thought was uppermost.

"*That ain't my plan,*" said he decidedly. "Moral persuasion is my plan. But come to some sort of a' understanding me an' Joan—John Jefferies must. When a Christian father hears his little 'un prayin' to Satan, it's time to learn the young idea how to shoot, an' where not to shoot, an' what to shoot at," proceeded he, mixing his metaphors. "I don't say but what Satan has his uses. A decent fear of him has druv many cowards into respectable livin'; but I don't hanker after him making a local habitation of my house."

"You can't teach a little mind more than it can take in," said Mother.

"Leave her to me," replied Father.

The morning was scented and sunny upon which the little barbarian was to get her first lesson in the ways of wisdom, and there never was a time when she was less inclined for it. She wandered beyond the homestead, and all about her upon the wide plains the idle sheep were grazing, and the irresponsible larks carolling into pure space. The division of labour and pain troubled the child

not at all; she was counting the marguerites she had gathered, and standing shoulder high among them by the gorge when Tom descried her, singing her mother's song:—

“Heigh, ho! daisies and buttercups,
Fair yellow daffodils, stately and tall!”

her eyes shining with the profound joy of childhood.

Joan comprehended presently that she was to miss freedom—the pleasure of the savage. She cried out impetuously and piteously:

“I don't like it, Farver!”

After a prolonged and doubtful contemplation of the moved face, Tom shook his head.

“You'll grow to it,” he affirmed. “It's nater to call out agen discipline. I've heard the cry of the earth when the plough cuts into it; but I take no pity for the destruction o' the grass, knowin' wheat will grow in its stead. I've seen the sheep tremble beneath the shears of the shearer. These things are deep for you now, but work is a blessed thing—you'll understand that in time. The Creator proclaimed it to the world, and signed it with His royal decree, that work is good.”

Joan followed with her gaze the flight of a butterfly, lifted her eyes higher to sight a lark.

"No," she said then, sending a direct glance straight into the eyes regarding her, "I don't want to work—I want to play."

"Ah! so we all do at the first, but we learn better by and by. You are getting a big girl, and ought to know things," he added persuasively.

"I don't want to know many things," responded she, frowning and sitting down on the grass to pluck more marguerites.

Father's expression changed to severity.

"That's not true," he said, drawing near, and sitting beside the child among the flowers. "Out there," he continued, pointing to the mysterious borderland, "there is a world of cities—places away beyond the utmost distant rim—"

"Ah!" ejaculated the child, interested, and alive in a moment with the common passion for knowledge of the unknown.

"Read, my little maid—read what has been, an what is, an' what is goin' to be. Be a scholar. I ain't one myself, but that's no fault of mine. 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, *do* it with thy might.' An' I have done it. But it's been rough

work, dear maid; an' while I have worked, I have wished—an' my work and my wishes haven't gone the same road—not that that's sing'lar, but while I've been ploughin' an' plantin', I've been longin' for the knowledge of all that's in the heaven above an' on earth beneath, an' in the waters under the earth. If you'd been a boy, mother an' me expected you to learn most things there was to learn—to become a power in the land. Bein' a girl, we hopes you'll do the best you can."

"Oh!" said Joan.

Then they went back silently, hand in hand, the man who craved knowledge, and the child who wished to play.

The mid-day dinner hour was a busy hour for Janet. She carved a whole side of mutton for the hungry farm-hands before she rested.

"Well?" queried she, when all but she and father had eaten and departed.

"I've done it," said he complacently.

The woman looked hard at him, then at the vanishing red figure.

"How did she take it?"

"Manfully," responded he, with assurance.

Joan went her favourite way to the plains,

circuitously by the gorge. There she paused, reconsidered, and made straight for the enclosures, where shearing was in progress. The great pens were packed with frightened sheep that looked appealingly from side to side, bleating piteously. Standing straight as a flaming hollyhock, her arms behind her back, she watched the inevitable come to pass. As the shearers dragged the sheep from the pens and adroitly threw them, her breath came hard and fast; she flushed while the bright shears met in the soft fleece, which fell in white heaps about the terrified animals. She waited while several were shorn, branded, and set free; then, as though feeling the shame of the denuded, took herself off. The sight had hurt her to the extinction of her high spirits. So Life treated you so.

She lay down on the tussocks, and, supporting her head with her hands, looked steadily afar. She sought enlightenment. Her father had said that, were she a boy, she would have known all things almost immediately; that, being a girl, she would know a few things if she read a great deal. There—beyond the shimmering grass, over the far line of blue—were the things of which her father spoke!

He himself had seen those wonderful cities, and the people who did not milk cows and herd cattle or plough fields.

A lark carolled from the blue above, but Joan did not turn her eyes; she was satisfied that the best things were those that she had never yet seen, and of which she had heard but now.

It would take a long time to read about them, spelling frequently—also many days indoors. If she were a boy, she could go and see for herself. A girl might not follow her inclination to inspect personally. Still, she had a boy's name—was not she entitled to some of his prerogatives?

The blue borderland came nearer, the intervening plains dwindled. She was a good walker. It was possible—she could return on the morrow. The one sweet, desired, lawless act, and all afterwards for atonement! It is a time-honoured heresy; but the young sophist dimly perceived that Father and Satan made insubordination uncomfortable. She sighed, and, rising, determinedly set her back to temptation. Presently she looked back, just a glance while she moved on in the right direction; but finding progression difficult, feet moving in one direction with head turned in another, she stopped

again and turned, then set off at a full run towards degeneracy.

Rosy, panting, tingling with the delightfulness of rebellion, Joan came to a halt at last, and, with a little thrill at the suspicion, turned to see whether, perchance, Satan was in the rear. No, only the gold-flooded tussocks and the house roof, too indistinct to impress its claims. So she journeyed between two infinities—the past and the future; but what lay behind was despised because familiar.

A second halt, and the child was alone with the universe. All landmarks were obliterated except the western mountain range. The space was speechless—no sound yet from the city. Joan felt no fear, only a little wonder that the world was so large. She kept up a little jog-trot, her footfalls falling noiselessly upon the turf; but when she had grown weary, she was astonished to find the margin of earth and sky no nearer, only more misty and indistinct. She stood alone in unbroken silence and mysterious shadow, and sighed to see the last glow of sunlight fade in the West. Her own sigh startled her; she thought someone was standing near her, and, when she had satisfied herself that this was not so, regretted her isolation. At home at this

hour, Mercy the energetic was making tea, and Mother the tender waiting for Father to put on his slippers before pouring it out. How nice some tea would be; she was very thirsty. She wiped a tear out of each eye with her handkerchief—Joan was dainty in her ways—then, with a fresh spurt of determination, went on again. The tears were born of the flesh; her will was subdued, not conquered.

With sunset there came from the east a heavy, damp mist, which brought a cold breath with it from the sea. This deepened presently almost to a drizzle, and Joan's curls clung damply to her forehead, her eyelashes were so moist that her vision was blurred, and at last she could see no farther than her own inquisitive nose.

"I'm not crying," she said out loud; "it's the rain blowing into my eyes."

But her assertion sounded so bold, uttered in such appalling silence and darkness, that it frightened her. Her feminine instinct to have the last word was amply gratified, and she said no more, not even to herself, but crouched down upon the wet tussocks, a very damp, cold, limp piece of baffled humanity, suffering the agonies of first defeat.

She strained her eyes through the gloom for the lights of the city. Suddenly she gave a little low ecstatic cry. There *was* a light, a red, glowing light that burned out of the darkness, disappeared, reappeared, and broadened to a flash, that swept the plains like a search-light. Joan's eyes ached beholding it. She jumped to her feet, startled by a long, loud, but tremulous "Coo-ee!"

Her heart thumped in her ears so that she could not hear her own faint reply. Then the gladdening flash again nearer, and the music of hoof-beats upon the turf. Another flash revealed Father on his old cob. He held a lantern in his left hand above his head. He wore neither leggings nor topcoat, for he had ridden forth hurriedly, but over the saddle hung a thick grey shawl.

For the space of a moment the lantern rays shone on a small figure with outstretched arms and scared, uplifted face, and upon the man's drawn, furrowed cheeks. His mouth was set like the mouth of a man who has ridden in the teeth of death. He lowered the lantern with a catch of the breath like a sob, and, setting it upon the ground, bent one knee and carefully wrapped the shawl about Joan; then, extinguishing the light,

remounting, set the child before him, and without a word turned the horse's head. The strong, encircling arm trembled, and closed round the soft body with a tightening grip. Presently he muttered to himself:

"Seven years last autumn I rode this same way to receive her. . . . It might so be that she got lost. P'raps she didn't want to go. . . . It's been rough on Mother. . . . O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is gracious, and His mercy endureth for ever."

The windows of the farm-house shone like a beacon; torches and lanterns flared in the mist, and cast grotesque and gigantic shadows of men and women on the walls of the barns, appearing there for a moment with mocking gestures, then disappearing to be seen later among the dark trees of the bush.

Mercy, with pale cheeks, believed she knew, and peered with frightened eyes into the gorge, flashing a lantern across its gleaming waters, craning her neck and starting at every dark object that obstructed the stream.

At the boundary gate a woman stepped out of the darkness. She had listened with heavy, choking

heart-throbs to the fast-approaching hoof-beats. Tom reined in with a jerk. He could not see Janet's face, but he discerned it with his mind's eye. She put out both hands and touched the unresisting bundle in her husband's arm.

"Twice given," she whispered hoarsely. Then she cried gladly, "Twice given!"

When Tom dismounted she clutched at the bundle, made to carry it into the house, turned at the threshold, and, before the group of eager faces about the doors, kissed "the master" on the mouth.

The young prodigal had been warmly bathed, robed in white flannel, fed and cried over by Mother, and blessed for being still alive by Mercy, who shook her head the next moment, and declared, without explanation, that it was "disheartling," and was now standing on the white sheep-skin rug in front of the fire, directing occasional side-glances at Father, who sat in his chair, smoked, and saw nothing. Mother, anxious concerning his behaviour, seeing that the child's looks were wasted on him, did not attempt to rouse him. He roused presently of his own accord, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, put it away carefully, then looked at Joan steadily.

"Speak up, young maid ; answer fair. Did you, or did you not, mean to run away from me an' Mother ?"

Joan straightened herself, slipping her arms behind her in a way she had when she meant business. Two pairs of grey eyes watched the situation without blinking — eyes very like each other.

"Why, Father," besought Janet, hovering near in trepidation, "sure-ly you're glad enough—"

"Hush up," said Tom peremptorily, without a flinch in his gaze.

Janet hushed up, and Joan nodded vigorously—one nod ; her mood was not superlative.

"You meant to run away? Speak ; don't nod your head like a pony."

"Of course she didn't," faltered Mother, who was afraid she did.

"*Hush* up!" commanded Tom.

Joan rubbed one bare, swollen foot against the other, lifted one damaged member and glanced at it, then met her father's eyes again.

"I runned away."

Janet gave a startled cry, and sank into her rocker. What would happen now ?

"Mother, I'm surprised at you!" reproved father, "when I ask you to hush *up*."

He had risen from his chair, and stood with his legs apart and his hands thrust into his pockets looking from his height down upon the foot-or-two-so-many-inches of white-robed humanity much as he would have regarded some unknown species of duckling, seriously, and with great concern. He felt at sea.

"You ran away of your own free will an' accord from 'ome an' me an' Mother?"

"Yes, Farver."

"Why?"

"To see the *world*," said the young explorer, with the intonation of a Cockney.

"The dear innocent!" came from the rocker.

"Look, Mother," remarked Father, so quietly that she knew he meant it, "if you *won't* hush up, you an' me will have a difference. —So you were off to see the world, were you? Do you think the world wanted to see you?"

Joan rubbed her wounded foot again, then shook her head.

"Not it, my girl," responded Tom. "The world ain't kind to innocents. 'Ome's the place for them."

Say you won't run away no more. On the honour of John Jefferies—gentleman—an' that you're sorry you ever ran away at all."

Joan stood on both feet, tilted on her toes, flushed, but said nothing. Tom waited. Still no answer. He looked at the rod. A deep groan of smothered anguish escaped Janet, and Joan burst out :

"No, no, Farver. No, no, I ain't sorry, 'cause I liked to do it. I won't do it no more ; but I ain't sorry !"

Tom's face softened, and Joan's quivered ; Mother's was invisible behind her apron.

"Do you mean," asked Tom, as though he wanted to know, "that you're sorry that you can't be sorry?"

"No," said straightforward Joan, "I ain't sorry, 'cause I ain't sorry. I'm sorry 'cause I must stay at home an' read."

"In that case," responded Father, stooping to lift her in his arms, "you come to bed without kissing your mother, an' stay there without her till you are. I can't have no bad little maids in my house, that 'ud sooner run away an' leave her mother than learn her book."

Tom left the child unkissed, but only to the outside of the door. There he waited and listened.

"Oh, dear me," he presently heard, "I can't do what I want. I must—do—what I must. I must do't, an' I don't want to."

Every long-drawn breath from the bed stabbed him; there was a stifled sob outside the door in sympathy with every sob within.

"It's discipline, dearie," he whispered.

"I must do't, an' I don't want to. . . . It hurts to do it. . . . I'll be good now, Farver."

When Tom trusted himself to enter the room, the child lay quietly upon the soft pillows sleeping; long-drawn, spasmodic sighs occasionally convulsing her soft, round throat. Her face was wet with tears, and one small cheek lay upon the forehead of the old battered wooden doll he had brought home that first night he forgot a present for Janet. He gazed till his own breast heaved.

"Ah, God!" he cried, as he sank upon his knees, "what are we, when all's said an' done, but rebellious, hurt children? An' when we're sore an' isolated by reason of our sin an' sorrow, it is by Thy mercy we can hug our toys. We sleep, most of us, with faces wet with tears; but we ain't so lonely claspin' our battered playthings."

Father and Mother had been abed an hour, each

pretending to sleep, when a knock came at their door, low down.

"I'm good now," came from a short, white-robed figure that stood there when the door was pushed ajar.

"You shouldn't leave your bed ; you'll catch your death, my lamb," said Mother.

"Climb up," said Father ; "there's room here between."

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER THE PLOUGH.

JOAN respected the man who had conquered her—and kept him up to the mark.

“Not so fast, my good girl ; Rome wasn’t built in a day!” he remonstrated, as she galloped through the information at his command. He desired that his testimony should be honest, and was frequently seen under the shadow of a hayrick studying a dictionary ; a pocket encyclopedia bulged from his coat while he rode round his boundaries. He was heard reciting Wordsworth, with his eye on the threshing-machine. The vowels exercised his soul ; he felt the “h’s” heavy on his conscience.

Once started, Joan took to the higher education of women, “like a duck to water,” Janet declared. But Joan found Father out before long, as he himself suspected, suggesting the “h” in a matter-of-fact way, and substituting “ing” for “ink.”

At the end of the week Joan's manner was slightly patronising ; but Sunday counteracted any degenerate tendency—for on Sunday Father preached.

Father, pursuing his idea of training the young idea, determined upon a Sunday service in the barn. This barn was "an upper chamber," reached from the farm-yard by an awkward flight of wooden steps. It was a long, cool building, redolent of wheat and chaff, sacks of which made comfortable pews. The dairies were near, and in summer, scents of clover and new milk wafted through the open door ; and Father had frequent telling illustrations to his sermons.

Standing at his desk—constructed from packing cases—in black cloth and white linen, his massive head thrown back, his bronzed, rugged face glowing with enthusiasm, he might have roused spiritual energy in a larger and more callous band than the farm men and women who made his flock. He had the orator's art, though not the scholar's knowledge. He knew by instinct just how to touch the matter in hand, and, with the poet's gift, raised it on high for contemplation. He was unaffectedly in earnest. Prosaic at each new start, but gaining refreshment as he went, his eloquence became elastic, and stretched farther and higher than he knew.

Janet listened with one eye on the poultry and the young person who had usurped the place of the second John the Baptist, and sat during these meetings on a flour-barrel, looking capable of every sweet and heavenly emotion. Her eyes wandered during prayers, but the moment Father's discourse commenced, her attention was arrested; and as stiffness slipped away from the preacher, she kept him company—intellectual company. When he made a point, her cheeks would flush and her eyes brighten. Once when he wanted a word, she called it out to him unconsciously. On Sunday she gave herself to the sensuous pleasure of Father's oratory; on Monday she read the Scriptures, critically, filling in all Father's situations, book in hand reverting to his illustrations.

It was Janet who discovered the truth.

"I would like that she loved us more," she whispered to herself, "an' admire words less."

Mother was jealous of the books, and strove to interest Joan in the kitchen. But she turned gently from Mother and the sewing, and scornfully from Mercy and the dairy, converting the attic into picture-gallery and study. Every old newspaper

stored there, and Father's books, were read indiscriminately.

The attic ran from east to west of the house, a window at each end. The east window gave an extensive view of the sheep plains. From it Joan watched the sun rise from the unknown world; the west saw it set behind mysterious mountains.

Mercy secretly gloated that Mother and child "were not what you'd call wrapped up in one another."

"It all comes with discontentment with the ways o' Providence," she told the cat.

The child had her inspired moments in the attic. Exempt from the common need of childhood—companionship and sympathy—she determined the form and method of her day under dominion of an idea or her own. She liked words; they afforded her an inexplicable pleasure. She rolled the "r's" off her tongue instinctively, and with much confidence as she read—always aloud, although there were none to hear her, save herself; to miss the sound of the language would be a loss.

In the open air she caught the spirit of the poets, and read glint of sunlight and grey of twilight into a line, and caught the tinkle and rush of water. On

winter evenings, to cajole Father from the harmonium, she read aloud, and, if Mother's tears refused to flow, and Father stared hard into space, she knew there was something wrong with the reading, and tried it over again in the attic.

"Joan Jefferies must go to Girton," announced Father, in Joan's twelfth year.

For the first time in her life Janet disliked Tom.

"What do we want with a Girton girl at a farm?" she asked him. "What we want is a homely person who knows how to make pies and look after the linen. A house an' a husband an' a baby gives a woman more instruction than all the books in the world. And there ain't no Girton nearer than Christchurch," proceeded Janet—"more than a day's journey by coach; an' what will the maid do so far from home? *I've* heard of them Girton women! They've a deal of knowledge about the bowels of the earth, but are surprised if heavy pastry gives a child the stomach-ache. What does a bonny lass need to know about the orbit of the stars, so long as she can regulate the course of her own household?"

"Don't you take on, my dear," said Tom. "Joan Jefferies is a gentleman. She'll do us credit. Whatever her hand findeth to do she'll do it manfully."

“I don’t believe you’ve got over the notion that she’s a boy,” retorted Janet. “She’s a woman child, dear, an’ sooner or later she’ll discover to which half o’ creation she belongs. I’d have been proud of a man child, if he’d been a he; but bein’ a she I’d take shame of it. It’s all the fault of that blessed christening.”

CHAPTER VII.

SOWING SEED.

FROM their high tower the cathedral bells rang out sweetly over Christchurch—city of the plains. The commercial square, in the centre of which the cathedral stands, was given over to the quiet of evening, the broad paved streets and tall stone buildings looking rather ghostly in the twilight, for as yet the street lamps were unlighted. Amid the greyness, the cathedral, lit for service, stood out boldly from the dun canvas of its enclosure, its open door and coloured windows glowing ruddily. The great cross on the spire, the domes and spires of many suburban churches winked at one another irreverently in the after-sunset beams. The high tree-tops still shimmered, but the Avon that embraced the city flowed black and steely beneath overhanging willows; and far beyond the environing plains were grey, except where cut by foam-crested

torrents or lighted by the flashing lamps of the incoming express, which, tearing over their expanse rent their silence with piercing shrieks.

Christchurch, the commercial centre of New Zealand's finest agricultural district, has retained from its foundation a distinctly English educational and ecclesiastical atmosphere. At the West End are to be found stately and picturesque colleges; sylvan residences of church dignitaries and professors fringe the river in the vicinity of the famous museum and parks; fashion, science, art, and religion are neighbours to the park gates, and the added charm of quiet reigns throughout, scarcely broken save by the souging of wind among great green branches, and the deep-toned voice of a turret clock.

Facing the river and broad green belt where the oak avenue terminates in a river-side path, stood Girton College, a rambling old cottage with dormer windows and verandas. The college proper, connected by a covered way, was built on a strictly scientific and hygienic plan; the house was made to be cosy in. It stood in a large overgrown garden; the porch so covered with vines that, but for the glowing red lamp that hung over it, it would have

been hard to find the door, with its burnished brass plate and inscription :—

“G. Goodyear, M.A., Principal.”

Miss Goodyear was sitting in her study, in a Russian-leather arm-chair, resting. The walls of the room were lined with bookcases, the floor overlaid with a thick carpet of a rich crimson colour; curtains of the same hue hung at the windows, the lower panes of which were hand-painted, the panels of the door showing the same design of hand-painted flowers. A bear-skin rug was spread before the gas stove on the tiled hearth, another was thrown over a low couch; several deep-seated chairs were scattered about; a few exquisite water-colours stood on ivory easels on the mantel-board, with a few photographs. Near the hearth and Miss Goodyear's chair was a handsome carved oak reading-table. On this a green-shaded reading-lamp was burning. A porcelain vase, filled with red and white roses, stood near the lamp.

Gertrude Goodyear rose, and with an easy, slow movement, crossed to the bookcases, touching a volume here and there with the light, lingering touch of a mother caressing her baby's hair. She was dressed in a black garment—a blending of academi-

cal robe and tea-gown. She stood, tall, slender, and square, with a dignity of carriage almost stately. Her age it was impossible to tell; when she smiled she appeared little more than a girl; as she stood now, her pale face impassive, her firm mouth closed, three lines of concentration and study showing between her dark, straight brows, she looked thirty at least. Her chief beauty was her hair, which, cut short like a boy's, waved in half curls of purest gold—every separate hair a separate glory—about her broad forehead and small, transparent, shell-like ears. Her eyes were also handsome, or would have been, but for the quizzical glance that shot from their blue-grey depths, and disturbed their grave serenity. Her throat was rounded and statuesque, its beauty set off by a deep point-lace collar. The neck, hair, and ears were so truly feminine that they seemed at variance with the square shoulders and the firm lines of the chin and lips, and the lordly air that fought with charm and grace. In one light she was seductive, and invited caresses; the next her manner signified, "I pray you have me excused." It has been said that intellect is aristocratic. Miss Good-year had the aristocracy of intellect. She had pretensions to learning, combined with some natural

wit, and counted those of inequality who were dull and uneducated. She created much amusement among her set by her satires and caricatures of the women of fashion, the purse-proud and commonplace women who darned the stockings and had babies. Of man—Miss Goodyear thought of him with a capital A—she had absolutely nothing to say. She smiled when he was mentioned in the abstract—a slow, deep, lingering smile, and invited him collectively to her lectures and at homes; but admitted individually to her domestic hearth—never, unless he chanced to be a lion or a hero. Perhaps in her fight up from poverty and obscurity, she had found man in the abstract, collectively and individually, her hill difficulty, which having surmounted with considerable toil, she had never forgiven for her aching feet. There might have been a love episode—she never said. She made no complaint whatever; she had won her woman's guerdon, and she smiled her inscrutable smile.

The sound of cab wheels caused Miss Goodyear to lift her head expectantly. Presently the brass knocker shook the door; loud revibrations echoed through the house.

Miss Goodyear turned on the electric light, dispelling the partial darkness of the room.

"Mr., Mrs., and Miss Jefferies," announced the maid; and Father, Mother, and their only daughter Joan were ushered in.

The brilliant light dazzled Father's eyes; shading them with his hand, as though from the rays of the rising sun, he discerned a lady in the radiance, and bowed with the gravity of a magistrate; then, a sudden impulse of goodwill and admiration breaking through his impressions of polite deportment, held out his hand. Miss Goodyear let her slender, strong hand rest for a moment in the large brown palm, then advanced to greet Janet.

With simple and undisguised satisfaction, Father undertook the introductions:

"Miss G. Goodyear—my wife, Mrs. Thomas Jefferies, and Joan John Jefferies of Otira Farm, Canterbury."

Miss Goodyear bowed. It was a moment before she raised her head; when she did so the sad, grey eyes were sparkling.

"I expected you by to-night's express," she said quietly, drawing forward a chair for Janet, and at the same time taking in every detail of the Quakerish figure.

Father refused a seat, and stood on the hearth-rug, a tall, bronzed figure demanding attention, his grey tweed suit smelling of new-mown hay. The night was warm, but he wore a knitted comforter of white wool—Janet distrusted the air of cities—and the fringed ends hung almost to the carpet. His massive grey head was lifted proudly, as though conscious of his important part in the bestowal of such a pupil as Joan upon the learned lady. He did not feign a mild interest in the occasion so important to himself and Janet, and he was bound already by friendly bonds to the instructress who was to “rub the rust off” Joan. He smiled benignly, as a generous-hearted person who bestows a favour.

Miss Goodyear felt conscious that the position of recipient, though not the spirit, was being forced upon her. The shadow of authority passed again into her face, the expression of intellectual solitude into her eyes. The gratitude should be theirs, that she had renounced for life sexual and maternal joys, ease and peace, to train other people's children to their fullest responsibilities.

While Tom talked—he never found himself embarrassed in any circumstances, playing his simple part honestly, giving everyone credit for feeling his

own identical interest in it—the tragi-comic side of her situation struck Miss Goodyear anew. Here was another uncultivated mind brought to her for culture; later the parents would return for their child and boast of her ability. She would be forsaken and forgotten. The next moment she soared quickly and high away from the hurtful, embittering thought. Her cause was woman's cause; every fresh thinker among women helped forward their emancipation. While she was striving unconsciously to crush down emotion, and see only with her intellect, Mother, who sat watching the grave face attentively, decided, "No, she didn't much like her. She was neither a natural woman, nor domestic." Then, her eyes falling upon a volume on the bookshelves, entitled "Bacon," and another "Lamb," endeavoured to readjust her first impression.

By a quick, unreasoning intuition, Janet realised that this woman was destined to be her rival in the admiration of her child, for she had caught Joan's look of interest, and seen Miss Goodyear's glance travel slowly from the brown curling head and daintily proportioned figure back to the piquant, sun-tinted face.

"Ah!" she exclaimed enigmatically, and, with a quick movement, stretched out her hand.

Joan placed her small palm in it, and glanced up into the eyes looking down with a gaze as steady.

"Make a scholard of her, ma'am, make a scholard of her!"

Miss Goodyear was very tired. She wished they would go; but she kept her attitude of courteous attention.

Father glanced at Mother, who was struggling to keep her face calm for the parting, then shifted from one foot to the other, and, twirling his wide-awake in his hands, said, with a deprecating glance, and voice of courage :

"With your permission, we will now commit the stranger into safe keeping."

Miss Goodyear bowed. She gave the great rough man credit for a pretty compliment. Then an unprecedented thing occurred. He drew the little girl into his encircling arms and knelt, Janet beside him. Miss Goodyear, embarrassed, stood, one hand resting lightly upon the reading-desk. She wrestled for a moment with a feeling of vexation, when the meaning of the singular scene came to her. The

trio were at their devotions. The littleness of indignation passed when Father spoke. Miss Goodyear's embarrassment changed to attention when, tremulous and shaken with his own petition, the man's voice faltered :

"When we are farthest from home, we are most akin to Thee," he concluded, "for Thou wert a wanderer, O Son of Man. Silence an' solitude echo Thy sorrow, for Thou didst dwell in the wilderness."

"Eloquent!" thought Miss Goodyear.

And when she bowed Tom out there was a subtle change in her demeanour that those who knew her would have pronounced respect. She stood patiently by while the farewells were said.

Father, clearing his throat, for it had grown suddenly hoarse, said :

"Little maid, be a gentleman."

"I sha'n't tuck you in to-night," said Mother tremulously. "Come, Father."

Father's voice was loud to the gate, and loud for some distance down the quiet street.

When it had died away, Miss Goodyear returned to the study.

Joan had sunk into an easy-chair, and was leaning

back among the cushions. Her brows were puckered, and lips compressed, but no sound escaped them.

Miss Goodyear glanced at the small forlorn-looking figure, then crossed to Joan's chair. She noted the paling cheeks and the dark circles beneath the closed eyes, that were made by unshed tears.

"You don't cry," she said a little wonderingly.

Joan's large eyes opened.

The two stared at one another.

"Do you?" asked the small girl, in a toneless voice.

Miss Goodyear was surprised once more to-night.

"I do—occasionally," she admitted, as to an equal.

"So do I," responded Joan, sitting bolt upright; "but not when I get something I want very much."

The perplexed expression deepened upon Miss Goodyear's face.

"This," explained Joan, waving towards the shelves.

"Ah, I understand!" rejoined the woman, with spontaneous interest, a faint flush mounting to her cheeks. She bent forward her body from the waist,

and asked eagerly, and yet with slight hesitation, "You find the exchange of home and parents . . . for books . . . easy?"

"No," thundered Joan, "I do not; it is not true; but one must give something always for the thing one wants."

Miss Goodyear turned off the electric light and sat down near the reading-table, and, leaning her chin upon her hand, looked steadily at her new pupil.

"Who told you?" she asked.

"I know," affirmed Joan; "to gather small fruit one must be pricked; to get at the large fruit one must climb."

Miss Goodyear slowly nodded her head, still with her hand supporting her chin, looking intently at Joan meanwhile.

"You are right," she said presently, "and if you want to achieve take no notice of outside distractions and hindrances. Many see the goal afar off; but it is the getting there that proves the individual. Thousands start—only one here and there reaches the goal. Of such the world cries 'He is a genius'; but his genius consists not so much in the strong pull as in the long pull." Her eyes were not looking at Joan now, but through her and afar off,

seeing things that the child had not yet seen. "Almost everyone is capable of a sudden rousing—a big effort either for honour, or affection, or ambition's sake; but, after the first glamour and enthusiasm have passed, the long, silent pull in cold, common sense is a rarer thing."

She meditated for a time in utter forgetfulness of the unaccustomed presence of the child, who sat and watched her, half-faint with the mingled sensations of hunger, home-sickness and a strange new sense of fascination.

"I find the quality of continuity rare," she reiterated dreamily. "Those who will reach the ultimate leave much good company behind."

Then, suddenly rousing, she became aware of a small, pale, pained face.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked quickly.

"I think I should like my supper and then to go to bed," said Joan, with trembling lips.

Miss Goodyear rose hurriedly, and rang the bell.

"Yes, of course. I beg your pardon. I forgot. I am sometimes absent-minded and preoccupied, I fear. My pupils return to their homes after we have finished our day's work. Our association is purely mental. Bring supper," she said to the maid; then

turning to Joan, she asked doubtingly, "What did they give you at home for supper? Your mother seemed anxious about your physical well-being, and I have never had a girl—a child—living with me before. What do you usually eat?"

Miss Goodyear's eyebrows had contracted with anxiety.

"Oh, anything," answered Joan wearily. "Chicken or duck, or ham, or things."

Miss Goodyear's brow cleared.

"Yes, thanks, Ann," she said to the girl, who stood respectfully awaiting her orders; "the chicken, and things."

When the tray came, Miss Goodyear waited upon Joan almost humbly, and spoke only once during the meal.

"Ah! fresh bread was prohibited, I remember," she said, putting away the new roll, and cutting from a stale loaf.

At the conclusion of the meal, Miss Goodyear asked abruptly:

"Is it your usual custom to engage in devotional exercise before retiring? I mean—do you pray?"

Joan nodded.

Miss Goodyear looked anxious.

“ I think,” she said, “ I will limit my instruction—supervision—to intellectual and material interpretation ; the spiritual is, I fear, somewhat out of my sphere.”

Joan looked in nowise distressed, and followed Miss Goodyear upstairs.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GREEN BLADE.

MISS GOODYEAR'S absent-mindedness was not chronic, but an indulgence for weary hours.

At the head of her school she was "all there," as Janet expressed it. Her leading characteristic was concentration; *now* was her motto—her creed labour. The satire she levelled against incompetence put indolence to rout. She roused passion for achievement; do, and do thoroughly, was the atmosphere she generated.

There was something of grandeur in her acceptance of labour; she thought it was the only justification of existence; failure was a sadder word to her than death. She had power, influence, admiration; all sorts of people found her useful—but she had no love. She had roused a passion in more than one man—the passion to subdue. No man had ever longed to serve her. All valued her approba-

tion, and she reigned supreme in her school, on which she lavished the care that mothers give their children.

The chief hall of the college was lofty and light ; at one end was a small stage, near which was Miss Goodyear's desk.

On the morning after Joan's arrival, Miss Goodyear stood at this desk, the sunlight glowing over her shining hair and sombre gown. She had just introduced Joan to the school, and was uncertain where to place her. Joan, interested and excited, but unembarrassed, awaited events. It was the morning for literature, and, in inward trepidation, Miss Goodyear placed a copy of Hood's poems in Joan's hands, open at "Eugene Aram." Joan scanned the page swiftly, and, with a sudden flushing of her cheeks, began.

As she read, a deep silence fell upon the room. Surprise was soon swallowed up in interest. The stranger was forgotten in the subject.

Miss Goodyear, with her eyes fixed upon her, also passed beyond observance.

When Joan ceased, there was a moment's silence, then a storm, as of hail, made by the clapping of hands.

When the illusion had passed, Miss Goodyear

became aware that a small figure in a sailor suit of serge was standing, with pale face and shining eyes. She stepped from her pedestal, and shook hands with the country-bred pupil.

After that day she tasked Joan severely; and the spoilt child, whose wishes had hitherto been consulted, felt abashed at her own ignorance, and ground away doggedly at the tasks which elbowed one another. She was debarred poetry, and kept to the hard, dry mechanism of fact. Pulled from the sensuous and æsthetic, her days were so many geometrical figures. Her performance must be exact, finished, clear. She was taught to reconcile drudgery with intellectual freedom.

When first Miss Goodyear disentangled Joan from her educational system, and realised her as an individual, her lonely rooms began to brighten. She remembered old games, and surprised herself with sudden bursts of laughter, and found that the hours of relaxation had a savour that did not come wholly of accomplished duty. At first she fought with this feeling, as a sentiment that would interfere with absolute concentration to her life-task. Miss Goodyear had rigorously held herself to impartiality and justice; no one of her pupils had hitherto been

favoured or defrauded by even a wish ; but once or twice of late the Principal of Girton College had detected herself hoping for honours for Joan not justly due. The discovery appalled her. She concluded that she was overworked, and losing nerve control ; but when she found herself listening for the girl's quick, light footsteps with heart as well as ears, she knew that she had grown fond of her.

Before the college, the most rigorous discipline was kept up—no familiarity was permitted or taken ; but in the house, the diligent and exemplary pupil whistled, and Miss Goodyear called her “ Johnnie.”

Janet found her out.

“ It isn't often that I express an opinion of my own,” she remarked to Father sarcastically, “ but I really do think that, when a woman has mastered everything there is to master in the way of scholarship, an' thinks that babies are only a special provision of Providence for them to teach, it's a little ridiculous to fall in love with another woman's child.”

Miss Goodyear suspected that Janet had found out her secret and tried to conciliate her. But Janet held the whip. Possession was nine points of the

law, and she reminded Miss Goodyear that Joan was hers, belonged by right to her inalienably.

"When the maid comes home," she would say, her expression of righteous cause hardening her soft features, her truthful eyes wilfully ignoring the pain in the paling cheek of the other.

Once, after one of these scenes, Joan sat wistfully looking into the fire. Three years had passed since her first occupation of that chair; yet Miss Goodyear could never tell whether she *cared* to be with her or not. There had been an inconsistency in her dealings with the girl. She had taught the superiority of the intellect over the emotions, and—

"Well," she cried, with an intonation of repressed passion, "why don't you say how glad you will be when Girton is a phase of the past?"

"Because it would not be true," answered Joan calmly, putting her head on one side, bird fashion.

Miss Goodyear felt the indignity of her position; she had been tricked into petulance. She turned away to her books.

"I hope you will let me stay on with you," said Joan gently.

"Let you!" exclaimed Miss Goodyear, with some bitterness, although she laughed lightly. "I wish I

could believe that . . . the thought of study . . . filled your heart; that you would have no power . . . to leave it."

Emotion after emotion passed through Miss Goodyear—memory of past triumphs, of temptations to half measures resisted; but the ache at the bottom of this perpetual search disquieted her—Joan's complacency disturbed her. Had this calm girl that impersonality of temperament which fitted her absolutely for the student's life? Was she exempt from that distracting element of sentiment that (she blushed guiltily) hindered her? Was she herself only fitted for the common destiny after all? Had she reached her limit of intellectuality? If so, could she not triumph in one mind?—snatch one complete success from many comparative failures?

On one point Miss Goodyear could move her to gratitude and delight—by permitting her to read. This she occasionally did—sometimes for the pleasure of listening, sometimes to win an expression of endearment.

One night, when Miss Goodyear and Joan were seated together in the study, the former showed signs of weariness. She had opened more than one book

and returned it to the bookcase, when she said suddenly :

“ Take me out of myself, Joan. Read.”

Joan, flushing with pleasure, reached for Tennyson, and at that moment Professor Stanton was announced—a man of much consideration, and occupier of a chair at the adjacent university. Joan, among other aspirants for matriculation, had lately passed into his hands ; but, although she had been presented, it was not until that night that she became actually visible upon his horizon ; he never *saw* her till she gave a passage from Tennyson, and then he perceived upon the hearth-rug a slender girl, whom, in the nervousness of the moment, he mistook for a boy—a bright-faced youth who put his own elocution to the blush. The poetry took such hold on him, and carried him so far away, that he lost sight of the reader again immediately ; and when he came back to the fact of her existence, he discerned that she was a girl. The confusion of this discovery betrayed the fact that he had a pulse, for he flushed. Hitherto Joan had regarded him as a mind—she had not associated with him the primal force of blood.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PROFESSOR.

STANLEY STANTON, professor of English literature, was a man of thirty, tall and slender of figure, with the slight stoop of the student. His face was long, narrow, clean-shaven, and smooth; his features marked by a classical delicacy; his forehead was prominent and full, attesting to intellectual development. His hair, which he wore rather long, was light-brown in colour, abundant, and of exquisite fineness; his dark blue eyes were mild and gentle, their glance being exceedingly difficult to arrest, for they were usually gazing afar off with an expression of profound melancholy and abstraction. This absent look was greatly attributable to nervousness. Mankind, in the concrete form, distracted and perplexed him; he had devoted his youth to the study of human nature as presented by the classical masters. Rarely did living, breathing contemporaries stir or stimulate; he sought companionship and

inspiration in the creations of the poets. In their company he was at ease and judicial, quick to discover alike merit and improprieties. He was never insensible to literary excellence, and discerned with acuteness ; but when flesh and blood took the place of imagery, he was confounded, confused, and silent, any momentary pleasure he derived from passing intercourse being more than paid for by the reaction of disappointment. His sensibility to excellence had become so abnormal by close study of the ideal, that the contradictions and inconsistencies of human nature disgusted him, and his fastidiousness made him unsociable, although naturally of a gracious and amiable disposition.

His elevation of thought and freedom from vice, coupled with his reputation for learning, had established for him a position at college which made his dicta grateful. He regarded his class as a mental receptacle in which to cast the fruit of his researches. He treated the receptacle with liberality, enriching it with the picked product of his industry and scholarship. He was a devout and large-minded worshipper of genius and talent, and his few friends were among those who were, at least, as fair scholars as himself. General acquaint-

tance with all sorts and conditions of men was repugnant to him, not from arrogance but inadaptability; for he was never able to dissociate the individual from his ideas. The intellectual force was the man to him; and he would have been distressed to learn that Homer's head had ever endured the indignity of aching. His own reserve and solitude protected him from criticism; his finest parts came only under view; his brilliant qualities were public property; the man was undiscussed because unknown. Whether his innermost heart and mind held vague longings and unsatisfied desires, as the innermost heart of most men do, none questioned. He was startlingly punctual; the moment the university clock sounded the last stroke of seven, before the tower had ceased to vibrate from the bell, he appeared, silent as an apparition, through the doorway beside his platform; and at the last stroke of eight disappeared as silently. The information he condensed into that hour continued to be a marvel to his students.

When his eyes fell upon Joan, with an expression that told that his brain went with them, she felt that a personal episode might be recorded in the memoranda of her day.

She read a suggestion of interest in the purple-blue eyes.

"You are a careful student, and possess artistic observation," said the Professor.

Joan flushed with pleasure, and Miss Goodyear with vexation. Should the girl discover the power of her art, she would be allured from the emotionless and systematic part allotted to her.

Joan was holding her head proudly under the Professor's praise, her physical beauty heightened by excitement and anticipation. In a moment Miss Goodyear had drawn off the Professor's attention mastering it and riveting it upon herself. She regarded this man as a pure apostle of learning; there was no coquetry in look or thought; his delicate austerity set him apart from sex. She feared nothing but the force of his dicta on the passion which slumbered, or only blazed fitfully, in the girl's mind.

So soon as the Professor could do so courteously, he turned again to Joan and questioned the method of her study—her first discovery of expression. She answered him promptly, with a communicativeness unusual with her, introducing the farm life in her replies; and Miss Goodyear noticed the Professor's

perplexity and surprise, which told his thought that the daintily-proportioned and intelligent girl before him was not a typical farm girl. He murmured some words from "The Miller's Daughter," and having found a precedent, his perplexity passed away, and he gave himself again to the subject that engaged them, glowing and expanding.

"I tried," said Joan, "to catch the harmonies of Nature, and read them into the poet's interpretation."

"—Interpretation!" echoed the Professor. He had an odd fashion, when following closely, of reiterating, in an undertone, the speaker's final words. It was always a sign that he was interested, and listening intently. He was sensitive and susceptible of impression, and this growing girl impressed him with her ardour. How had she, untaught, hit upon this illumination of expression, which had escaped the rigidities of his training? She had suggested a connection between sound and colour.

Joan, conscious of his changed demeanour, chatted on :

"I have promised Miss Goodyear faithfully," she was saying, when he interrupted her.

"Be accurate. There is fidelity of performance—none of promise. Read Miss Austen on the subject."

Joan was estranged and extinguished, and, while Miss Goodyear smiled, the girl flushed with humiliation. She resented being thrown back on dry technicalities.

Miss Goodyear soon had the Professor deep in metrical joys, and came up later from her intellectual plunge beautiful and glowing.

On leaving Miss Goodyear's house, Professor Stanton turned towards the river which ran in silver ripples beneath a spring moon. A mist hung about its waters enshrouding the willow-fringed banks in mystery, making distance indiscernible.

Among dark clumps of trees, red lights gleamed from many windows; the tall colleges and villa residences stood for all the world at that moment in Stanley Stanton's range of vision—physical and mental; there was a veil between earth and sky; the beyond was obliterated.

A clock in a neighbouring tower struck ten. The silvery chime was taken up by a deep bass, and passed on into the far distance, with echoes faint and few, leaving the silence tingling with sugges-

tions. The Professor looked at his watch instinctively, and returned it to his pocket, unconscious of the action ; paused, gazed into the vista of mistiness, and, finding it unenticing, turned towards one of the red brick houses near. Entering the lighted Gothic porch, he let himself in, and strode along the blue-and-white tiled hall, without a glance right or left, or the pleased dalliance of a man glad to be at home. His footsteps echoed, as footsteps do in an uninhabited house, and as one who receives a shock of loneliness he hurried up the polished stairs, unlocked a door, entered his study and shut the door to quickly, an unusual flurry apparent in his movements. He was impatient to shut himself in with himself—as impatient as though his social call had been a pilgrimage into misery.

He lighted the gas and glanced round, seeking familiar and beloved objects. Like Joan's garret, the room looked east and west. The intervening walls were lined with books, a huge desk standing in the centre of the room. The east window gave a view of the distant city, the lights of which twinkled like golden stars ; also of a row of detached villas, among them Girton College, and, at the end of the street, the spires of the university. The west window over-

looked the Avon, its serpentine course being traceable here and there, patches in silver between enshrouding foliage ; and beyond, level stretches of the tree-studded park.

The Professor gazed first from the east window, then crossed to the west. After a few minutes he returned to the eastern one. Finally his gaze was focussed to the red light in Girton Cottage porch, which, a little to his right, gleamed ruddily among the foliage upon the opposite side of the belt.

“An exquisite voice,” he murmured ; “passionate, delicate, refreshing as song. A fine instrument of expression. As an elocutionist she would take rank. Will Miss Goodyear introduce her to the public ? ”

There was no answer from the direction in which he gazed, and, finding scanty leisure from the calls of his profession, he seated himself at his desk. He headed a sheet of paper with the line, “City-born Poets.” But he did not add to it. The girl’s voice had him in toils. What music she extracted from words, and infused into them ! She was an interpreter of the poets. Did she approach them as men to be revered, or adopt their music as a strain best fitted for that instrument of hers ? Did she utilise them simply for sound effects, or approach them with

intellectual integrity? Her tones vibrated with artistic passion; they seemed an outpouring of tender comprehension. He sighed; his life had been a continual and futile effort for expression, but his critical faculty would permit him no satisfaction at any attempt made; ignorance and egotism threw no glamour over his work. Mediocrity he despised, and he dissected his own productions mercilessly, permitting them no public life. From boyhood his accumulative faculty had been remarkable. His study had been profound; but he had no inspiration, no creative power. He could sit in judgment, dissect, assimilate; but he could not *make*. To-night a girl had told him that he could not *realise*, that the lark only could interpret Shelley's "Skylark."

The vague aspiration of his youth had been utterance; in this hour this desire took inordinate proportions; that which had been of worth to him, that accuracy in which he prided, sank into insignificance; his knowledge seemed poor and mean. In this hour of intellectual anguish he would have bartered his accumulated learning for that enfranchisement of spirit, that freedom from bond and technicality which means speech. His eyes were

dulled with suffering, his nervous hand trembled as he drew Keats towards him. He read for a minute only, then hid his pale face in the volume. Was anything left to say? Had not all been expressed? Did not the perceptions of the masters link together all reasonings and conclusions of all time and space? Every graceful embodiment of an idea was old; there was nothing for the writer of to-day but a modified version of impressions received. What use in striving after originality? Was he not better employed as a student? Was not the passive attitude the only one left to literature?

With trembling hand he began to write. His theme required only accuracy; his mission was to convince, not charm. He was concerned with knowledge more than beauty.

When the dawn broke he was reading Jean Ingelow's "Honours."

"Still must I plod, and still in cities moil,
From precious leisure learned leisure far,
Dull my best self with handling common soil;
Yet mine those honours are.

"Mine they are called; they are a name which means
'This man has steady pulses, tranquil nerves.'
Here, as in other fields, the most he gleans
Who works and never swerves.

“We measure not his mind ; we cannot tell
What lieth under, over, or beside
The test we put him to : he doth excel,
We know, where he is tried ;
But if he boast some further excellence,
Mind to create as well as to attain—”

He closed the book hurriedly, and turned off the gas.

CHAPTER X.

A SWEET GIRL GRADUATE.

IN Joan's nineteenth year Father and Mother were bidden to her capping. Tom Jefferies felt himself the most remarkable man of his generation. Janet like a barn-yard fowl who had hatched an eagle, watched her chick straining for the peaks with unrest and apprehension.

Father received the letter at the township, and digested the great news contained in it while he rode homeward. On arrival he was calm and collected.

"Like a man who 'ad been rearin' Bachelors of Art from infancy," said Mercy ambiguously and gruffly.

But the cob could have revealed secrets had he been endowed with speech. He had heard a sob and more than one shout. The wind was smartish, the man said, and that accounted for his red eyelids.

Mother was taken unawares, and trembled, as it was impossible not to see; but, being a woman who could wait, stitched silently while Father embarked on the reading of the letter. He unfurled all his sails of emphasis, and finally came to port, hoarse with roaring, standing with his legs wide apart, and still wearing his outdoor clothing. His hair and coat were greyer, the lines in his face deeper; but he was hale, hearty, and enthusiastic as on the night on which the rusty bag upon his back had bulged with a skipping-rope and a doll. His face rekindled her drooping spirits. His belief in the best and strongest vanquished her timorous trembling. The woman pined. She grudged the years her child's education had stolen from her.

When her man had finished his say, Janet spoke.

"She'll come home now. There's nothing to keep the maid away longer."

A faint flush stole into her face, her eyes fixed upon her sewing. Tom looked hard at her.

"I don't know. If she can win more honour there, why shouldn't she bide?"

Tom had been drinking triumph, but he was not too dazed to see that Janet's head hung till it nearly touched her breast.

"It's hard on me," she said.

The needle clicked loudly in her seam.

"Look at Miss Goodyear. There's a woman devoted to woman's cause," urged Tom.

"I've no cause to look at Miss Goodyear, special," responded Janet tartly, tugging vigorously at a tangled thread. "It's my own child I'm wanting to see. I haven't set eyes on her, *without* Miss Goodyear, for more time than I care to count. It's hard on a mother to give up her child."

"Not if it's for the child's good."

"It's hard!"

Janet spoke as one who knew.

"You're no philosopher," said Tom.

"I married you to be a farmer's wife."

"An' did you never wonder what makes the autumn so still?"

Janet lifted her sad eyes interrogatively.

"Mother Nature is bereft of her young, my dear. The nests are empty. It's the pipin' of chicks, bleatin' of lambs, an' burstin' of buds that makes the voice of spring. You're a nice sort of a mother-bird, you are, to grudge the music of your little skylark to the world, because it won't sing in its nest."

"I'm all behind the times, I suppose," responded Janet. "But it comes natural to some mothers to philander with their babies. There's ambition mixed in a father's love. He don't separate himself from his child; he looks to it to carry on his plans and make good his failures, and transmit his name with credit."

"Our children are bone of our bone, an' flesh of our flesh," said Tom; "an' the Almighty set us adrift, an' said in effect—'See what you can do.' Our works do our Creator credit, an' our children's works do *us* credit," he went on, bringing his fist down upon the table with conviction. "Every time they do somethink honourable, they're lovin' us—provin' that we're grit, just as we prove the grit of our heritage when we act the man."

"I don't quite see that the children love us back that way."

"Back! Mother, I am surprised at you—I am! Back, ain't the orders to the race! Why, your own chickens teach you better. You'd think it a freak of nature if they didn't grow feathers an' crow their own crow."

When Father and Mother found themselves in town, they were lost in admiration of it, especially

the West End. Every edifice seemed a structure reared to talent and merit. Janet, in her lavender silk, clung to Tom's arm, and felt in him a blessing. He was quite at ease with the city and civilisation, and sustained himself like a traveller. In his best broadcloth he dreaded no light—he did not mind the whole world's knowing his identity; indeed, he feared lest, by some disastrous mistake, he should be taken for other than the father of Joan John Jefferies.

Joan received them graciously, with a little gush of courtesy, in which all passion was kept out of sight with a manner that hinted of distant revelations. She was a bright, piquant creature, a spoilt child, whose whims and moods changed twenty times a day, one phase of character appearing to atone for another's disappearance; yet always under this movement lurked an unknown quality, which seemed one hour to kneel with humility and the next to freeze with scorn.

In stature she was really below the middle height, but so daintily and perfectly proportioned that she gave the illusion of being taller than she was. She held her head with the pride and arrogance of youth, to whom no project seems impos-

sible—a shapely head, framed with short, clustering curls that fell over a serene, white brow. Her deep grey eyes fixed themselves upon Janet's face.

“How sweet you look, you Quakeress,” she said; and all Janet's pride rose up to meet the great occasion. She even watched her daughter side by side with the woman she had envied, and breathed freely. Miss Goodyear would understand that it was an awkward thing to come between mother and daughter.

Miss Goodyear was too much occupied to seem to have such desire. She received her guests with her slow, quiet courtesy. She looked at the father and mother of Joan with a scrutinising glance, which seemed to ask, “Have you come for her?” Then she turned to others, her head proudly poised upon her beautiful neck, as though her heart could swell with no pride that was not intellectual.

The night of the capping was one of wind and storm, but Father and Mother were too happy and proud to notice it. Mother propped herself against Father's shoulder and worshipped her girl, who was shut off from her by a sea of professors and black-gowned folk. Father applauded everything and everyone till his chest was sore, but he felt no

pain. The crowded hall was only a setting to his life's prize; his maid's success brought him joy that none had heart to rebuke.

After the capping, Miss Goodyear gave a supper. It was an immense moment when the farm couple found themselves among a learned, chattering group in the dining-room of Girton College. Joan presented them to several people, who covered them from top to toe with a glance and then turned away. At last she brought a man who stayed—a pale, meditative man who gazed afar off, while Joan said smilingly :

“Professor Stanton, my mother and father.”

Joan was flushed and radiant. She wore her academical gown, and held her head regally. This was sufficiently imposing; but she produced a profound impression on her parents' simple minds when she rested her hand familiarly upon the learned man's arm, and chatted to him with the ease of close acquaintanceship.

Father returned the Professor's bow, and deluged him with eloquence. Mother possessed herself sufficiently to curtsy, and to take pride in the crinkle of her silk. Joan stood by, dividing her watchfulness between her parents and the Professor. She

half smiled as she noted the purist's anguished contraction of brow at Father's pronunciation. The substance of the good-man's speech was disregarded because of the form. Tom, innocent of all thought of antagonism, gave vent to his imagination and knowledge; and Stanley Stanton, to whom substance was nothing without style, was becoming conscious of a desire to stop his ears, when Miss Goodyear asked him to take Janet into supper. Father followed, and seated himself in his rightful place on the other side of his wife, and talked across her. It might be vanity, but he couldn't address a professor every day.

Mother's appetite was satisfied with the tasteful arrangements of the table, and by the elegant little person who was distinguished by the seat of honour.

The Professor also glanced at Joan, then back to her father. Something baffled him. While he helped Mother to salad abstractedly, she heard him saying softly :

“ ‘I liked that way you had with your curls wound to a ball in a net behind. Your cheek was chaste as a Quaker girl's ’—I beg your pardon—salt? ”

Father supped substantially. The evening had

been sufficient to inspire him with hunger as well as eloquence. He had his hearers, for he was at all times a popular speaker. But his remarks, however, were directed exclusively to the learned gentleman, who did not hear them.

Miss Goodyear, at all events, was listening. She looked distinguished and handsome at the head of her table, and turned, with an unspeakable expression, from interested watching of the farmer to the farmer's daughter.

"Well, Gertrude?" asked Joan, in an undertone.

"You have not your father's gift of thinking, Johnnie. He can produce; you reproduce."

Joan flushed scarlet.

"Do you think I am likely to be spoilt? Do I need levelling?"

Their eyes met.

"Could you resign your audience? There is no sensuousness in strictly scientific knowledge. Take care, child, or you will become lost in your desire for appreciation."

"Am I vain?"

"Johnnie!" reproachfully.

"You imply it."

"Dear, you mistake."

After supper, and just at the moment when the Professor was at the highest pitch of abstraction, Father rose, and, with a profound bow, begged his hostess's permission to speak.

Miss Goodyear inclined her head, with a gracious smile, and squeezed Joan's hand surreptitiously under the table.

The Professor brought his eyes from the far distance and looked at Tom, much in the same way that he had looked at Joan for the first time attentively, as though for understanding. He himself abhorred public speaking; he rarely spoke in private, unless to the point. Unless a man had something really to say, speech was worse than futile. It was a perverted faculty. A man used his legs and arms for a purpose; he abused his tongue.

But Father *had* something to say. He was a very proud and grateful man that night—proud of his daughter, grateful to Miss Goodyear, thankful to Providence. He expressed this with an upright head and moist eyes, with rugged generosity and dignity, embellishing his speech with imagery that appealed to the imagination of an audience alien to his sentiments. With the orator's true power, he

subordinated his hearers ; fashioned their thought for the time being, and associated them with the subject in hand ; agitated and moved them till Tom Jefferies of Otira Farm and Joan, his daughter, seemed to be the most prominent and moving subjects of the time.

The Professor forgot the inexact expression in the freedom of the diction. The unfettered language moved. This was no mere mechanical effort, but spontaneous, artistic, mesmeric. The man of learning sighed. He would have given more than others knew to possess such power. Expression, which he found fugitive, courted this untaught man.

In the electric pause which followed Tom's speech, Joan, flushed, her large eyes sparkling, interposed :

" My friends will understand that my good father magnifies a very common everyday occurrence into an achievement. But, if I ever *do* attain success, I shall owe it to Miss Goodyear. I am lazy naturally—ask my mother."

She spoke in a quiet, conversational tone, and smiled archly at Janet in concluding. But in that moment all the light went out of the room for the jealous mother.

In the drawing-room the Professor asked Joan for a reading.

Since that first night, intimate as had been his acquaintance, Miss Goodyear had refused his repeated request. It distracted Joan's attention from her serious work, she said.

Joan's face quickened now at the request.

"Gertrude," she said in a low tone to Miss Goodyear, "give me your sympathy."

Miss Goodyear nodded, and, from her chair near the window, watched attentively. Thirty or forty persons were in the room, chattering and laughing, when the slender girl took her stand—was it instinct or design? Miss Goodyear wondered—near the Professor. She paled; her face glowed with purpose. She cast a rapid glance over her audience as she used to do at home; then, opening her Tennyson, began the story of *Dora*. It never could be a dead story, but it lived to-night with vital force.

A deep silence fell upon the assembly; brain and limb alike were held. Professor Stanton's face lit with an inner glow. His eyes watched Joan's. A thrill of painful expectation made audible Father's and Mother's breath.

" 'And the reapers reaped,
And the sun fell, and all the land was dark.' "

Janet gave a little cry; she saw the night come down on her child again, as it had fallen long ago.

“—Dark!” the Professor echoed softly, seeing nothing but the wheat, and the mound that was unsown where the poppies grew, and the watching mother was waiting with her child for the favour of the stern man. They peeped with her in through the door that was off the latch, and chuckled with the old man as he played with the boy; saddened and grew remorseful with him, winced and wept at his exceeding bitter, impotent cry:—

“‘I have kill’d my son.
I have killed him—but I loved him.’”

“—Loved him!” reiterated Stanley Stanton.

‘May God forgive me, I have been to blame.’

“—To blame!”

CHAPTER XI.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN.

THE last guest had departed ; Miss Goodyear and Joan were alone in the study. Miss Goodyear leaned back wearily in her chair, her brows knit, her eyes gazing vacantly at the lighted stove. Joan sat on the rug at her feet, her hands clasped about her knee, one leg crossed over the other. On the girl's face was a reflective look, as though she were lost in pleasant reverie ; it contrasted vividly with the set, almost stern, look of the woman.

A clock in a neighbouring tower struck one. Joan turned her handsome head, looking up and back.

"A new day !" she said, a subdued thrill in her voice.

Miss Goodyear smiled assent, and let her fingers play with her companion's dark soft curls. The look, peculiar to herself, of power and aloofness was very

strong upon her to-night ; she seemed by intuition to know the thoughts that worked in Joan's mind.

"When are you going, Joan?"

Joan turned quickly to the fire.

"I have not said that I shall go."

"But you will. The life of the student is too austere for you ; only the scientific mind is satisfied with knowledge ; the artistic must have audience—must subordinate others to its imagination."

Her voice was calm almost to coldness. While Joan hesitated how to frame a reply, Miss Goodyear spoke again, still playing absently with the girl's soft locks.

"The scholar turns his eyes inward ; he sees little of the outer world, is indifferent to its opinion. His passion is to *know*. His enthusiasm and patience are all to unravel the mysterious ; there have been some who have spent a life of force over one little knot."

"Poor martyrs," said the girl.

"Martyrs, perhaps ; but not to be pitied," came the woman's quick response.

"Not to be pitied, Gertrude? Are you sure? They never feel the pulse of life."

"They know a rapture, dear, intenser than the

love of man or woman. The isolation of the intellect is not loneliness; it is communion with strength, power, beauty; it is encounter with soul. The senses and body are ungrateful; they demand incessant tendance, and quickly forget that tendance. The mind solicits and retains; its gains are abiding, distinguishable."

Joan's serenity left her brow; the sweetly animated look passed from her face.

"I have not the instincts of the student," she said humbly. "I can enter into the passion for fame, but with the passion for knowledge—you are right, Gertrude; I want diversion."

She drew herself round so that she could look Miss Goodyear full in the face.

"I value knowledge," she went on quickly, holding the woman's hand in both her own. "I do value it, but as a means to an end; to you it is the end. It sounds cold, cruel, selfish of me to say this in words to you, who are an apostle. You have given seven years to me," she continued, with a little catch in her breath—"seven long years. See how I reward you. Out of curiosity I have pried a little into the mysteries, taken little jottings, careless sketches. From the very beginning I have asked questions to

have them answered ; once answered, I turn to something else. This seems a jest, a mockery of you ; I do not mean it so. If I could chain myself to your cause I would—because I honour you.”

Miss Goodyear rose, and, as though seeking refuge, passed over to her book-shelves. Her face was turned from the girl, who watched her with panting breath. She felt that she was striking a blow—felt, too, that she struck for liberty.

“My cause is woman’s,” said Miss Goodyear, opening a volume, encouraging her companion not so much as by a glance.

Nothing mattered to Joan just now, except to gain Miss Goodyear’s sympathy.

“Gertrude,” she said, with a gulp, “are we to drift apart because I have not your thirst for acquisition? Knowledge enthral’s you ; appreciation, applause if you will, bewitches me. You are happy in application. I care little for research, if I can achieve the result of penetrating the emotions of mankind. There is a sweetness, an intoxication to me in this. You could suffer poverty and scorn in your efforts to enlighten darkened minds ; I don’t care anything about any women, except myself and mother and you. I am selfish ; I always was.”

Miss Goodyear turned, and came slowly back. Seating herself once more, she drew Joan to the rug again.

"I don't pretend to misunderstand you," she replied, linking her arms round Joan's waist, and looking her in the eyes. "You want to go free; you can't link yourself with my life. I shall not ask you. I am not a humble woman, and I don't believe in persuasion. What I see in your face I have seen in other faces before." She paused for a moment and removed her gaze. "You don't love me well enough to make my cause yours," she continued coldly. "You don't say it, but your look implies it. I have nothing to do with your future, Johnnie." She lifted her eyes, and looked searchingly at the face before her. "For me, you can go free."

She tried to unclasp her hand from Joan's, but the girl would not let it go.

"You don't mean, Gertrude, that you cast me off? That, because I cannot see with your eyes, I must forfeit your friendship? Do you remember the first night I came here?"

Miss Goodyear nodded assent. She waited for

Joan to finish her broken sentence, but Joan's lips quivered; she did not go on.

"You are not crying, are you, Johnnie? That foolish name! it is absurd to call you by it."

Joan did not reply; she rose instead, and went to the porch door. It was a misty, moonlight night, like that upon which Professor Stanton had first heard her read. The river and trees lay under a haze; the tall, red houses opposite were in darkness, except for one window in a tower. Joan's eyes rested upon it unconsciously; suddenly they brightened. *There* was sympathy with her art.

Miss Goodyear stole to the girl's side, cast an anxious glance in the direction of Joan's gaze, and, with a movement that was almost timid, folded a white shawl about the slender shoulders. She feared to speak, lest she should irritate, so she contented herself with looking. Joan held her head proudly; her face was sad, her eyes continued to stare blankly at the lighted window.

"I'd better go home with my father and mother," she said presently. "I was a disappointment and a sorrow to my mother; and now I am a disappointment and a sorrow to you."

"That is not true, Joan—and you know it."

Her tones were those of weariness and pain ; she moved away from the girl's side listlessly and went down to the gate, and, leaning upon it, looked up, then down the road. The ghostly trees clustered in weird groups opposite, the stars in the sky were few, but there was a quickening breath in the breeze that stirred the budding branches. She was tired ; her hold on the good of life seemed at that moment frail. She was bitter and hurt. The almost agonised care she had given her charge had led to this—Joan panted to relieve her of responsibility ! Her strength was spent, her arm nerveless, she told herself ; she could not retrace the way again, only to be left once more upon the dreadful border of desertion. Her brain reeled ; she sensed what it would be when she stood forsaken. No, no, it was not desertion of *self* she feared—it was *not* human flesh that shrank ; it was the desertion of her cause, the shame of intellect she dreaded, she told herself.

She gave a hurried backward glance, fearing detection in her conflict ; drawing her hooded cloak about her, she slipped lightly through the gate and crossed the belt to the opposite avenue of oaks. The branches were budding with early promise of spring ; but their intricate interlacing did not wholly

shut out the pale sky. The isolated stars seemed to look between the branches, curious of the woman's caprice of passion. Their aloofness—the length of their existence—effaced for a moment the remnant of courage left in the woman's spirit.

"Everything disappears; our memory perishes," she thought, with bitterness; "our work is but a bubble on human history."

Joan was right to take her pleasure and profit from passing days! Her face was white, her mouth sternly set. She suffered the agony and humiliation that none know but those who give their best in vain, and that not once only. She discerned nothing in that hour except the defeat, felt nothing but the loneliness of one who, pursuing an ideal at the cost of all, finds he has out-distanced those whose companionship is life. Presently she became dimly aware that a figure was approaching from the museum end of the avenue. Her mind was too engrossed for wonder or concern. She kept her stern gaze upon the tall, stooping, steadily on-coming figure, as upon the vision of a dream, and without questioning. Like two sleep-walkers the man and the woman approached each other through the silver mist, then stopped in mutual recognition.

Professor Stanton lifted his hat with his accustomed deference. Miss Goodyear bowed in unembarrassed response. They turned by common instinct of companionship and paced slowly on together. The woman felt his presence grateful. There was a pleasant self-possession, an aloofness from mortal passion, in his contact, that checked her tempestuous thought. He, in his way, was as aloof from distracting contradictions as those pale stars above. He was a *savant* indeed; the ordinary emotions of mankind passed him by completely; her hot anger and hungry yearning were appeased. They paced the length of the avenue in silence, and turned to retrace their way.

"I thank you," said the Professor, with his slow, deliberate speech, uncovering his head and bowing. "I felt myself in need of companionship. To-night I have been oppressed."

Gertrude Goodyear started. There was a look of care on the man's strenuous face, an accent of suffering in his voice. Was he not then invulnerable? He did not see her quick look of questioning; he was gazing far off—far as his desire.

"To-night I found it easy to understand the sensations of the dying; my previous existence all seemed blank."

"Ah!" ejaculated Miss Goodyear, with quick comprehension.

The man brought his gaze to her attentive face.

"You also have experienced that?" he asked, surprised. They turned to walk again, by common impulse. "Renunciation—intellectual renunciation—is annihilation. I cannot renounce," he continued, clasping his hands together behind his back in a sort of agony. "I cannot abandon effort, although I pursue an hallucination. I strive continually for perfectibility of expression," he added, in an explanatory tone, remembering that he had not stated his case. "I must strive, though I am profoundly conscious that I shall always fail."

There was a grandeur about his humility, a pathos in his hopelessness that went straight to the heart of the woman. If he had cried out about any other thing, she would have thought him weak; this mental torture she understood—so she thought. In reality, it was the human suffering and not its cause that stirred her. Here was one whom, a moment before, she had believed remote from the common lot—one whose endowments she revered—humbled and sore as she.

"I am a failure," said the Professor simply. "My

life has been a longing for speech, and I am dumb. We live in an age of echoes. If I cannot create—and I cannot—I will not add to tawdry reproduction. Your friend Miss Jefferies is happy to voice perfectly perfect words. The sorrow of my life is to see perfection and reach mediocrity."

"You study your poets for style," answered Miss Goodyear, with that ring in her voice that meant encouragement; "let them *talk* to you more."

An hour ago she had been despairing; incentive to sublime daring there had seemed none. The despair of another lighted her lamp of faith once more; she held it to throw a light on the darkened path of the man allied to her in intellect.

"I honour you for your endurance. It is sublime to be thrown and stand; overthrown again and re-stand. I cannot recite like Johnnie"—she hesitated endearingly over the pet name—"but let Browning talk to you. What does he make the 'Faultless Painter' say?

" 'Well, less is more.

. . . There burns a truer light of God in them,
In their vexed, beating, stuffed-up brain,
Heart, or whate'er else, than goes to prompt
This low-pulsed, forthright craftsman's hand of mine.
Their works drop downward; but themselves, I know,

Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me :
Enter and take their place there sure enough,
Though they come back and cannot tell the world.'"

"—Cannot tell the world!" echoed the Professor in his soft whisper. The reiteration vibrated with a note of despair on the quiet night.

Miss Goodyear's voice was strong with courage as she concluded :

"'Ah ! but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for?'"

The woman had escaped from her own despondency in lifting his. She played her old hope and enthusiasm upon him to be played upon in return. She was talking and dealing with a living soul, not an abstract fact, and the discourse edified her own spirit. The affirmations of strength strengthened her. Her eyes were brilliant; she bent forward in bestowal. Teaching was her art—sometimes her great art—when she let herself overflow with a sort of divinity she had a large perception and penetration. She was above the consideration just then that the hour and conversation were unusual.

She went over to her garden and went back to

her study, forgetful of self. Then, with a shock, she remembered her own need, for, wearied with waiting, Joan had fallen asleep. Her transparent skin was guiltless of shadows; her dark lashes rested upon her tinted cheeks. Miss Goodyear's horizon narrowed; the exaltation died from her face. She looked down at the sleeping girl yearningly and tenderly.

"I love you, dear," she murmured. "It is you, you, you I covet. I am jealous of your voice, because its music is sweeter to you than I am. I own it to-night; I have had a lesson in honesty."

The next morning brought Mother, hungry for satisfaction, in a subdued whirlwind of excitement, for the answer to her question :

"When was the maid coming home?"

The maid sat sideways on her chair, swinging her leg over the rail, as in the days of long ago. Janet smiled on the blooming girl, the happy roses stealing into her own cheeks, for Joan looked then little older than she had looked when under maternal restraint. But there was a startled expression in the girl's eyes. Was it to be teaching, or nothing? Was the farm the only alternative if she abandoned Miss Goodyear?

"It won't be so lonesome for you as it used to be; there'll be a boy about the farm," said Mother, smiling a little sadly. "Father finds it more than he can manage, so he is taking a young man to help him—the son of a gentleman in the Old Country. He wants to get an insight into colonial farming before taking a farm of his own."

"I suspect you and he are great friends," said Joan, with a softening face. "You always wanted a son, didn't you?"

There was a quick look of apprehension in the woman's eyes. Did her child think a stranger could take her place? A quiver of emotion shook her lips. She dropped the subject of the young man.

"The old place will look beautiful in the spring," she pleaded.

Joan swung her foot slowly for a silent moment or two; then, looking up quickly, said with determination:

"Very well, dear; I will come with the spring."

The mother's jealous torments were at an end. Joan was saying to herself that she had a few weeks for special study before her holiday. She did not for a moment imagine that she should stay. The suggestion had been a shock to her. The instincts

astir in her did not tend to seclusion. Things would work right somehow. The energy she felt within her moved to progress in her art. She knew that Father would be on her side. Miss Goodyear would, she hoped, be softened by degrees. While she was at home she might win Mother to the thought of a public life for her daughter. At present she must make concessions.

Miss Goodyear and Janet were left alone to their farewell. Miss Goodyear showed no sign of last night's irritability or discomfort. She was pale and calm. The absent-minded expression of her eyes was inexplicable to Janet, who had a strong distaste for being ignored in all affairs concerning Joan. She sought a distinct understanding as soon as possible.

"Joan is coming home in the late spring," said she, with almost aggressive hardness in her voice, looking searchingly at the face before her.

"Ah!" exclaimed Miss Goodyear, stooping forward and gazing past Janet, perhaps at the lonely days ahead. She had almost despised the farm-woman at the first. She had dreaded to be bored; she still had a nervous distaste for Janet's prim, superior air, and would have avoided this

interview could she have done so courteously. She was conscious of a feeble wish, through her overpowering weariness, that it would end as little awkwardly as possible.

Janet gave a loose and little jarring laugh.

"She's been a sight of trouble to you, I'm sure. You will be glad to get her off your hands."

Miss Goodyear brought her gaze to Janet's face. She drew herself straight and held her head up.

"I have all a mother's love without a mother's rights," she said.

"Aye, the maid is mine," responded Janet, hardening her heart to the sadness in the other woman's voice, remembering, instead, her own years of waiting.

Miss Goodyear flushed slightly, and put out her hand almost timidly.

"All yours?" she asked covetously. "You are her flesh mother; am I not, perhaps, the mother of her intellectuality?"

"Its nurse," replied Janet, with curt cruelty. "Her intellect comes from her father."

Gertrude Goodyear remained in her study for the rest of the day. She walked round her shelves with new affection.

"There is peace here," she said.

Then she sat down and leaned her golden head upon the cushion of her chair.

"Self-government," she murmured once; and again, "The girl would have stood between me and reality."

When Joan came to search for her towards evening, Miss Goodyear roused from her dull stupor. The two pairs of grey eyes looked interrogatingly at each other.

"Dear," said the woman humbly, "can we not be friends?"

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE SPRING.

JOAN was seated beside Father in the old buggy going home.

The morning was bright, transparent, rain-spangled, scented with snow-breezes and blossoms. Daisy-chains linked the tussock tufts; clover fields terminated in vivid green wheat undulating to the blue-black mountain base. The ruts of the old cart-road were fringed with sorrel; purple thistle flowers gleamed among brown dock-stalks; tiny blue and red weeds streaked the grey shingle beneath hedges of golden gorse; white ducks, with fluffy yellow ducklings, splashed in the gorge, which flashed in silver between dark flax and blue flags, rippling over slate-coloured boulders and green cresses.

Meek brown cows were grazing beneath dark gums, and under a clump of stately cabbage trees a row of thatched hives stood in a plantation of

wallflower. The hawthorn hedges round the orchard were a mass of the dappled green and brown of half-opened buds. Above, the milk-white and rose of apple and peach blossom and the yellow wattle made a fragrant radiance among weeping willow and sombre fir. Brown and white laurustinus was woven into the velvet lawn; violets and polyanthus vied with pink currant blossoms along the path to the porch.

Under the porch stood Mother, grey-garbed, glad-eyed, holding herself with assurance, a little pride, and gentle welcome.

"I've brought the maid," said Father, with comforting heartiness.

Joan drew herself slowly from her mother's embrace, laughed lightly and with slight self-disdain.

"I fear," she said, "that you will find me an encumbrance. I have been ruined for a farm."

She stopped short with a slight flush, for beyond her mother, standing bare-headed at the threshold, was a young man, tall, bronzed, of athletic build, who regarded her half-quizzically, half-interestedly. The dark, steady eyes conveyed some hint of disapprobation, as from a harboured thought.

"The boy about the farm," thought Joan, a swift

resentment at the look stirring her blood to a crimson protest. She bowed with mocking grace, as Father, with hearty geniality, presented her :

“Mr. David Aubrey—my daughter.”

It was a solace to observe that the young man felt her mockery. Her heart swelled at some intangible offence. What right had this young man to regard her as though she had been guilty of some fault, and judge her off-hand? That look in his dark eyes was decidedly of disapproval. She touched his outstretched hand carelessly with her finger-tips.

“You do not like the country,” he affirmed.

“I love it,” she dissented, with much sweetness.

He smiled sceptically, and bowed with an old-world formality that seemed out of place in the geranium-scented porch. What was he doing here on a farm? He looked like a man who would be more at home in a city drawing-room; his sun-burnt face contrasted oddly with his fair forehead. Joan passed him with a queenly air that made her appear tall.

The sunbeams were playing hide-and-seek in the old parlour. The girl stood at the doorway, her heart drawn from the city. Time, change,

fashion passed unheeded here. There was Father's red-cushioned arm-chair by the hearth, and Mother's rocker opposite. The deep window-sills were ablaze with flowers. No spot tarnished the white rugs and boards, and the mahogany table reflected a bowl of violets that stood upon it. The harmonium was open, and the old hymn-book at the page, "Glory to Thee, my God, this night."

Then, to complete the home picture, Mercy came in and scolded Joan—scolded in quite a refreshing way, for, although her voice was aggressive, her eyes were approving.

"You've taken your time in comin', Miss Joan," she grumbled. "So long as I can recollect, this 'ouse 'as been a-waitin' of you. But time don't count with the unborn, an' the young dispise it!"

"You are still ambiguous," said Joan, with a light laugh; "and eloquent. I remember how you impressed me when I was a child."

Mercy shook her head.

"You were disheartling," she replied.

Joan noted the lines in the sunburnt cheeks, and the hair flecked with grey. A humbled, penitent feeling touched her. She knew not why. She had

been several times disapproved of late ; how did she merit this disapprobation ?

“ Mother mine,” she said impulsively, resting her hands upon Mother’s shoulders, “ do you find me ‘ disheartening ? ’ I feel conscious of a falling short. I feel a prophetic little shiver of apprehension. Do you think I shall bring bad luck ? ”

She looked half-laughingly into the fading face a little piteously, too. She seemed to be disappointing almost everyone somehow. Why did it come natural to those who knew her to destine her to the impossible and unattainable ? What duty lay before her ? She had not yet investigated ; she was scarce awake.

“ Shall I go away again, dear ? ”

“ Shall you go ? go away ?—you, my love ? Never, if God’s will be mine.”

Joan was a little startled by the passion of Janet’s voice. The old hands clutched hers, then passed gently, and with a certain proprietorship, over the brown, curling head. The girl had spoken partly in jest, without weighing the significance of her words. Of course she should go sometime. Not yet ; but—of course— She felt like a young eagle hatched in the barn-yard ; her eye was on the

peaks. Janet's emotion was embarrassing. It was an awkward thing to play at being domesticated. She tried to balance things.

"If need were, I *would* stay," she faltered.

Janet held her off a little.

"Need? What need, child? Father and me need you. We're getting old. There won't be a day too much to love you in."

"Dearest, since that is so, let me be my best."

She was pleading for freedom, expansion, expression.

Janet could not mean to swallow up her individuality and efface her existence. She was not to be annihilated in this dim quiet. This mother—passion was not to obliterate and annul all; if so, to what end had she been educated? Was she to return to the elementary form—emotion?

"I've waited many days," said Mother; "for many nights I've sat alone. But now you've come, I do suppose you'll stay until you leave me for a husband, dear."

Janet spoke seriously; she was not trifling, Joan saw; nor was she ashamed.

The girl looked curiously at the moved face; but with a distrust of the emotion which had made it

quiver. Yet this emotion weakened ; she was afraid of being carried away.

This was not the time to annihilate the woman's hope she felt. Yet, beside her desire for a public life—the life of stage—she held this domestic inaction in complete indifference. It would be callous to say so now ; but she could not resign, she could not sacrifice. She would appeal later. If Mother would grant her ambition, she would show her that it did not mean detachment wholly from the home-life.

She found the little world she had left not quite the same world. The boy about the farm had somewhat transformed it. He seemed perfectly at home. He came in to supper in his fresh tweeds, contrasting vividly, in his boyish enthusiasm and energy, with the middle-aged air of the house. Joan at first thought she must have mistaken the expression of his face in the morning. His manner towards Janet was protective—almost tender ; and Joan noted, with a little, amused smile, that her mother had learned the trick of lingering over his name, and in her glance his way. Father also did not find his companionship insignificant ; he allowed him his side of an argument. Indeed, it was not

easy to exclude him, for his opinions were apparently as dear to the younger, as were the elder man's to him. But, again, Joan had the impression that in his manner towards her there was a touch of languid indifference. He had established himself as a favourite. Even Mercy's grim look softened when her eyes fell on him.

Joan was not quite certain whether or not she liked this new sensation of life about the old place she thought, with a frank and simple impulse, that she was a little jealous. And then the next moment she found herself coming under this new masculine influence. She tried to shake it off. Seated apart with Mother, she assumed an interest in the knitting of Father's grey stockings. Janet explained that it was "plain four and pearl three," and smiled complacently as she unfolded to her own satisfaction the mystery of heeling. Joan was smothering a little ripple of laughter, which rose unbidden to her lips, when she had an uneasy feeling that David Aubrey was watching her. But she would not look to see; instead, she glanced round the charming old room, in which the firelight made harmonious tints. Her mother in her faultless dress, the old china, and the lavender were all part of the picture. Father,

too, with his iron-grey head and commanding figure, belonged where he was, in the great crimson arm-chair; and the young man leaning against the mantelpiece, tall, strong, straight—? Yes, he was observing her with audacious criticism! Her thought was broken; she gathered herself together again, and completed her sentence—"he might have been the son of the old folk." The thought of a brother was amusing to her. They would have been at daggers drawn, of course. He looked quite capable of shaking her. She had held her own superbly among the men at the university; and this young farmer, for some reason unknown, despised her. She rallied, and broke out in a little burst of reckless gaiety. She exhibited almost a feverish eagerness to appear bent only on amusing herself; but she and David exchanged not a word.

At ten o'clock Father sat down at the harmonium, drew out the stops, and started "Abide with me," very much out of tune. Mother joined in in a quavering treble, content to gaze upon her husband, while she sang, "I need Thy presence every passing hour." Tom turned to meet his wife's eyes, and unconsciously revealed the fact that Janet was his sweetheart still.

How would the stranger take the idea that the old children's thoughts were not wholly in heaven while they prayed—that they were not quite prepared for any subtle and profound change that would break their communion?

Joan's examination of the young man's face told her nothing but extreme gravity. He still stood near the fire, and listened courteously.

"Now, my girl!" said Father, "give us a reading."

"To-night?" she asked, betrayed into a note of dissatisfaction. "I am out of tune."

She made a little deprecating gesture when she saw the disappointment on the two faces. She felt it cruel to sadden.

"I will read you a story," she added quickly, with her ready grace and charm.

Mercy, who had come into the room to scoff at the scandalous late hours her mistress was keeping, remained to gape. The story was a long one, but no one remembered the time till the end of "Enoch Arden."

"'Can one love twice?'" the exquisite voice asked. "'Can you be ever loved as Enoch was? What is it that you ask?'"

"'I am content,' he answered, 'to be loved a little

after Enoch. . . . If Enoch comes—but Enoch will not come.’”

Meeting David's gaze, the girl was conscious of a strange sensation. The dark, intent eyes seemed to reiterate—"But Enoch will not come."

She exulted in her power. Art had for the moment conquered the man's indifference. How glorious it would be, when the woman in her was helpless, to move another, to subjugate by her art! She was grateful for her gift, and her devotion that night was that of gratitude.

Joan stood by her window a long time before she went to bed. The wide land of her father stretched on either side; she felt no attraction towards it, except that its beauty stirred her. The stars shone brilliantly in the pale sky, the grey mists hung about the distant mountains; it was a poem to her, to be read and learned, but not lived. In space, individuality was effaced. Infinite will filled the spheres; she could not be effaced and silent, always uniform in aim, a slave though not in fetters. She was running away again in her mind "to see the world," as in her childhood. The old pioneers asleep in their bed, after devout thanksgiving for the maid's safe return home, were untroubled in their dreams by

thought that their daring and love of conquest had been transmitted to their daughter's blood.

Joan was roused from her reverie by the scent of a cigar from the orchard below. She drew back with a regretful and irritated sense that the privacy of the old home was invaded.

The girl was up with the sun next morning, and went out to see the farm. The leafy hedges and slender branches were fresh from their dew-bath; the daisies were not wide-eyed yet; the mist was breaking in the east to let shafts of crimson through. At regular intervals a woodman's axe from the forest smote the clear air; the house-dog barked at cackling hens and crowing cocks; the bleating of lambs mingled with the lowing of the kine. Spring had flung its message abroad; the voice of life rose to an anthem, a chord of which echoed in the girl's heart. She kept silence and let it swell. There was no outward expression save song; and the larks could not be rivalled.

Making her way to the byre, Joan sniffed the fragrance of new milk. Among the milkers David Aubrey was taking his turn, leaning his fair head against the side of a black cow. Joan noticed that his hair was light brown—lighter than his eyes.

She watched him for a moment. How easily and well he milked. He saw her presently, and called out a cheerful good-morning, not at all embarrassed. Milking certainly forbade ceremony; but had he entirely divested himself of his indifference of the previous day? Joan looked at the fresh faces of the dairymaids, listened for a time to their pleasant talk and laughter, then turned away for one of her old rambles beside the gorge.

This boy about the farm was not an unmixed delight. She must expect to encounter him at every turn. He seemed possessed by a spirit of energy—masterful, too. And not only the servants, but Father and Mother, deferred to him. But the glancing stream drew Joan's attention. It pictured the blue sky in inconstant flashes, saddening and dimming at the breath of the amorous breeze.

Joan sat down among the wild mint and thyme, and thought of Gertrude Goodyear and Professor Stanton. A smile lingered about the girl's lips as her mind concentrated on the latter. What good friends they were; how he, even more than Father, was jealous of anything that should distract attention from the perfecting of her art.

"A day like this teaches," she said aloud; "it is filled with harmony."

She turned to a field-path. A few yards ahead, swinging along with lengthy strides, was David Aubrey, the knickerbockered legs and serge-coated back eloquent of a goal to be quickly reached. Joan laughed spontaneously.

"Our importance is increased as our environment is decreased," she said to herself; "in a crowd individuals are overlooked. There was no chance for poor Eve in the Garden of Eden, with Adam always in the foreground. Nature is the best setting for a man after all; its simplicity and grandeur either emphasise his deficiencies or show off his good points."

The young man strode on, unconscious of criticism, a vigorous figure in the sunshine, casting behind him a warmth that did not come from the sun, but which emanated from himself. He played into the sensation of the moment by song:

" " It was a lover and his lass,
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino !
That o'er the green cornfields did pass
In the spring-time, the only pretty ring-time,
When birds do sing, hey ding ading, ding !
Sweet lovers love the spring.

“ ‘ Between the acres of the rye,
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino !
These pretty folks would sit and sigh
In the spring-time, the only pretty ring-time,
When birds do sing, hey ding ading, ding !
Sweet lovers love the spring.’ ”

After breakfast Joan learned two facts concerning David Aubrey. One was that he was the son of an English clergyman, that he had been destined for the Church by his father, but had turned his back rigorously upon study of any kind, save farming. Consequently, Joan was sure she shouldn't like him.

CHAPTER XIII.

A YOUNG MAN'S FANCY.

WHATEVER determined his notion of duty, David Aubrey did it. The country was his sphere of happiness; passivity and he were strangers. He did not pretend to a growth of æsthetic culture; his domain was physical life, his combat with matter. In his estimation, a thing was none the less sublime because natural. Active determination characterised his expression and movements. He had come to sub-manage Tom Jefferies' farm, and every inhabitant of Otira Gorge knew that he meant to do it. He made no fuss, but, with keen penetration, went to the point and effected his purpose.

Joan watched him with subdued admiration, puzzled evidently by the dignity with which he invested his part. She had lived among those who had more mental allotment and force than physical. On the farm, sheep had always been shorn, crops sown and garnered; but Father's religion and poetry

had thrown a glamour over the whole affair. The law of nature, skill and force of man's will was the science that determined results for the young man.

His personality carried with it a power that imposed itself even upon the animals.

One morning Joan sat on a fence and watched him breaking in a filly. The animal rebelled, reared, trembled in every limb with terror, its delicate nostrils quivering, its eyes glazed. With firm mouth and shining eyes, the man commanded, cajoled, punished, coaxed, but did not relax his will to dominate. When he had conquered he caressed.

He went over to Joan with his uncovered head held high. All a man's gratified sense of mastery shone in his face.

Joan shut the admiration out of her glance.

"It was blind submission to force," she said, with a slight inflection of scorn in her musical, fresh voice.

His face was still flushed with recent excitement. He looked a trifle disappointed, and flicked his leg with his riding-whip.

"I have mastered the beast's will, but her love must be won," he said simply. "When I have gained her confidence affection will follow."

The girl changed colour; she turned her pretty head towards him, and met his eyes with challenge and defiance. She looked very sweet in her lilac cotton gown; her personal beauty suggested softness as well as brilliance.

"How fond you are of all live things," she said unexpectedly.

He had almost thought her irritated. He vibrated to her implied compliment; her tone encouraged him to think she sympathised in this weakness; but she more than balanced his swift pleasure by the after-thought.

"My mother and you have much in common."

The childish-looking creature had drawn a bar between them. For a moment he felt a little shame; she appeared to imply the superiority of intellectual over agricultural tastes. The next impulse was honest; he expressed his pleasure in all live things; had something to say for the cycles of life outside the hubbub of cities. He wouldn't be put aside at her humour, but grappled with his subject till she looked at him with interest.

"That's a very comfortable feeling," she said presently; "to know just exactly what you like best and how to do it."

She was looking at him with much attentiveness. How sincere, and honest, and direct of purpose he seemed. After all, was it not the knowledge and force, and not the occupation, that stamped the man? His study was farming, but he was a student. Her tone of interest appeared to please him; his face flushed, then clouded with wonder.

"You have always found the country tame?" he said.

"Never," she answered, walking while she spoke with loitering steps towards the gorge. "I see all you have shown me, hear every sound of the open air."

She turned her face up to him, and it struck him how large and uncouth he was beside her. He observed, too, how her eyes could widen and flash.

"But it does not satisfy me. No," she proceeded, with a commanding little gesture; "you mistake my meaning. It is not that I think a farm-life rough and coarse; I think it takes a child-heart, or a poet, to be content with nature; and I," she added sadly, "have neither the simplicity of the one, nor the greatness of the other. It sounds affected to plead moods, but it is true; my happiness in such a perfect day as this is transient. I am not simple

enough to revel in animal sensation only, although my flesh tingles with pleasure; nor great enough to hold the key that unlocks the poet's soul. It humiliates me to know that I halt midway; for don't you think that everything between simplicity and greatness is affectation, pedantry, pretence?"

He couldn't say. He felt guilty of having at first sight delegated her to the middle rôle. He pulled at his moustache, and waited for her to go on. She leaned over a barred gate, and looked at him very seriously. How childish and womanly she was. He felt the magnetism of her presence, the subtle sweetness of the personal charm which she unconsciously drew and fettered hearts. She seemed just then the most alive thing amid the life around.

"All this wondrous tissue of light and colour," she continued, with a gesture indicating what lay around; "I see it—look!" she exclaimed; "the grey plains beyond; the nearer undulating land, green with rising grain; the open fields and hawthorn hedges; the dark forest and purple mountains; the bright stream twisting between grey boulders and ferns; the white marguerites with golden hearts; the purple pansies and butterflies, decked out in gorgeous

velvet; the pendulous branches of yellow mimosa trailing over the brown thatched roof of the barn! I hear, too—listen!—the doves and pigeons coo to their mates; the sheep bleat far off on the downs; the water gurgles over the stones; the wind plays an anthem through organ-pipes of pine and poplar! Yes, I see and hear, but I don't understand it in my heart. One 'I' enjoys the sensuous pleasure of it all. A-ah, the long summer! I feel it with every drop of blood; but the other 'I' reaches out for other communion. I am happy here, conditionally—that I can go back to town."

"You like a crowd better than solitude?" he queried. She nodded.

"I like that disembodied feeling one has in a crowd; you are, and you are not! Allied, impersonal, a spot in the great stream. As a separate entity one feels"—she hesitated for a word, tapped her little foot impatiently on the green sward; but, not being able to find the term she sought, used another—"awkward, embarrassed. One has so much in common with humanity as a whole; but individual to individual what strangers we are! That is my difficulty. I don't care very much for individuals. I wonder why?"

She lifted her hand and pushed her curls from her fair forehead, and looked at her companion in the most natural way.

He answered dubiously that wasn't it rather unusual? and thought privately that there was not the smallest chance of her liking him.

After confusing him with her long gaze she withdrew her glance.

"Sometimes," she continued presently, "I've got an uncanny feeling that only half of me is here in my body—the mind part of me!"

She smiled her meaning smile, and, nodding a cheerful good-morning, went away.

David watched her going. At first he felt inclined to laugh; then his face grew grave. He understood now. She did not ape superior ways; she wasn't much interested in anybody.

Joan quickened her pace. Already she repented of her little outburst of confidence. After a month's acquaintance, she had talked to this stranger as she had talked to no one before; tried to explain, to give an account of herself. What did it matter to him what she thought or felt? What did it matter to her what he thought or felt? Vanity! just because he had regarded her critically and coldly,

and she was accustomed to indulgence, she had—and without any pre-conceived intention—solicited his forbearance. His! Her colour deepened to crimson. She was the more annoyed, because, although her back was turned, she could see a strong mouth and chin, a pair of dark, surprised eyes, and a tall figure clad in a knickerbocker suit of tweed.

The man looked after her wonderingly. Then his thought turned to self-scorn. Heavens, what a clod he was! How dumb and boorish he must appear in her eyes! She had talked to *him*, with her great eyes fixed upon his, as though expecting response; and he had stood there like a tongue-tied baby. Now he came to ponder it, it seemed that he had had only one thought—a wish that she would rest her rounded arms on the gate, and stand there talking to him all day. He had got no further than the surprise and pleasure of it. When she had raised her proud head, and lifted up her sweet face there had been a look of yearning upon it, the yearning of youth and ignorance, which is sadder than middle-aged crying. He did not understand why it hurt him so to remember it, or why he felt so gentle just then, and thought all helpless things holy.

He raised his head and walked steadily towards

the house, words flowing readily and softly through his mind. He longed to be with her again and hear her asking questions.

It was night when they met; she was curt, cold, satirical, and would talk nothing but crops and cows. But the young man did not stiffen; she had roused him, and her whims could not put him aside. The cold face, a few hours ago so meek, awakened the man-passion to subjugate. She was such a little thing and so untamed. Unconquerable? He could not answer. Beside her his strength was weakness.

Mother looked from one to the other curiously. Then at some secret thought blushed like a girl and smiled. Father smoked and saw nothing.

It could not be kept a secret, the young man's new-born passion for her. In the days that came and went the waters murmured it, and the winds blew it. So self-conscious was he of the thought of his heart, that, turn where he would, see and hear what he might, all things told it. And the wonder remained that she gave no sign of comprehending. She did not perceive his wish, but put every hindrance to his scheme of meeting her. Frequently he saw her in the distance, walking alone over the fields or towards the mountains. Once he approached near enough to

see that she carried a volume in her hand, and to hear that she read aloud. At night she was still absorbed in her books, and if by chance he met the sweet eyes his heart leaped.

At last he met the wandering figure face to face.

"If you would speak to me sometimes," he began humbly; and then stopped. He had so wished for days, putting his wish into words coarsened it.

She did not appear conscious of his pleading.

"I have been reading," she remarked, in matter-of-fact tones, holding up the book she carried to draw his attention. "How much one strives for small results. To start is easy—to continue is the test. I should hate to fail."

"You could not fail," he said, answering the determination he saw in her face.

"Do you think not? It would be easy—if I let go. I have risen when the sun was below the horizon to catch the spirit of the dawn, and watched the night die, so to enter into its mystery. You people of physical feats do not understand that one may suffer exhaustion from wrestling with words."

Yes, he could suppose it; but perfect production left no trace of effort. He should never forget the picture she reproduced that first night of her home-

coming. If sometimes she would be gracious and permit him to listen—? The summer was short, and he understood that she would return to town at the close of the summer.

To please him she granted his request, and the perfect voice tortured him. But for it, she might remain at home. She never could be won to domesticity while triumph awaited her in the city. He cursed the applauding crowd in his heart, and grew morose. While this mood was upon him, Mercy and Father seemed surprised. Mercy repented somewhat of her harsh thoughts man-ward. This boy about the farm added zest to the humdrum of every day. She liked him the better that he sometimes appeared headstrong and obstinate. He brought a genial magnetism into the still sameness of things, and if—

Mercy had got so far, then ruminated with folded arms, staring stonily into the fire. There are many unwritten romances beginning and ending with "if." Mercy was not the only middle-aged woman who ever pondered in stray moods of tenderness the chapters of untold romance. It is laughable, of course, and a little pathetic; but no triumph of broom or brush brought such lustre to Mercy's eyes as the

nail-prints of David's boots upon the boards. If she had been Joan—! Well, the only thing she could say was that Joan had always been eccentric. For twenty-five years the serving-woman had done the honours of Otira Farm kitchen, presided over and directed the domestic affairs of her mistress. Crows' feet had gathered about the corners of her eyes; but she had her weak moment. The practical onlooker at sentiment surprised herself in dreaming. She was not at all sure that her conclusions had always been right, and was perplexed to discover that, having regarded "Johnnie" as a bane, she at last sighed that she was not Johnnie, who did not show appreciation of her advantages, or appear to estimate as she ought her individual luck.

David did not pose, and Joan could not class him. He was aristocratic by birth, democratic by occupation; she could form no theory regarding him, therefore was compelled to accept him on his own terms. He revealed himself naturally and slowly. One day a touch of hauteur and ceremony demanded attention; the next the spontaneous glad impulse of the lad won regard. When piqued, he walked upon stilts, to be humbled the next hour as he approached his divinity with hesitation—so humbled that Joan

wondered at his humility. There were hours when his passion taught him a spontaneous eloquence that bridged all intellectual difference between them; then even while the girl delighted in at-one-ment, the man grew dumb, practical, energetic, and dignified his exertions with ability, communicating subtly that he was satisfied to be about his business, needing no apology.

During these skirmishings, the young man cut no undignified figure. He strove for the mastery, as men do, although he would not desert his colours. It was the pride of the soldier in his good coat and shining steel before the battle—a hint of energies to be.

Joan was undecided about him; but she was conscious of a strange expansion, a new humility and comprehension stealing in upon her. Her heart was not so shut up. For the first time, it struck her how colourless and hard the work-woman's life was.

"Mercy," she said one day, "if cleanliness is next to godliness, you must have scrubbed your way to righteousness."

Mercy brandished her brush and snorted at this unexpected commendation.

"I didn't never hear tell of a body scrubbin' their

way up the golden stair," she affirmed, breathing heavily.

"Nor have I," Joan answered, "it is a lowly claim; yet I could almost suppose its efficacy."

"Well, I am—" commented Mercy, looking after the departing figure of her young mistress, with an astounded expression. She did not complete her conviction, but laughed in a jerky, barking sort of way. "Scrub my way—to the New Jerusalem! Lord! Fancy! what a hidea!"

But she scrubbed with additional vigour.

"She *do* touch you in a weak spot, she do," added Mercy, an hour afterwards, when she viewed, with head on one side, the effect of her labours. "I will say that for Miss Joan—she do know what you set most store by."

If Joan knew as much of David, she did not reveal her knowledge. The summer was young, and her spirits vivacious and gay; and when her companion was not dramatic with strong emotion, they laughed together at the nonsense that youth breeds. They fished, walked, rode together; seemed spontaneously to solicit each other's opinion and enjoyment; and in these days the girl surprised her lover by sudden brilliant flashes of talent and wit, and hints of execu-

tion, which made a pessimist of him. She could not, he told himself; no man could ask her to hide her light under a bushel. Sometimes her gaiety was forced; there was a hint of Miss Goodyear in her caustic humour. She bewildered and charmed him; but, while she made a prisoner of him, she seemed to hold herself free; he had tested her surface soil and subsoil, but did not know her depths. One day she thrilled him with the sweet, natural impulsiveness that had first attracted him; the next, she was irreproachably prim.

For, while Joan listened, she was undecided whether he attracted or displeased her most; and, as these sensations varied, she got on and off her stilts. As a companion ready to hand he was stimulating. But he would not always be taken as a tonic; would not always assimilate with her moods. He had an imperious way of his own that did not always act as a stimulus; she found herself frequently unnerved after a draught of it. As a study he was interesting, but he couldn't remain passive enough for impersonal study; the magnetism of his mood affected her, separated or united them; and she could not think quite clearly after a talk with him. He encroached upon her ground; by some

personal spell made what was intolerable to her, tolerable.

Mother surveyed these signs with complacence. She refrained from expressing her judgment. Father knew only that his affairs prospered, and applauded his own good judgment and experience for drawing to his side a young man of parts, who opposed decidedly and approved enthusiastically, as might be, but who nevertheless had won his confidence as a suitable inmate and manager of Otira Farm. The good of Otira Farm was of first-rate importance; even Providence had acknowledged so much by bestowing prosperity and happiness upon it.

But Providence keeps profound its secrets.

CHAPTER XIV.

THOUGHTS OF LOVE.

DAVID stood beside the stream waiting. This waiting had grown wondrous sweet. He had done battle with himself, but the fight had proved too hard ; his passion had taken complete possession of him. There was no escape from it, he told himself, with no desire to be free.

The morning was irresistible. The cloudless sky was of deep purple-blue ; a soft breeze stirred the blue and red flags growing by the stream at his feet, and blurred the water in patches like breath upon glass ; thick green corn rustled in pride, with promise of a fat harvest ; bees, with drowsy murmurs, hummed among the clover ; and the sharp swish of scythes from an adjacent field told that men made hay while the sun shone.

The langour and lassitude of intense longing overpowered the young man. Surely she would come ;

the life of the morning would entice her. Would this waiting be long sustained? Would it end abruptly with the passage of the summer? He glanced along the stream, and his hand closed convulsively, a ruddy colour mounting to his brow. He strode to meet the slender, white-gowned figure. She came along with her proud head held up, her large grey eyes shining, and with a slight flush—a little trick of self-consciousness lately acquired. But there was no hint of self-surrender in her manner. A fleeting little frown contracted her brows at the man's too hasty advance. But she was quick to note the artistic beauty of the scene; the strong man gave that touch of individuality that the still picture needed.

David's heart throbbed when he saw her blush; but had she not proved false again and again to that sign of welcome? She was a kaleidoscope of moods. He could not trace one of them back to its source; he could not by a given touch produce the same effect twice. How was he to know how she would meet him this morning?

“You are not tired yet?”

There was a tone of supplication in his voice. He looked down into her face eagerly.

She gazed past him at the distant horizon, wrinkling her brows to shade her eyes from the glittering haze.

"I must have dreamt the past three months ; they are so unreal."

She turned from him a little and began mechanically to pluck the marguerites growing tall among the grass. It was the same spot at which Father had sought her long ago and pressed the unwelcome thought of labour. A recollection of this paled her cheeks a little ; the passion for accomplishment, stronger in the few than the passion of flesh, was suddenly called into life again. She could weigh no other desire beside it.

"I have thought the matter over thoroughly," she continued gently, still with head bent over her flowers, "and it is better that I should go back to town."

Her father trusted in her blindly, she went on hurriedly ; she must not disappoint him, and she could not be content with only small things to do. She was not great enough for that. Not to misunderstand her, once she had despised the humble workers, but that was when she was ignorant of the science of doing insignificant things well. She could conceive a

far-off time when she herself would be strong enough to renounce ; but it would not be till she had proved that her dearest wish—fame—would never be. When she had failed she would come home and darn the stockings ; it would do her good. She bent down lower over the marguerites, and the snapping of their stalks could be heard in the silence that followed her words.

“It is the great women who do those small, unnoticed things,” she continued, with strange humility, not lifting her eyes. “It is true I did despise them once, but not now. One day I may come to be like them—good, like mother and Mercy. Perhaps when I am quite old ; it will be a great occasion.”

She looked up then and smiled appealingly, her eyes misty.

“But no one must expect anything so big of me just now,” she continued hurriedly. “There is something theatrical in my nature ; I must strive for effects ; or, in other words, I must fly till my wings are broken. It is the glamour of the air.”

She shaded her eyes with her hand and watched the ascent of a lark, which soared steadily till it became a dark speck only against the blue vault. The passion of her voice, her quick action, gave the

little dramatic touch that always redeemed her ways from commonplace, and infused the moment with a force which emanated from herself, moving her audience to her mood.

David uttered a half articulate sound of despair and passion. She would not be caged, this beautiful girl. He cursed beneath his breath his spendthrift ancestors who had made it impossible for him to follow her where she would.

She roused him from his morbid thoughts by a magic imitation of the lark's notes. The notes ended in a rush of laughter and words.

"If one could be spontaneous like the bird, and want no audience!"

There was a passionate protest in her heart—a cry that he would have and hold her even against her will; keep her from battle and strife. A random impulse, her brain reasoned, even while it was strongest upon her; a madness born of the sensuous, odorous summer morning, that, passing, would leave her sane again. She shuddered, as with chill. Where was she drifting? She missed the sense of David's answer; but she felt his fingers upon her muslin-vested arm. Her pink colour deepened.

In an instant he relaxed his hold. Something in

his face warned the girl that she was trying him too far; she stood for a moment transfixed before the storm she had called into his dark eyes. He braced himself as though for defence; then the speechless anger died suddenly from his face.

The girl was looking at him with the expression of a frightened lamb. Her incoherent lament had suggested tragic possibilities.

"I shall be here when you return," he said, in a choked voice, and unexpectedly.

She held out her hand instinctively. She had not thought of that; the summer would not end it. An hour ago there seemed no alternative between eternal separation and relinquishment of the world she had run away once long before to see. But David missed his point—insistence. The young have not experience enough to fall in placidly with the irresistible march of life—the end of a phase is the end of existence; and it is just possible the girl was not prepared wholly to give him up.

His surrender touched her; but he took up arms against himself as soon as he had made it; he had done precisely as he had determined all along he would not do—taken an off chance. His rival was an unseen force; the ground of combat was taken away

from him ; man against man, he would have fought every inch. Against this intangible obstacle he was powerless ; and yet he strove, first against the pain of heart, that made itself felt above the joy her presence gave, and then against the witchery of her eyes.

They rested upon his face. She divined his thoughts. But the end was not just yet. After her fight with the world, the flesh, and the devil, if she returned conquered, he would be here. They disagreed on many points ; on this they were agreed. She had robbed him of no right, for she had given him none. She was vehement over this thought, and raised her head proudly ; certainly she had given him no right. Gertrude, with her fastidious sense of fitness, might blame her for the close companionship of the past months ; and at the name of Gertrude she had a twinge of self-disgust.

Gertrude was single of purpose, beyond the weakness of this hour. How had it come to pass that she had made this man grieve ?

“ It is my old luck,” she said inaudibly.

They had bent their steps in silence towards the plains. David walked with his head up ; her tacit rejection of him had roused his pride ; he kept pace with

her courteously, but he had the air of one encaged. His shoulders were thrown back, and his set mouth and glowing eyes reminded the girl of the morning she had watched him break in the filly. Their conversation turned into conventional channels ; and Joan, with burning cheeks, sketched her life at Girton, and the brilliant career that was to be, when he, her friend David, would be one of her audience, and bring her flowers.

Suddenly he put out his hand sideways, and took hers in a grip.

“ It’s all nonsense, isn’t it ? ” he said.

She met his eyes, and faltered, rallied, then shook her head gaily.

“ It’s sober truth,” she affirmed.

“ I will bring you the gorse blossom,” he replied, relinquishing her hand, and springing to a bush that flowered among the gorse, breaking a spray while he spoke. “ It has a sweet perfume and a heart of gold, although it grows among thorns.”

She took the cluster he proffered, and fastened it in her belt.

“ David,” said Joan, using his name unconsciously, “ do you repent of our friendship ? ”

He had not yet lost all individuality in loving, and he counted the cost.

"I repent of nothing," he answered, after a pause. "Do not let us quarrel. I will wish all that you wish, think as you bid me think, accept what you can give me at your own price. It is not my life, but yours, which is to be considered. You have an unalterable purpose. I drift, as you see. I let my feelings get the better of common sense."

The smothered anger and sarcasm in his voice belied his words. The struggle between pride and love was raging. The outburst of irritation chilled the girl's remorse. If he would exert himself he might convince her. In obedience to an impulse she could not analyse, she turned a scornful glance upon him.

"I trust we may be friends," she said haughtily and coldly. Then, in a few hurried words, she intimated that she wanted to be alone, to listen to the sound of the wind among the tussocks.

Her lips were smiling, and her brow was serene. David's sudden suffering surprised him. She was dismissing him; their old intercourse would never again be renewed. He should revisit the old haunts without her. His longing spoke from every

feature. He threw off his cynicism, resentment, and hostility, and, in quick, earnest words, as though pleading for life, asked her humbly to forgive his temper, and to meet him when the moon rose; he wanted to show her an effect which he thought had escaped her. His manner touched her, and she agreed.

The girl wandered along slowly, with downcast eyes. Why could she not be left alone to be happy in her own way? She felt her heart beating fast. What did it mean—pleasure or pain? Why was she more receptive of impressions than she had been six months ago? She felt David's presence perilous. Every time she was with him it happened that her self-restraint became weaker. It was a vulgarity of the flesh—a sentimentality which could be played upon by the trivialities of tones and looks. There was a possibility that she would entirely abandon herself to this new sensation if she indulged in it much longer. Should she remain calm enough to put aside that unreal world, that accidental phase of passion, and realise the real world of labour and achievement?

The young face looked strangely old, the great eyes very wistful. How lonely it was; how horribly

lonely ! Love obliterated all limits, nullified all divisions, emancipated from ambitions. How sweet it would be to rise spontaneously to the ideal world, and leave the real behind. Were the women of higher intelligence the happier women after all ? If she had been left there to milk the cows and ride at will over the plains, she might have developed a plenitude of power to give and receive happiness.

She lay face downward on the tussocks, and wished for the conflicting simplicities, spontaneity, platitudes, and insipidities that were part of other girls, for their ridiculous tendernesses and simple, sensuous truth.

The long shadows were slanting over the plains when she remembered that it was time to go home. She had reached the old cart-road, when she saw the figure of a man toiling over the ruts—a familiar figure, slender, and slightly stooping, dressed in black. Every fibre of Joan's brain remembered, every nerve tingled with recollection. It was the Professor.

As she went forward to meet him, she heard David's voice from the hay-field :

“ ‘ This carol they began that hour,
How that life was but a flow'r ;
And therefore take the present time,
For love is crowned with the prime.
In springtime, the only pretty ring-time,
When birds do sing, hey ding-a-ding,
Sweet lovers love the spring.’ ”

CHAPTER XV.

THE UNEXPECTED.

PROFESSOR STANTON bared his head. He seemed wholly unconscious that he had taken Joan by surprise. He was panting a little with unusual exertion. He must have walked all the way from the station, the girl reflected. How like him it was to start without calculation.

She felt quite excited as she held out her hand. He put her in touch again with her old desires. She was too young to accept real life, and in her reception of the man who linked her with her ideals she infused a warmth which he took to be personal. His grave lips broke into a smile that was almost radiant. His eyes were humane, looking into hers with a softness that he did not seek to veil. In her new-born consciousness she felt the contagion of his gladness.

"Yes," he said, still holding her hand and quoting,

as though following the thread of an argument, "this rapid and inexorable expansion of the universal life, which covers, overflows, and swallows up all individual being, which effaces our existence and annuls all memory of us, fills me with unbearable melancholy. To be born, to struggle, to disappear—there is the whole ephemeral drama of human life. Except in a few hearts—and not even always in one—our memory passes like a ripple on the water, or a breeze in the air."

He introduced the lecture hall in a flash. His habit of quotation was too familiar to Joan to appear strange. He never used his own words when an authority could speak for him.

Against the background of reddish-brown bank, the girl's white figure stood out in relief, and her curly head and white throat; the sweet, proud poise was emphasised.

"Except in a few hearts, and not even always in one . . . our memory passes like a ripple on the water," he murmured again reflectively, with his gaze intent upon the young eager face. His dusty boots and travel-stained appearance had entirely passed his ken.

Joan, embarrassed by his scrutiny, was hasten-

ing to bid him to the house, when the voice over the field carolled with conviction :

“ ‘ . . . springtime,
The only pretty ring-time,
Sweet lovers love the spring.’ ”

“ Ah ! ” said the Professor, as if in answer to the affirmation.

Joan drew apart and walked slowly beside him. He lost the thread of his discourse and remained silent. Joan asked questions eagerly. How was Gertrude ? What did she think of this idling ? He answered at random ; he scarcely seemed to know. When he came in sight of the house, his attention was arrested. The old place had never looked more imposing—grey-white among the purple and orange shadows of the afternoon ; but the sight of it seemed to startle Stanley Stanton. He turned to his companion deprecatingly, again lifting his soft wideawake hat.

“ Will you talk with me a while ? ” he asked. “ I have no mother or sisters ; the woman who feeds me remains in her offices all day.”

Through an impulse to laugh, the pitifulness of his loneliness forced itself upon the girl for the

first time. Like other people, she regarded the Professor as an intelligence more than as an individual.

"All day through I sit alone," he continued, while she turned from the house path towards the gorge, silent with surprise at his new-found speech. "But I have beguiled the hours with memories," he went on, when they stood beside the shadowed stream.

The sun was going down behind the purple and silver peaks in a great red ball of fire; but the Professor took no more notice of his surroundings than if he stood in his familiar class-room. He appeared to have forgotten his walk of many miles; he had the manner of a man who had come far to say a given thing.

"I have a certain power of memory," he explained, his back to the red rays of sunlight, which crimsoned the girl as though she stood in the red flame of a transformation scene. "It may be inconceivable to some, but I find the quality that constitutes the success of individuals—that frequently develops mediocrity to talent—a—a positive hindrance at times. It is often helpful to forget . . . I always see your face . . . your voice ever reaches me!"

Joan started. She suddenly heard the plaintive calling of nesting birds. She looked at the broken stems of the marguerites and the fading flowers at her belt, and asked a question that seemed wide of the subject, and to surprise herself.

"Do you think there is such a thing as permanent joy, or must there always be a reaction?"

She looked anxious for an answer, and he gave it conscientiously, as he answered every student.

"An uplifting means blood in new channels of the brain—giving pleasure. After a time the flow ceases, and quiescence, called reaction, sets in. This is the materialistic explanation."

An uplifting? Yes, that expressed her sensation of the past months. New channels of blood to the brain! It was a matter of blood. Her face cleared; she breathed relief.

She heard the pigeons cooing drowsily; but she had spent enough time in bird study. She had quick memory for intellectual comradeship, and had tasted this man's quality. She listened for his next words.

"The incidents and avocations of the day have been incomplete without you—Johnnie." He lingered over the last word. "It is a foolish ap-

pellation," he added, with his rare smile, "but permit it. Dear, will you come to me? Will you voice life for me?—individualise it? It is shadowy and unreal to me. 'To be born, to struggle, to disappear.' 'I pass . . . into the grave . . . while still living.'"

He turned to her a face so tender that she was amazed.

"I have not learned to woo," he added. "I must of necessity keep you in my thought, my memory being tenacious."

The idea was new and strange to the girl; an emotion she mistook for tenderness swept over her. This was the link to her desire; could she let it go? cast from her what she most desired—encouragement, distinction? This man of well-made mind would never confound intellectual nature with sense.

"You ask me for companionship?" she queried, grown pale, but intent and earnest for his answer.

"—Companionship!" he echoed softly, catching the word from her lips.

"To be co-worker with you; to enter your domain of ideas?"

"—Domain of ideas!"

"You honour me," she said, wishing, while she spoke, with an independent action of brain, that she could join the fading blossoms she wore to their broken stalks. "Intellectual companionship—the whole question centres here?"

"—Centres here!"

There was something almost sublime in his humility; he did not see the satire of pupil dictating to master. They spoke in different tongues. He meant thus; she thus. She was devouring with greedy joy the prospect of his mind; he felt aching of head, hunger of heart.

"It would be hypocritical of me not to tell you," he added unexpectedly, "not to say that I have coveted you. You have, perhaps, thought of me as a man exempt from human passion. I myself am pained to discover that reason and will have not constituted plentitude of existence to me. I am testimony of deranged balance; memory predominates; I could not forget you; I found myself brooding. It appears that your presence is my liberty of mind. If I see you constantly before me, I may lose consciousness of you. I came to say this," he added, and turned to retrace his way, having spoken.

Joan stood before him.

"You have revealed your heart to me," she said, with a gesture as though she would force the confession back; "and your confidence compels equal candour. You offer me your name, home, knowledge, of which to make use?"

"—Of which to make use."

"Your name is dear and sacred to me, the source of mental effort; under the inspiration of your presence, I believe that I shall do my best; but, if it should not be?"

"—Not be?"

She stretched out both hands towards him appealingly.

"I don't know! I don't know yet what I am. A vision of myself as I might become flits before me. I rebuke myself for my poor similitude of her. I do protest against the gap between us; if I thought I should never bridge it, I should send you away."

"—Away?" he echoed faintly.

"Yes," continued Joan passionately, her voice sounding like music in the man's ears; "back to your loneliness and your peace."

"Not peace," he corrected.

It was Joan who echoed now:

"Not peace?"

"No, not peace," he affirmed. "There is a terrible weight upon me. I am barren of speech. It shames me as a woman barren of child. . . . I seek enfranchisement of spirit. . . . I am selfish. The silent man is unknown, be his dreams ever so great. I *have* failed. You may. If you do, we shall, perhaps, come nearer in the darkness."

Joan turned her back to the setting sun, and looked over the field whence David's voice had come.

"Would you be content," she asked, turning suddenly and again facing the Professor, "to be loved a little after Enoch?"

There was no need to explain. They had read the poem often. He thought in silence for a moment, Joan watching him the while. Then his face took on a look of relief; he murmured just audibly:

" ' Yet Enoch, as a brave, God-fearing man,
Bow'd himself down, and in that mystery
Where God in man is one with man in God,
Pray'd for a blessing on his wife and babes
Whatever came to him.' "

The Professor had found his precedent, and he smiled contentedly.

"Thank you," said Joan, relieved. "But it is only fair to tell you that there has been no Enoch."

"I want no faultless angel—only you," he said, and lifted his hat; "your voice, your sweet ways, your mortal faults."

Joan answered with humility and earnestness equal to his.

"My present self dissatisfies me now; help me to strenuous days."

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"Mr. Professor Stanton, sir," said Father, in a loud voice, his face shining with pride and gratification, "you are welcome. The house is at your service. Nothink could give Mother an' me greater pleasure—nothink!"

Mother looked doubtful. She suspected the man. She had enjoyed a season of restfulness in the thought that Joan was growing more at home in her father's house, forgetting Miss Goodyear and all that pertained thereto. While she directed Mercy about the table linen laid by in lavender for great occasions, and the silver locked in the old oak locker, and went herself to the larder to select the tenderest chickens and tastiest tart, her mind reverted to the same question—what was the Professor after?

Father did not ask ; it was enough that he had come. Otira had never sheltered a more welcome guest. All through the meal Father talked. It was well he did ; his voice covered the silence of the others.

"You must come again, Professor Stanton, sir, when the wheat is in the ear ! Come to our harvest home. It's a time of thanksgivin' for the bounty of the Lord ; a consummation of hope. The plough and sickle are heard no more in the land, nor the pantin' of labourin' cattle. When the wheat is in the ear—"

"It proves the quality o' the grain," commented Mercy from the background, putting a plate of cherry pie before the Professor with a snort as though she grudged it.

Joan, although she had fasted since the morning, did not eat heartily, but drank her tea eagerly, and seemed pre-occupied. Mother questioned her as to her long absence ; but when she answered, "I was part of the time with David," the woman's brow cleared.

"He hasn't been near the house since morning," she replied. "He's busy in the hayfields ; he's no need to work as he does ; he's never happy unless

he gives a hand. He'll be in to supper; the house seems dull without him."

Yes, he was good to Mother; Joan liked him for that. He had many pleasant household ways. She roused herself, and went to her room to bathe her face and hands. She felt a strange, dream-like calm, as though she watched another girl performing her own acts, admiring her own face in the glass as she arranged a fleecy white scarf over her head and shoulders. She opened her window and gathered a handful of white roses, some of which she tucked under the hood of her scarf, fastening the others at her breast. Her face had paled, and her great eyes shone like diamonds under her dark curls. She smiled at her reflection faintly, then turned to go out.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MOONLIGHT EFFECT.

A FEW stars twinkled softly in the grey-blue sky. The twilight was luminous, and the white blossoms of the clematis looked like a light snowfall on the dark tree-tops. The great hills were distinctly outlined against the pale vault; house and barns stood out like black shadows. The air was fragrant with roses and lilac blossoms—sultry with accomplished day, still with consciousness of coming night. Through the stillness, the voice of Nature could be heard. A bird sitting in the dense brushwood; the distant cry of the mor-poke; the munching of the kine among the grass; the splash and startled “quack” of a belated duck; the lewd crowing of an inexperienced rooster, whose instinct was to turn night into day; and the gentle rush of the gorge over boulder and fern.

Upon the margin of the stream, David kept his

tryst. As the white figure of the girl glided into view, like a sprite of the night, he sprang forward amid the shadows to meet her. Joan stopped a little short of meeting, but he came on.

"I'm glad you've come," he said softly, and with gratitude; he had feared that she might not.

He led the way to the plains, bending to look into Joan's face once or twice with interrogative and eager glances. She looked straight on, stepping lightly. She appeared to be in another world, and to see other objects than those at hand. David, too, was plunged into inner consciousness—the joy of love at the nearness of the creature loved. In that glad moment he scarcely realised that he was a separate personality; his love held dominion over all circumstance; joy was in the fact of his love, which, while impersonal, put him in touch with the universe. He roused at last.

"Where are you?" he asked, bending lower to arrest her glance.

She turned to him quietly, and answered in matter-of-fact tones, lifting her hand while she spoke to push the clustering curls away from her forehead:

"We came to see the moon rise."

Her tones roused him also ; brought him back to earth and circumstance. His freedom of spirit vanished ; he consciously measured his progress with the girl beside him ; calculated his strength.

They had passed through a field gate, and the homestead was behind them, open space in front. At their back were high hedges of gorse and sweet-briar in full bloom. Never again did David or Joan see the moon rise over land or sea without recollection of the pungent odour of the mingled fragrance.

A flock of clouds, like huddled sheep, whitened in the sky ; a vivid silver flash, with answering signal from the snow-peaks and upper air ; a gleaming arc, which lit the topmost branches of the dark trees, and a full-orbed moon sailed into a surf of cloud waves, and passed through to the blue zenith, touching with magic the weird, majestic roll of tussock-land, chastening, half-revealing distances, hinting at space unseen ; then, the light falling nearer, slashed with steel the meandering stream, and made every near object discernible and transparent silver-blue.

“ Superb ! ” said David, with a deep breath.

“ Chaste—and severe,” answered the girl.

"Severe?" he queried.

"In its revelation," she replied.

She spoke like one who was scourging herself, and awakening from a trance. This was a new mood. She was adorable, the young man thought. He liked her better so than when cold and haughty. The silver light gleamed upon her white gown and head-dress, and showed the roses in her hair and at her breast. David's eyes grew large with longing; he almost succumbed to the temptation to fold her in his arms.

"I am nothing; I have little except my love to offer you," he said, with sudden impulse, taking her hand. "I am an ignorant beggar beside you, but my love will last till death. It may be presumption to say so; but, dear, it is true. If it is wrong of me to tell you this, forgive me; but, right or wrong, it is true."

She had started forward while he spoke, as though in answer to the lash, and they went on together, hand in hand.

"You draw me to you as to a magnet," he went on, pressing the fingers he held, and speaking hurriedly, as though fearing a check. "My whole thought and force is concentrated on you; but I

have yielded in opposition to will and pride ; for, sweetheart, you have scorned me without scruple. No, don't speak. Let me speak this once, if for ever after I must hold my peace. You must not crush me ; my heart needs you. While your love is a matter of uncertainty, all other things are in doubt for me. I feel timid of action, lest it should lead me away from you—of speech, lest it offend. Put me in harmony with life, dear ; love me. I surrender myself ; purify and ennoble me."

The ardour of his voice, the humility of his look, penetrated to the girl's senses only dimly. She gave a little shudder in the warm summer air. It was their last walk together, and she was going to hurt him. She wished she might have left him with an easy heart. How disastrously for his contentment her holiday had ended ! She looked helplessly at the sunburnt hands that held her own, and thought stupidly how the moonlight contrasted the white of her skin with the brown of his.

"You will let me try my very best to win your love ?" he urged.

"No, no !" cried the girl—"no, no !"

David's face fell ; the look of expectation died from it.

"Are you punishing me for my audacity?"

"No, no!" cried the girl again, meeting his gaze with eyes that were full of trouble. "You must put such thoughts away from you. We may only be friends."

Was she acting? Her voice and eyes spoke of pain.

"Friends?" he asked slowly—"you and I?" Then he went on impetuously, "Do you think that I can bear to have you go away, having once known you, and not be sure that I shall see your face again?"

Joan roused herself with a strong effort. What was she permitting this man to say?—to show her his heart without reserve, while she stood by, unable to check his fervid speech. Her breath came fast; she drew away her trembling hands. The emotion that invaded her at his touch was so unlike anything she had experienced before, that she felt compelled to shake it off. If she was not to become a creature swayed by the accidental happening of the hour, she must show decision—offer resistance to this weakness which oppressed her.

"I am the promised wife of Professor Stanton," she said desperately, in accents of self-depreciation and apology.

A painful silence followed her words. A tide of self-scorn swept over her, despite her belief that she had acted wisely. Her arms hung helplessly by her side ; she could not meet David's eyes. She had never promised him anything, she reiterated to herself. It was better they should part ; this recurring struggle between duty and inclination would then be over. She had not anticipated how difficult life made it to conform to a given law of action.

" Since when—has this been true ? " he asked jerkily.

She battled against her sense of deadness—fought for an assumption of indifference. He was taking the lead ; she tried vainly to realise the position in which she found herself, and to shake off the consciousness of his mastery. It was new to her. Until this hour she had held the reins. While she stood motionless, thinking words of resistance, but not able to pronounce them, she felt David's hand upon her shoulder. He turned her face to the light.

" I beg your pardon," he said, after a moment's silent scrutiny, letting go his hold, and speaking in frozen tones. " Your announcement was sudden—I was not prepared for it. Hadn't we better return ? "

His manner condemned her; he despised her. Fierce invective would have been easier to bear, would have given her a loophole of escape through anger. But he held his head high; he seemed to tower beside her as they paced back silently. She had treated him as one of inferior strength; it was she who was undergoing disenchantment in his eyes. Half an hour earlier his eyes had read her countenance; it was she now who cast beseeching glances upon him. She wanted to soften the blow to him, to explain.

He opened the field-gate for her to pass through, and, as she did so, he caught sight of her drawn brow and tremulous lips. A passionate protest rose in his heart against her decree; but he forced it back in stubborn harshness. It was easier to let go than to hold on at the cost of self-esteem. Joan felt his anger in every inch of flesh. Acting upon an impulse, she put a hand upon his arm.

"Doesn't it seem clear to you that what you wish could never be?" She steadied her voice and went on after an almost imperceptible pause, "We are little suited to each other; after the first we should regard each other as strangers. Neither you nor I would be able to get rid of old habits, nor to ignore

their claims, and we could not throw each other off; it would be misery. Can't you see?"

She turned to him with a faint smile on her lips, struggling hard to keep her composure. A protest rose in him against the calculation of her words.

"Our opinions on marriage are evidently dissimilar, as upon other questions. I have no more to say. If you were my promised wife, I should expect another man to protect you from himself."

She made no answer. He held her to her bond. Well, it was honourable, and she appreciated honour; yet how easily he resigned her. She recollected that she was being swayed by emotion again, and drew herself up. If she suffered, it was by her own voluntary act; but she was not suffering! Suffering lay in the violation of duty. She wished she could make David understand that duty had determined her choice; that she had been educated all along to take this step; that to branch off suddenly into a new way of life would be a breaking of mental law.

Instead of speaking, David buried his face in his hands. She heard his breath coming loud and fast. She was not prepared to stand such a test.

"Don't," she said softly, "don't, David!"

He made no answer, nor did he look up. Her mouth quivered; her voice was soft and musical.

"This is a phase—it will pass," she said. "An obligation is laid upon us to conform to the laws of life."

"Is not natural truth one of those laws?" he demanded, standing erect. "Your arguments are sophistry; but I would not, if I could, reason them away. My wife must come to me of her own free will. You'll know in your heart one day whether your love is mine or not. If it *is mine*—and, Johnnie, sometimes I think it is—you cannot perpetrate the awful lie of marriage with another man. I want you, will and body. To-day you are under other influence; no man on earth must come between my love and me. No woman has ever feared me; no woman shall ever feel her love for me unclean. But do what you will, put a thousand miles between us—if *you are mine*, full knowledge will come. I will not contend. I need not. I shall suffer while I wait; but let me say, once for all, that I shall be loyal."

"I shall never come," she said, with conviction, "never."

His head went down again upon his folded arms.

"Then fare-you-well," he said brokenly. "You have taken my heart and strung it—strung it with clumsy art; you have played some melody on it; tuned it to passionate music; but to-night you have broken a string."

As she turned to go, the roses fell from her hair. He stooped and picked them up.

"No, I shall never return," Joan reiterated, as she stood at her window that looked over the way they had walked. "It will not be possible that I should prove so weak. If I acted from caprice it would be another matter. Life has requirements in excess of passion. I cannot love as the women of fiction love. If I did I should let everything else go, and think the end of existence gained."

A footstep roused her. She turned and saw Mother coming towards her through the moonlit space between the window and the door. The woman put her arms about the girl and kissed her, and Joan felt that she was trembling. There was chastened agitation in the faded face; she was eager to speak, but hesitated. Joan had taken off her wrap; her clustering curls were tumbled, her cheeks looked pale. There was something in her attitude half defiant, half wistful, that reminded Janet of her

child as she had known her long ago—as she had looked when standing on the rug that night after her flight.

“Dearie,” said Mother suddenly, looking anxiously into the moved face, “you are here in your mother’s home. If there is anything that troubles you, tell me. Tell me now, dear.”

“It is all well,” replied the girl, not shrinking as usual from the soft caressing hands.

Mother’s face was doubtful. She drew the girl closer, and they stood with linked arms looking out into the silvered world.

“Has the Professor told you?” asked Joan, in tones which, in spite of all her efforts, quavered.

The woman nodded, and then sighed.

“It is true, then? I thought it mightn’t be. It don’t seem real. I thought maybe he’d got muddled in his mind; he does seem so at times. Perhaps I grudge you to him, and that makes me see things awry; the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, as Father and the Bible says. And yet it seems to me that I can’t grudge you, for I’ve been planning your wedding in my own mind ever since you were a baby in long clothes. Still, it’s struck me like a blow. I hadn’t thought of

him; it's upset me. There's nothing more difficult than to re-arrange ideas; and mine seem all topsy-turvy, like the store-room after an earthquake. I've been building up romances, dear."

Joan's face gave no indication that her mother had touched upon a truth. The woman shook her head disappointedly.

"Girls have different tastes nowadays," she went on, with another prodigious sigh; "there don't seem to be the same romance in their love-making as there used to be."

She came to another stop, but received neither affirmation nor contradiction from the silent girl.

"A vision haunts me of my little grandchildren," she said, with gentle plaintiveness; "for the life of me, I can't help seeing them bald-headed and wearing spectacles."

Joan drew herself apart, with cold reserve.

"Ah, my dear," said Mother, with sad eyes on the averted face, "that's where marriage leads. If a girl cannot love the man as the father of her children, marriage is a secret shame. When the man's blood cools, and he tries a woman as a man will, it's a poor thing if the wife can't be glad that, with all his faults,

he, and not any other man, is the father of her sons and daughters."

Joan turned her face further away.

"It takes the sweetness from a woman's fondest hours to know she never loved the man it is her duty to teach her children to love. How can she show another when she doesn't know the way? And a house divided, dear, is sure to fall—"

"Who's talkin' of divided houses?" broke in Father's strong voice. "You're a born pessimist, you are, Mother!"

His entrance had given both women a shock. Joan felt relief; she turned to her father gratefully.

"Father, tell me, have I done right?"

Father flung a protecting arm about her shoulders.

"Wilt thou have this man . . . to love . . . honour . . . and obey?" he asked, with almost stern emphasis, pausing between each phrase, the more to impress.

"I honour him; where one honours, obedience follows!"

"Well said, Joan Jefferies; an' love is the outcome of respect—the real foundation of it. The love that doesn't take its rise in honour is a shallow stream that the heat of life soon scorches dry."

"Please leave me now," pleaded the girl. "I want to think."

Left alone, she knelt at her open window. Her meditations were prolonged.

"I must escape from trifles and caprices," she said at last. "I am not deceiving myself—I am not. There is only one way of escape from oneself—work."

In the days that followed, Father's face shone with satisfaction. He conducted the Professor over the farm, talking loudly, drawing attention to its beauties with confident expectation of appreciation. But the student of literature had not learned to read Nature at first sight—she distracted attention from her interpreters; he could not see her charm except through the spectacles of art. Set free from cornfields, he had resource to Keats, and, with a sigh of relief, lingered with ecstasy over the pictures of the poet. The physical eye failed to detect colour, his sense to appreciate the subtle suggestions of beauty, until choice words objectified the picture to his brain. As a looker-on, he missed the phenomena.

Almost as unexpectedly as he had appeared, the Professor took his departure. He came and went

a stranger. Mother eyed him with suspicion, and something of fear. Father, in his most optimistic mood, could not affirm that he joyed in his presence, independent of external and material influences. Joan moved like an automaton, regulated to a conformity to duty. David only appeared to act from internal liberty. The family affair of the Jefferies did not seem to hamper his movements; he admitted, by no sign or word, that he was hurt; he offered no resistance, did not struggle against events. So completely did he put them aside, that Joan, with private scorn, took comfort in the thought that she had not allowed the temptation of an hour to influence her, the agreeable to outweigh reason.

But some other instinct did not tamely accept David's acquiescence. If he had rebelled, solicited for his desire, her sympathy would have, at least, been his; but his quick recognition of the rights of another man, his refusal to combat those rights, his perfect conformity to good breeding, irritated the girl, and piqued her. Her gentler inclinations froze. She did this thing, and did not do the other, to prove that reason, and not susceptibility, impelled her.

Mother alone obeyed her instincts, taking no cognisance of why or wherefore.

"I thought," she said to David, one night when they were alone in the sitting-room, "that it might have been different. I hoped that you cared."

David laughed. The warm, ingenuous nature that the woman had learned to love, seemed indifferent. If he had *bared* his pain, she would have tried to comfort him—a man's sorrow has first rights over women. Instead of lamenting, he said quietly :

"Joan has willed ; we follow her lead."

CHAPTER XVII.

HARVEST.

THE golden haze of autumn shimmered over russet fields; the scent of ripe apples and garnered corn made the air fragrant; in the mellow light the larks poured forth their song—song in whose passionate cadence was the memory of warm flush of sunrise and sunset, the spirit of summer gone.

The granaries were fat with a rich harvest, the second crop of hay was stacked and thatched, great wains had groaned beneath their cargo of wool, and the kine had increased and multiplied. The reaping and threshing machines were silent now; but about the homestead was an air of expectation—a sense of holding breath—for the harvest home was to be a double festival, to see the daughter of the house a bride.

Mother had frequently been heard to say that the boy about the farm had brought them luck—that,

with his coming, all things had prospered. It was the luck that followed zeal with knowledge, Father said; but the woman shook her head. She misgave her that he was ill requited, that Father's pride of place for Joan had blinded his eyes. She watched the quiet sternness of David's face with eyes illumined by intuition, and while she leant upon his sturdy arm, hungered to challenge his reserve. But he gave her no opportunity. Without effusion he met every occasion, infusing a gentleness that was almost tenderness into his manner towards her, but still holding his position, over which Janet could not cross, except by glances. From these occasionally he turned away his head. Joan felt sore that he gave her so little cause for grievance. There was no posing, no dramatising; he acted rationally—too much like a pure intelligence to justify her in her assumption of his sensuousness. She had arraigned him before a moral tribunal, and he conducted himself with calmness and deliberation. "Of the earth—earthy" had been her early judgment, and she was conscious of a flaw in her perception. The young farmer had succeeded in being a gentleman even as the intellectual world understood the term! He had unhesitatingly obeyed reason—that is, as she herself

had presented it—and she found herself surprised and angry that natural instinct had not predominated. It was odious thus to sin against her æsthetic taste! for a girl, trained as she had been, to feel any inclination contrary to the law of mind! She was willing to put herself under restraint, lest she should not meet the exigencies of her own principles. Her remedy for this artificial sensibility was marriage. She would be linked so, irrevocably, to the desire of her mind. And David disputed nothing. If he had suffered any injury at her hands, his pride held sway over passion and resentment.

But the girl fought mutely against the contradiction of his present manner to that of the past. He no longer courted her favour, or sued for understanding, but accepted the position she had assigned to him. So the months had drifted on from summer to autumn, she schooling herself to check this degeneracy which, she estimated, would, if yielded to, leave her only a little higher than the animals. She fought valiantly, and alone. And, because she dreaded the emotional influence of her mother, drew back from Janet's advances; the woman, in ignorance of the cause, lamented that the season of her short-lived content was over, that the late awakening

receptivity and responsiveness in her daughter's manner had frozen in its spring.

Joan's face had lost its light. The passionate love of those around her had left her uncomprehending—dead. For the first time, she felt—and shunned feeling as a disease.

With Father only was she at ease. His unfaltering conviction that she did well, his manifest pride and satisfaction, soothed and confirmed her in her part. His voice was her conscience and hushed her inward voice, and he drew her to him day by day, unconscious of Mother's covetous eyes and Mercy's emphasised hostility.

Upon Mother and Mercy devolved the responsibilities of the trousseau. Joan was the only wholly uninterested person concerned in the preparations. She emphatically declared that she would not wear wedding garb, but would be married in her academical robe. It was sign and symbol of the union, she perhaps thought—she did not say; but left Mother sighing:

“I could have wished a bit of a bride about the house. . . . Our only child . . . and we old.”

And Mercy wondered how she herself would have looked in white silk under a bridal veil, snorting

angrily as she pondered on the arrogance with which some folk disdained their chances.

It was the day before harvest home, the eve of her wedding, and all day long Joan had wandered restlessly about. The history of the first day of her home-coming had repeated itself, with a difference. The brilliance of spring, the almost startling suddenness of bursting leaf and life, had changed to haze and stillness. That sense of limitation and fugitive satisfaction, that hint of regret and coming combat, which lingers in the autumn air, weighed heavily upon the girl's young spirit. Through the white twilight of dawn she saw David's face in the milking-yard, looking stern and cold. Later he passed before her over the fields, but the fields were reaped, and his song had something of passionate reproach in it under the changed conditions :

“‘It was a lover and his lass
That over the green cornfields did pass.’”

The tense was the past tense, and, as Joan heard, her whole consciousness seemed only to exist in the knowledge. When she found herself once

more in the world of action this illusion would pass. Her waking life would explain this dream.

Returning from the fields she met David face to face at the gate at which they had parted. In a moment the man was the only reality—his eyes more expressive than all art or theory, his material strength more potent than intellectual power, his personality her pole and centre. With the suddenness of an electric shock she thrilled to her fingertips; yet she did not understand his monarchy of her sensations, his right to claim her. This force which radiated from him to her she regarded in the light of animal magnetism. With the thought her maiden pride took arms.

He had paled at the shock of meeting, rallied to a courteous greeting, then, as though something in her face had stirred him to expectancy, he bent forward slightly, there leaping to his eyes a flash of light. But she effaced his hope with serene speech, and he fell back, modifying his glance, although the hand with which he held open the gate was shaking on the rail. A moment's speaking silence, and Joan broke the spell.

"I wonder whether you will like Gertrude Good-year. She comes to-night."

She had gone through the gate, and heard it shut behind her, and felt that she had passed through a fiery ordeal, panting and breathless, clutching hard at her garment of self-esteem to shield her from the scorching flame. Accustomed as she had been to analyse all emotion, she only half believed in the genuineness of her own.

When next she was conscious of David's voice, she found that he was drawing her attention to some prize cattle grazing near. Their moment had passed.

In the afternoon, Father drove the buggy to the station to meet the Professor and Miss Goodyear.

Joan had first offered to accompany him, then suddenly changed her mind. The usual afternoon repose of the farmhouse had given place to a subdued activity. The great kitchen was decorated with ripe corn, and the immense table partly prepared for the wedding feast. Joan wandered from room to room, the only unoccupied and uninterested person in the house. She felt irritated at the disturbance, at the obliteration of the old home characteristics, and finally took refuge in her garret. The great red sun was slowly disappearing behind the heights when she emerged, looking as though she had been in the company of ghosts. Not daring to

risk a chance encounter with her mother, she set off with rapid strides along the road, as though her intention was to meet the buggy. The still twilight fell while she was walking; the solitary space was voiceless, save for the bleating of sheep. Her speed increased; only once before had she ever felt afraid, and that was long ago, when she had run from warmth and loving companionship in search of unknown good. She was afraid again; this time she knew not of what, but a sense of desolation paled her cheeks; her knees trembled and her steps lagged. In another minute she would have huddled to the earth, when she saw the buggy coming through the greyness towards her. She sprang forward with a little cry; there were *her* people, her rescue, and her refuge. Her lips trembled with the anticipation of communion; the Professor knew—Gertrude would understand.

“Woa-a, mare!”

Father’s voice sounded through the tumult, and Joan was conscious of a gentle, æsthetic face, tremulous with suppressed emotion, of a lifted, wide-brimmed hat, then of a gleam of golden hair, a firmly-set mouth, and the intent searching gaze of Gertrude Goodyear’s eyes.

The next impression was of the tall stooping figure of Stanley Stanton beside her.

He took her cold little hand in his. The sensation of protection which his clasp conveyed was very welcome just then; for the first time Joan experienced what it meant to be wholly dependent upon another, in need of sympathy. The respectful admiration of his manner liberated her from her gloomy thoughts. A warm rush of gratitude loosened her tongue, and put life into her steps. When she greeted Gertrude at the house the elder woman believed that she was looking into the face of a blushing bride.

She stiffened; a tinge of scorn disfigured her beautiful eyes and lips.

"May you find in this marriage your justification and sanctification," she said coldly.

That the undemonstrative, practical, unromantic girl could have fallen in love with the silent, solitary student, and become mobile and sensitive under the influence of passion like the most commonplace of her pupils, was a blow to Gertrude Goodyear that Joan could understand. In a passion of longing to be understood by this stately woman, whose rigidities of training had never been directed towards her

personally, Joan clasped her hands about the arm of her friend; but, with rapid words upon her tongue, was silenced.

"Don't gush; spare me," said Gertrude, with a smile almost of contempt.

Joan realised in a flash that her confidences had been procrastinated, that, apart from her wholesale distaste for marriage, Miss Goodyear had a justifiable, personal grievance. While the girl had been silently fighting with puzzling and conflicting emotions, Miss Goodyear had read her silence as an intimation that Joan's confidence in her sympathy had diminished. What Gertrude had suffered by this exclusion her cold, set face did not disclose; she made no resistance, but her reserve intimated that the barrier which Joan had raised could not be broken down in a rush of impulse. But the spell of Gertrude's leadership remained; for the first time, these two stood solely in the position of teacher and pupil.

It was a strange evening; each got through it for the sake of the others.

The great front parlour—unused except upon very special occasions—was thrown open. It was the only ugly room in the house. The wall-paper

and carpet matched in an inartistic floral design ; stiffly-starched blue-white curtains depended from the brass cornice poles ; two large gilt-framed portraits of Father and Mother respectively hung one in either recess of the fireplace, and, between the windows, a flaring "painting" of Joan as a child, represented her in her scarlet frock and fez, and with a very pert, if not bold, expression. Here also were gathered all Father's agricultural and horticultural prizes. Stuffed birds stared glassily from their cases, and in the place of the sweet scented lavender in the living-room, wax flowers flaunted in the mantel vases in colours which, setting Dame Nature at defiance, strictly matched the crimson and yellow of the upholstery. Great bunches of ivy filled the open fireplace, and a design in butterflies had the place of honour over the mantel-shelf. A large print of Napoleon hung on one wall, facing "The Death of Nelson." On a round table in one bay window lay the family Bible upon a spotless antimacassar ; on the Bible, under a glass case, rested the floral decoration of Tom and Janet Jefferies' wedding-cake. The whole apartment was speckless, and wore a general air of primness and holiday discomfort which, until the

occupants vitalised the atmosphere, overwhelmed with a feeling of isolation and alienation.

The Professor sat in the seat of honour, a great uncompromisingly stiff arm-chair, looking nervous and distracted at being the occasion of the domestic demonstration, his gaze directed afar off, lost, it seemed, in silent contemplation of a way of escape. The kindness and the beneficence of his countenance was disturbed; he had conceived the ideal of union as the poets conceive it—without its practical and commonplace preliminaries. He had journeyed here in a dream, his silent companion disturbing no illusion. If he had anticipated at all, it had only been the return, his dream fulfilled. The intervening ceremony and the family fuss had escaped his vision. Both he and Gertrude Goodyear abhorred fuss, and Joan winced at the unspoken criticism in the woman's eyes, and at the helpless, worried expression of the man.

Father was cordial, loud, and emphatic in his endeavours to approach the pale, silent student as a flesh and blood son-in-law. He raised his voice the more he strove to make himself understandable, glowing and expanding under his own exertions; airing his accumulated witticisms and senti-

mentalities till the fastidious recipient of his courtesies rose hurriedly, as though to escape from the weight of blended patronage and forced affection which were crushing him. Then, his appealing glance resting upon Joan's face, he murmured a line from "Maud"—

“ ‘There is none like her—none.’ ”

Gertrude Goodyear heard the murmur, and saw the sudden life and warmth that emphasised it. The tone of conviction, and the reassured manner of the man, were a revelation to her. She flushed, then paled, still watching with her intent gaze the glow of transformation that had changed the critical student into a human being. This was something more than idle susceptibility. The night in the oak avenue recurred to her forcibly, as it had frequently of late—when the Professor had first shown the man! Were all hearts to be reached by the smile of a girl? Great heroic hearts content to fall back upon nothingness? Were not even men like Stanley Stanton sufficient in themselves to fulfil their own destiny? or would he, later, replunge into the inner life which he was now forsaking?

The addition of David to the party made the position more painfully constrained. He had honoured the occasion by wearing his dress suit; he seemed determined to regard it seriously, to assume that the success or non-success of the evening depended upon external things, and did his best to dissipate Mother's visible anxiety and disappointment with his most charming manner. Joan was conscious of his every movement; also of Gertrude's attempts to quench the young man's attentions towards herself. The climax of the girl's discomfort was reached when Father, carried away by the sentimental suggestions of the hour, sang "John Anderson, my jo," seeing nothing incongruous or amiss in it. It was then that Joan wrenched the position from unyielding and incompetent hands, and dignified it. The ludicrous blundering of her well-meaning father covered her with confusion. He had conducted matters in a way befitting the nuptials of a dairy-maid; and Gertrude had sat by and seen her scourged without an attempt to liberate her.

The girl lifted her head and rallied her scattered force, and, by the immortal power of genius, drove all other influences into the background. The self-restraint and self-repression of the past few months

were forgotten the moment she began to read. The slender, white-frocked girl emancipated herself and her audience from the room, and the rigidities of courtesy and prejudice. More than once while she read, a quiver of passion shook her voice. Expectation broke through the shadow of Gertrude's reserve; David grew pale, and, standing under the print of Napoleon, unconsciously fell into his attitude, with arms folded upon his breast, telling something of the restraint he put upon his feelings. Once he looked up, but not at Joan; the Professor riveted his glance. The man was bent forward, with enthralled gaze upon the girl, his lips moving to a whispered reiteration of the words that left her lips. All his remoteness had dropped from him; there was an inner upheaval. Could appreciation of talent move so far?

It was Rossetti's "Blessed Damozel" that she read; and she transported them from the crudities of Otira Farm to infinite space, where

"The curled moon
Was like a little feather
Fluttering far down the gulf."

They heard the voice like that

“The stars
Had when they sang together,”

and saw the girl leaning in longing over the bar of heaven, pining for her earth-bound lover, with her star-crowned hair that was “yellow like ripe corn,” gleaming down her back.

Had she chosen this theme with definite purpose, Miss Goodyear wondered, to hint that love controlled all forces?

“‘I wish that he were come to me,
For he will come,’ she said.
.
.
We two will lie in the shadow of
That living mystic tree.
.
.
And I myself will teach to him
The songs I sing here.”

It was the broken, yearning voice of the man, and not Joan's they heard, then, aspiring to reach the woman's height, yet fearful of rejection :

“‘Alas ! we two, we two, thou sayest.
Yea, one thou wast with me
That once of old. But shall God lift
To endless unity
The soul whose likeness to thy soul
Was but its love for thee ’”

David's eyes were fixed upon hers now. It was accredited to the girl's artistic sense that, piteously, and with infinite pathos, she proceeded "We two," and, in subdued ecstasy, followed the re-united lovers in their hand-in-hand journey to a region of purity,

" 'Not once abashed or weak.' "

The revulsion of feeling was almost painful when her hearers realised with the Damozel that her ecstatic joy was anticipatory, that she was still lonely, in spiritual remoteness awaiting her beloved.

" 'And then she cast her arms along
The golden barriers,
And laid her face between her hands
And wept. (I heard her tears.)' "

"—I heard her tears!" the Professor's soft voice affirmed after the passionate cry.

"Oh, dear!" said Mother presently, furtively wiping her eyes; "she were only a woman after all, an' couldn't make herself at home, even in Paradise, without her man."

A loud snort from the doorway expressed Mercy's sentiments.

Almost with her last words, Joan passed from the room. Miss Goodyear's eyes followed her with a curious and troubled glance. The child had been equal to the occasion—had played her part well, and knit their divorced feelings by her old fascinating spell, bewildering with her eloquence and inspiration. For a moment she paused, then passed after her. Joan was in the garden, and, hearing footsteps, turned breathlessly.

"You!" she exclaimed, and there was something in her voice of disappointed expectation.

The woman caught the inflection, and her momentary impulse of softness passed.

"I am afraid," she said, with a great effort, "that I seem unsympathetic. I cannot reach your level; I am about the most unfitting person possible to masquerade at a wedding. I cannot command the enthusiasm expected. Upon the present occasion I am baffled. I regarded the Professor as absorbed in his professional pursuits, and find it difficult to readjust my conception of him. This betrayal of his highest . . . hurts."

There was a long silence; the slender, white figure walked beside the tall, dark-robed woman, scarcely less stately in carriage than she.

"I have wondered sometimes lately," said Joan gently, "whether love"—she hesitated over the word—"might not *be* the highest; wished, if so, that I might represent it to at least one life."

She spoke with unusual shyness, but with quiet pride. A burning flush suffused her face at the last halting words, but it was not visible in the moonlight.

"I don't understand you, quite," answered Miss Goodyear. "Indulgence in sentiment is a shilly-shallying business; resistance to emotion is the only avoidance of suffering. The moment reason yields to impulse, the man or the woman creates a limitation, and becomes enfeebled by a division of force."

"It has sometimes occurred to me," responded Joan, with hesitation, as one not sure of her ground, "that much of our æstheticism and intellectuality is in reality only drapery that hides the real man."

"Our lives are testimony that we do not agree," responded Gertrude, without passion.

There was another silent pacing upon the lawn. The woman's face was as still as though carved from stone; but Joan had lost some of her nervousness.

"Was there never a time when this common lot, this heritage of woman, seemed possible to you?"

It was a bold question. Joan trembled at her own temerity. She bent forward with an apologetic glance, but the woman's face was turned away. The answer for which she waited did not come. Instead, she spoke again herself.

"Forgive me; I have disappointed you—that I know. There is a smallness in me somewhere that hurts. I shall grow large only through that feeling and experience you dread so much for me. Let it come; a withdrawal would be a voluntary death in life. I must go on to meet it. One day I shall live wholly to weal or woe. When I have found the secret sources of my own being, I can track those of others. You have taught me a trick of analysis, Gertrude, that I cannot overcome. I find myself dissecting every inch of my own body and brain, and every inch of, say, yours among others. Has anybody loved me really, I wonder?"

Gertrude started, and turned her head quickly.

"You have all had so many diverse plans concerning me," she proceeded, answering Gertrude's

look. "Am I wholly to blame that I have failed to carry them all through?"

"Have I blamed?"

"You have loved me less!" answered the girl simply.

"This sort of thing is weak!" said the woman; "don't let it betray you into regret. Your alienations, if you have any, are of your own making. You seem, willing just now to barter all tangible good for something intangible. You have gone too far to retract; but I think I might have saved you had I been your mother."

They bade each other good-night, and Joan walked slowly towards the house. She came back presently.

"Mother did try," she said, with frank honesty. "She had nothing to gain either—and I think *she* loves me. I have hurt her always, and she is always my friend. I think it right to say so."

Miss Goodyear stood quite still for a long time.

"An extraordinary climax," she said at last, and went back to the house.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HARVEST HOME.

THE morning was still, as if in soft surprise at its own loveliness; the spell of sunshine overspread mountain and valley to the furthest goal of sight; the landscape was clear and the sky blue; the rich colour of the light compensating for garnered fruit and grain by its illusion of gold, which robbed the stubble fields and fruitless trees of nakedness. The rare flowers were rich in perfume, and the brown berries among the red and yellow leaves glowed ruddily.

The sound of whistling and song came from the dairies, as of men and women emancipated from the thought of labour, love-songs and snatches of psalms vibrating to a sense of poetry and thanksgiving.

The great barn was decorated for the festival with sheaves of wheat, ripe rosy apples, and clusters of purple and white grapes. Through the open windows

the rich light streamed, touching the harmonious tints with its alchemy. Autumn flowers were heaped in every corner, festooned from the rafters, and twined round the rough seats, which were presently filled with the men and women about the farm, gaily dressed in holiday attire.

At the last moment the house-folk arrived—Father in his broadcloth, with his massive grey head held high. The strong light searched out the lines in his face and forehead, but his lips and eyes were smiling. Upon his arm leant Joan—hardly leant; her small hand rested lightly upon it, her attitude self-poised. Her young face looked fairer than usual above her hooded gown.

“Law, what a shame!” whispered a dairymaid to her sweetheart.

Her remark was intended as one of regret at the nature of the bride’s adorning. But she was sweet and serene, her proud head covered with its clustering curls.

“She does look like a pretty boy, she does!” said another.

Her eyes were frank and clear, as she turned and smiled, and gave her hand to Stanley Stanton, who followed with Mother upon his arm. The man

looked dazed, like one walking in a dream. He also wore his academical robes, and impressed the onlookers with his gravity and air of distinction. Mother was gay and sweet in lavender silk, bringing in with her visions of her golden age of youth, happiness and affection ; the peace and calm of resignation had tranquillised her sweet, old face. But she let the Professor's arm drop at the earliest excuse, and turned to David, who stood handsome and strong, trampling his desire without sigh or lamentation.

Mercy, clothed like the dove outwardly, rustling with grim importance, seated herself as near David as she could, prepared to mourn or rejoice as she read the traces of sorrow or pleasure in his face.

Miss Goodyear conversed with the minister present in easy and subdued tones. Her gown was of silk, the colour of the grapes near which she sat, her only ornaments a deep Vandyke collar of white lace and her crown of golden hair. She was indulging in a little subdued satire at her companion's expense, and the reverend gentleman was looking uneasy ; but, above her mirthful smile, her large eyes were pathetic in their sadness.

The harvest thanksgiving was to precede the ceremony, which Father was to conduct. Had the law

allowed, he would himself have married Joan to the Professor. He could not leave to other hands any other duty of this day of days. He took his place at his old desk, massed with late blossoms. His hand trembled slightly as it touched the flowers lightly; his eyes were misty, as they travelled over the faces before him; he saw them through a veil; the blended scents and colours reached his senses; the snow drifts of white wool, the good corn, the attentive eyes of his daughter, the faded face of his wife. He saw also a man riding over wind-torn plains, who, emerging from the storm, heard a child's cry. He bent a little forward, and met Janet's eyes.

"This is the day that the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

"I'll try, dear," said Janet in her heart.

Gertrude Goodyear was sitting where she could see Tom Jefferies' face, and also, by a turn of the head, the whole assembly. She noticed how, at his first words, the simpering consciousness that had disfigured most faces sunk instantly from sight, that his affirmation dominated the thought of all present. He meant that all should give thanks. She would watch this thing; it might be interesting. Would this one mind prove superior to the slumbering

passion in that young man by the window, stir that hard-faced serving woman? The young man looked through the open space to the dark-browed hills. A little tremulous spasm passed over Mercy's face as she smoothed her dress. The Professor's eyes were gazing through his glasses with the careful attention with which a scholar bestows upon the matter in hand.

"Rejoice and be glad in it!" repeated Father to those at the end of the barn. Then he gave out a hymn, and melodious bass voices declared manfully:

" ' We plough the fields and scatter
The good seed on the land.' "

"Come, girl," said Father's eyes to Joan; but Gertrude noted that she did not sing; nor did David. Gertrude never sang. The Professor had drawn himself up and pushed his hair from his eyes. He looked as though he could plunge wildly into a controversy, when the melodious but unscientific assertion followed:

" ' But it is fed and watered
By God's Almighty hand.
.

He paints the wayside flower,
He lights the evening star.' ”

A few broken words passed from his lips; his astonishment was visible. Then the next moment he grew interested again, and filled with the honourable ambition to possess the fluency of the man who spoke.

Father's text was: "The summer is over, the harvest is past, and my soul is not saved."

Before he had finished both Stanley Stanton and Gertrude Goodyear had forgotten the occasion and the ceremony to follow him.

With a certain tyranny of force Tom Jefferies commanded the hour. All else but his subject was insignificant. The scholar forgot his pessimistic views on the futility of utterance. The man who spoke found new thoughts to voice an old subject. "Not saved" was not "lost"; the harvest closed a phase of existence—did not limit a soul's possibilities; every experience yielded some golden grains of truth which, re-sown later, would yield again. The sublime discontent of a man was the hint of his possibilities. From the winter of check or disappointment a healthy mind drew fresh resource.

To the man whose attainment had seemed absolutely fixed, who was bound by external form, this testimony of inspiration—for it was absurd to suppose the lecturer represented a trained mental development—came with a new surprise, a surprise pregnant with hope. Might not he, also, in an hour of inspiration, one day rise superior to the technicalities which had so fatally crushed him? Might he not also receive his thought and express it well in a new way? But to gain this man's vision of the ideal? How to obtain the far sight of the poet?

No limitation! Gertrude lifted her yearning eyes and kept them steadily fixed upon the rugged face. What of ridicule and irritation, and that dead wall reached again and again? But this labourer spoke of the gathered grain that others would sow, handing the harvest on from one generation to another. Something was garnered from every field; every experience held its ear, its golden truth contained within itself.

At this point Joan met David's eyes. His said: "As you have sown, so also will you reap." Hers answered: "The individual wills, not circumstances; I shall be mistress of my fate."

There was a stir when Father ceased. Mother gave a little cry and pressed to the side of her child. Joan turned to her and held her hand in a reassuring clasp. The folk at the back pushed forward. The moment had come when a girl is the centre of interest, when all sorts and conditions have a common heart towards her. The women were divided between smiles and tears, but one in sympathy, as recollection of their own wedding that had been, or thought of one to be, compelled them.

The nervous tension was again visible in the Professor's face. He met the eyes of the stern-visaged young man near the window, who, it occurred to him, had not recognised him as the bridegroom-elect. He felt grateful for the omission of salutation, yet puzzled and troubled at the aloofness of David's demeanour. The uplifting which had resulted from Tom Jefferies' magnetic force was suddenly overwhelmed by the new power of the antagonism of the dark eyes. Stanley Stanton turned away, feeling an opponent behind him; he could not put the new impressions into order. He had so long been encompassed by the functions and expressions of the university, and the boyish, ingenuous faces of students, that he was at sea in

these strange surroundings. But a foreboding of sorrow, an instinct that the strong, passionate face would connect with it, swept over him for a moment. He turned uneasily and looked towards David again, with a feeling of propitiation, but the antagonism had died from the young man's face ; he had turned, and was gazing out of the window.

" Who giveth this woman to be this man's wife ? " asked the clergyman, in clear, grave tones.

" I do ! " affirmed Father solemnly.

" Wilt thou have this woman . . . ? "

" I will ! "

The Professor's voice was earnest and humble.

" Wilt thou have this man . . . ? "

The girl had paled. She did not look at Stanley Stanton, but at her questioner, half defiantly. There was an almost perceptible pause, then she answered :

" I will ! "

" I wish you happiness, Mrs. Stanton, " were the next words of which Joan was conscious. They fell upon her startled senses with a shock. She looked up and saw a pale, smiling face above her. David's eyes seemed to burn her ; the voice, in which he so coldly acknowledged her husband's right, to reproach her.

"Thank you," she answered icily ; she made no appeal in tone or glance against his condemnation, but turned, giving her hand to her mother.

"Don't leave me, dear," she said, with something like entreaty.

Janet patted the hand she held, with no eyes, even of triumph, towards Miss Goodyear. An hour previously she had had her doubts and demurs ; but her daughter was wife now, and the married mother had only one desire, that the married daughter might walk without resistance or reluctance where the bridegroom walked. She turned with a new feeling towards the husband of her girl. He had a claim, and she was ready to acknowledge it.

"God deal by you as you by her," she said brokenly ; and then looked into his face eagerly for sign of response.

"Amen," responded he earnestly and simply ; "amen . . . mother."

Janet's face flushed. The moment was heavy with pain and hope. She put her hands upon the stooping shoulders, reached up, and kissed Stanley Stanton upon the lips.

"My son !" she said.

To Janet, marriage was a sacrament, and the husband of her daughter was no longer a stranger in her eyes ; henceforward he must enter into both her joys and worries, nor must she rebel against his decree.

David saw and understood. He turned sharply.

"Come, lads and lasses," he cried, and led the way, strewing the first flowers for the bride. He was the merriest of the merry that day—the life of the festivities.

Twilight had descended upon the fields and plains, the mountain steeps looked bleak and cold. In the porch stood mother and Miss Goodyear, the latter cloaked for a journey.

"I wish you'd stay, at least for to-night," Janet was saying, almost piteously, looking into the austere face of her departing guest.

"Thank you, no," responded Gertrude, gazing not at her hostess, but out where the shadows lingered.

"I'm sorry," resumed Janet gently. "It wouldn't be so bad if you could reach home to-night ; but I don't like the thought of a woman leaving my house this time of the evening to put up at a wayside inn. I know them inns. You reach them

dead tired, and won't be able to get a wink of sleep for the clatter beneath; and, most likely, you'll catch your death of cold from damp sheets. It's a poor way to have you treated, after coming so far to do our Johnnie honour."

The woman said "our" with marked emphasis; but Gertrude listened in stony silence.

"I know you're sore at heart," proceeded Janet boldly, her pale face growing paler, and her lips tremulous at her own boldness. "You couldn't live with Joan—seven years—and not miss her. But you'll see her oftener than I."

She struggled on with what she had to say in spite of the discouragement of Gertrude's frowning silence.

"You've been good to her. I wronged you once. I was jealous. I feared you'd keep my maid away from me. I'm sorry; for you're as lonesome as me to-night, and I'm as lonesome as you. She left us both. We both know what it is to rear and lose; but I've this advantage over you, I've got her father to comfort me, and that's why I want you to stay. I can't bear the thought of your going away all alone—at night, too."

She paused.

"Thank you," said Gertrude, with a courteous inclination of the head, but with no indication that her determination was shaken.

Janet went on with difficulty.

"Once you asked me, didn't I think a teacher shared with a child's parents. I said no. It wasn't true. Your patience and cleverness have had a deal to do with making Johnnie what she is. I knew it then, but wouldn't say so. But to-day—when the man—took her—from teacher and mother alike—I own it. I've been mother of her body, you of her mind. The man has triumphed over both."

Janet was giving voice to a wider truth than she knew. It was the deliberate expression of her personal feeling.

The blood rose to the listener's proud face.

"It is the mother's tragedy," she said gently.

It was the first sign she had given that she understood, or identified herself with the moment.

"I deserve that you should pity me," she added, in tones of self-contempt. "I permitted myself a weakness that I despised in others. It clouded my judgment. Not all the optimism on earth can save from suffering the individual who fluctuates between

sentiment and duty. I have regained my ballast. Here is the buggy; good-night."

With an imperative gesture, she waved Janet's outstretched hands aside.

Then—Janet afterwards told how as she stood looking after her, chilled by her coldness—she suddenly came back from the buggy steps, and, taking both Janet's hands, looked at her quite humbly.

"My mother died when I was a little child. . . . Will you kiss me . . . mother of Johnnie?"

Then she went out in cold, proud, pale reserve to face her loneliness.

The sound of the buggy wheels had died away, when Father joined Mother where she stood. The house was silent in the shadow, the windows in darkness, for the revels were over. The occasional echo of a voice floated to them from a distance, or a straggling rocket shot into the air, burst and fell; but presently sound died from the fields and road, as the last revellers departed. Mother had huddled to Father's shoulder; his arm had strayed to her waist. The two old faces were indistinct in the shadow. The two aged lovers were thinking of their youth. Their minds travelled back together picking up old

incidents, forgotten chains, remembering foolish wisdoms, and wise follies, and all the resources of their innocent affection. The weight of Janet grew heavier against Tom's shoulder, the grip of his arm firmer about her waist. They had had their divisions, their separate ambitions, infinitely great or infinitely small, according to the standard of the world outside their world; but an invisible cord bound them always each to each, in spite of contraries. They understood each other. They had no need for words. There had been no disillusion; neither had changed to the other; each was still the other's belief. With one mind they dwelt upon the epoch of their lives—their child late given; then Janet, quoting for the first time in her life, expressed the thought of both:

“ ‘And the reapers reaped,
And the sun fell, and all the land was dark.’ ”

Later, the woman turned over dainty and small garments in a lavender-scented closet, and sang her old song abstractedly:

“ ‘Heigh, oh! daisies and buttercups,
Fair yellow daffodils, stately and tall;
When the wind wakes how they rock in their grasses,
And dance with the cuckoo-buds slender and small!

Here's two bonnie boys, and here's mother's own lasses,
Eager to gather them all.' "

And David lay by the meadow gate, with his
shamed face hidden in the tussock grass.

A hundred miles away Professor Stanton quoted,
with smiling lips :

“ ‘ I have led her home, my love, my only friend,
There is none like her—none.’ ”

CHAPTER XIX.

ADJUSTMENT.

THE silent house on the Avon received its new mistress without demonstration. The housekeeper who waited on the married pair gave no indication that her master's new relationship was unexpected ; her face was indicative neither of pleasure nor the reverse.

She replied quietly to his greeting, then turned to Joan, who stood hesitatingly near the door, and said :

"Perhaps you'd like to come to your room, ma'am," and led the way across the flagged hall and up the stairs. On the landing she paused and turned to her master. "I lighted a fire in the dining-room, sir ; the evening is a little chilly."

She conveyed by a look that Joan was to follow her, and opened a door opposite to that from which a ruddy glow streamed invitingly.

The chill had struck on the girl's senses, she shivered slightly, and felt inclined to make for the

glow, but followed, instead, whither the woman led, realising with a sort of shock that she had come home, that this house would be henceforth the theatre of her daily life. She had an impression, received from reading, that brides were welcomed home with pretty words. Not that it mattered, of course, except, perhaps, that it was a relief; she had been hearing pretty speeches all day. She dismissed the housekeeper with her little air of self-possession, and shut herself in the well-lighted room. It was spacious and lofty, furnished with old-fashioned, heavy sort of comfort; but carpets, brass, wood-work, curtains, all were new, painfully new.

Joan sat down in a deep-seated chair at the head of the four-posted bedstead, feeling very small and unimposing. It was the contrast to the colour and life and bustle of the farm that made this house seem so still; the quiet was sure to strike forcibly at first.

She rose and threw off her wraps, humming softly to herself while she brushed her hair. Midway in the performance, she suspended operations, and, brush in hand, gazed once more around her. What a strange, uninhabited feel the room had! No little graces or negligences to tell their story. Her hands shook a little at the reflection that this room had been

specially prepared for her, that it was her own personality that would be stamped upon it. It looked peculiarly inadaptably to her simple needs. What did one small person need with all this space?

She arranged the soft lace at the neck of her blue dress, and, without waiting for a guide, went in search of the dining-room, where the warm glow was; pushing open the half-open door, she looked round rather wistfully. A bright fire burned in the tiled grate, and flickered upon numerous pictures on the walls, faces of men and women who had distinguished themselves in literature, who had propounded or unravelled life's problems. She drew her breath with a little sigh, then moved round the walls to renew her acquaintance with old friends and to be introduced to strangers. Some of the eyes appeared to be watching her, as though their interest were centred upon the movements of a slight girl; others to be looking far away, with an expression that seemed to say that the ideal had won them from humanity; that what they worshipped, *that* was life! Some of the faces were alert, susceptible, hinting at swiftly following smiles and tears; others calm, instinct with strength; others passionate, remonstrating, despairing.

She turned from the pictures to the hearth. A table, with covers for two, stood where the firelight flickered upon the silver and glass; two easy-chairs were drawn to the hearth.

She remembered again. They two—Professor Stanton and she—inseparable in interest henceforth, till death them should part!

She sat down in one of the chairs by the fire and looked into the glowing embers. Presently she found herself repeating a snatch of a nursery rhyme mother had taught her long ago:—

“Two little knives !
Two little forks !
Two little plates and spoons !”

“How ridiculous!” she exclaimed, with a faint smile, when she caught herself. She leant back, a look of dejection about the corners of her sweet mouth, the light of her brilliant eyes covered by their drooping lids. How silent it was! Not a sound of life came from any quarter of the house. Yes, it was restful! After all the excitement of the day, it was restful!

She roused herself, and, seeing a book upon a stand hard by, stretched out her hand for it. It opened at

random. "To surrender what is most profound and mysterious in one's being and personality at any price less than that of absolute reciprocity is profanation," she read. She returned the volume to its place, and gazed into the fire again, then round the room. How simple all its appointments were! There were traces of the student even here. No artificiality, no tawdry commonplaces; a distinct, yet austere, setting of a mind. Why was she so conscious that there were *two* persons to sit face to face day after day? She supposed the feeling would wear out after a time; both would be very busy; she expected they would scarcely meet, except at meals. She rose and went to the window. It overlooked the river, as did the Professor's study above. A glimpse of the stream was caught here and there among the trees, but everything else was indistinct. Joan noted, with a little thrill, that, far away in the western sky, there was still a lingering light above the peaks.

She returned to her seat, and, resting her hands upon its arms, sat motionless. A feeling, not a sound, made her look up; she saw Stanley Stanton's face above her, his eyes gazing softly down. She sat up, then rose silently, and took her place at the table.

The Professor presided with evident nervousness. It seemed to strike him for the first time that the girl opposite had physical necessities. He had sat out many meals with her without observing what she ate. If he ever noted what was placed before himself, the notice was accidental. But he flushed sensitively now.

"Was the meal properly served?" his troubled face inquired.

Joan nodded a bright assurance; she had noted and understood his perturbation. Her friendliness calmed his anxiety.

At the first sign of his distress, her woman's tact came to the rescue. She chatted unreservedly; her eagerness to please him was almost pitiful. She was inwardly perplexed for entertaining subjects, and pained by her inability to keep his interest; the thought of his scholarship oppressed her. How could she know that he was under the spell of her personal witchery?—that he was pleased by the pale blue of her frock, and found his attention wandering from her talk to the light and shadow that chased alternately through her eyes?

At the conclusion of the meal, Joan rose, and hesitated what next to do. Seeing her uncertainty,

the Professor remembered, with an agony of shame, that he had forgotten a drawing-room for her.

"I have grown barbaric," he apologised, "and sacrificed the amenities of life to the habits of the recluse. Until I have prepared a room for the occupation of a lady, . . . will you . . . share . . . my study?"

He paused between each few words, as though reluctant either to wound her susceptibilities or to admit an outsider into his holy of holies.

"This will do!" said Joan easily; and they went back to the chairs by the fire.

The woman, while she cleared the table, cast curious and surreptitious glances at them; but neither seemed to be conscious of her presence. The slight noise of the door closing behind her roused Stanley Stanton from his abstraction.

"I beg your pardon for my obsession," he said, rising while he spoke, and leaning his arm upon the mantel-shelf.

Joan noted, with surprise, that his shoulders were more bent than she had supposed, and that the hair about his temples was thin. She was sensible of a something to which she could not give utterance

springing up within her — a callous sort of criticism.

“I want to say something to you, . . . dear,” said the man, with an almost apologetic tone for the use of the term of endearment ; “and I find my habit of reserve hard to break. It is a difficulty I must cope with and overcome.” After a moment’s hesitation, he went on, looking directly into Joan’s eyes, “I . . . long to break away from my chain of thought . . . to merge myself in human interests.”

He looked at the girl pleadingly, but she did not help him ; she sat with her hands folded listlessly in her lap, and gazed into the fire, having withdrawn her glance suddenly from his.

“I find it difficult to express exactly what I mean — no new difficulty ; to give utterance precisely to my thought is impossible. But my wish is to bid you welcome ; to thank you for your entrance into my house ; to—to ask your forbearance, . . . acceptance . . . of my service.”

Joan’s downcast eyelids and drooping mouth were trembling. He came forward a step ; she looked up suddenly.

“Thank you,” she said, a little hurriedly. “We both find the position strange, naturally.”

"—Naturally!" he echoed, with a grateful sense that she was coming to the rescue. His face lightened; she had a rare gift of understanding!

Her foot touched his accidentally; she drew it in.

"Somewhat painfully constrained," she added, and looked for acquiescence.

He nodded.

"—Constrained!"

"I feel as though I had lost my way, don't you know!" she said, with a faint, pathetic smile; "but one's feelings work round to new situations by degrees."

The Professor's face had lost its bright expression while Joan was stumbling through this sentence. At its conclusion the disappointment lightened somewhat.

"By degrees. Naturally. I see your position!"

Joan nodded several times thoughtfully, with her head upon one side. The outlook was clearing; it was pleasant to discuss matters. It made everything more friendly and everyday like.

"We have approached our present standpoint from different quarters," she continued cheerfully; "but our views are fundamentally the same!"

"—Fundamentally the same!"

"Mutual help, that was our intention ; reciprocity of intellectual interest."

But Stanley Stanton's face had a strange, startled look upon it, that roused Joan's wonder.

"You believed that my presence would prove helpful," she suggested anxiously, tapping the arm of the chair with her open palm, as though the action helped his memory. "You found your thoughts wandered to me, distracting you from your work. I need the tonic of your mind ; I was losing stamina. The benefit was unequal. You are a scholar. I prize the gift of your companionship ; but my only chance of intellectual attainment is through contact with intellectuality ; and the life of the brain is the only life."

"—The only life !"

It sounded more like a query than a reiteration.

Joan nodded, smiling up at him.

"I was so near making a false start," she added, with a little burst of confidence. "I was deteriorating, preferring to follow the direction of animal impulse. The country is dangerous ; it exercises all sorts of spells. The light, and scent, and sound produce a sort of exaltation ; they carry one away with a feeling of delight in mere existence.

I need not enter into particulars, but I began to dread mental obliteration; the dominion of ideas seemed nowhere; your coming saved me!"

"Saved!"

"Yes," she answered, with a deep breath; "reminded me of what you and Gertrude have lived eloquently—that the limits of emotion are too narrow to fill the space that life demands."

"Ah!"

She rose, and held out her tiny hand, appealingly, it seemed to him.

He watched her movements with painful intentness. Was she rejecting him?

"Good-night," she said gently.

His throat contracted. His breath came spasmodically. There was a moment's fear in her eyes, as she watched the struggle in his face. It was brief. He took the outstretched hand, held it for a moment, then let her pass.

She turned at the doorway, and smiled reassuringly.

He gazed after her with a sort of stupefaction. When the door closed, he went back to his old position on the hearth-rug, leaning as before, looking down upon the empty chair she had just occupied. His face lit up the while he gazed, an indescribable

gentleness illuminating it as though he saw the girl-woman, with her curly head resting against the dark-tinted leather.

"I marvel at the difference her presence makes. . . . A perpetual giving forth. And she is such a little thing. . . . Such tiny hands!"

He turned abruptly, and strode hastily from the room, and to his study above.

Joan heard his footsteps ascend the stairs, and the closing of a door. She turned on her white pillows restlessly.

"It is quite true," she said out loud, as if in protest. "I *do* honour him!"

The Professor lighted the reading-lamp upon his desk, and sat down before it. The light under the green shade made his pale face of a ghastly hue. He stretched out his hand, and drew a volume towards him, and presently was in communication with its thoughts. He lifted his head once, and listened. All was quiet, appallingly quiet. His head went down again, his eyes pursued the printed page. Hours passed; the slight rustle of the regularly turned leaves marked the student's labours. With the dawn he looked up with the expression of one who had found a new conception.

CHAPTER XX.

HONEST BLUNDERS.

GERTRUDE GOODYEAR devoted herself to work again, energetically and exclusively. Labour had been her life-feast ; but a dainty morsel had come her way. The women of New Zealand were fighting for the Franchise, and she made the common cause of her sex her own, and very specially.

The strength of her will carried her through months of unprecedented effort. After her toilsome day at college, she prolonged her exertions through the evening, and frequently late into the night ; presiding at meetings, organising committees, writing articles that influenced the thought of the hour.

Her standard was so high that her weaker sisters, with shorter reach, felt the magnetic touch of her strength, and the conviction that she, and such as she, only could obtain for them what they desired.

The crowd of feebler woman lean on such strong ones, admiring them ecstatically, looking to them in

their sorrowful and terrible moments for succour and support. Many women envied the talented Miss Goodyear her knowledge and power; few would have trodden her road to gain it.

Her voice cheered and gladdened the laggard and the feeble. No voice assuaged the ache and yearning of her heart in the loneliness of the silent house. While happy women discussed her lectures round domestic fires, she went quietly to bed, longing unceasingly and unwittingly for that other soul which should reflect her own.

"To be self-sufficient is to be strong," she said. When sleep had unfastened the shackles of her will, her hand would search the vacant space beside her.

Yet, when she met Joan, her demeanour was unsympathetic. She did not touch her as of old. The caresses she had formerly indulged in were withheld. Once having assured herself that Joan could arrange her life without her, she made no attempt to regain the old ascendancy. The meetings between the two were of less frequency than Janet had supposed they would be. Their different views took them different ways. The woman's cause had not the significance to the younger that it had to the elder woman.

Perfection for art's sake was Joan's aim ; perfection for the uplifting of her sex was Miss Good-year's. Personal success as an isolated fact was little to her ; it was Joan's all. At least she believed so at this time, and laboured to realise her belief—laboured frankly with the desire to make a name.

The Professor did not damp her ardour by any show of feeling. After that first ineffectual attempt to show his heart to his girl-wife, he was shy of demonstration. He did all that he could to help the young student in his home, listened to all she had to tell, bore her interruption of his private study with patience and forbearance, but made no demands—did not, in fact, appear to recognise that he had claims.

Some special work absorbed his leisure. In the pale hours of dawn he read from the MSS. upon his desk—a mournful, melodious measure—with a face of thoughtful gladness.

The assured position that Stanley Stanton gave her in his home quieted Joan's first apprehension. He *had* understood. An involuntary sense of gratitude for his consideration followed, and she strove to meet every emergency of her new position with a friendliness equal to his own.

“The privilege of daily association with you i

inestimable," she said to him one day, when she had gone to him with some darkness for his illumination.

"I may be right," he answered humbly. "I am not sure ; truth is inexhaustible. I have given you such help as lies within the limitation of my knowledge. Get beyond it if you can."

She looked up at him, noting the grave and gentle sincerity of his face. His lack of egotism struck her as it never had before.

"I will help you to do that the moment I see farther myself," he added, wondering at her look, and laying his hand gently upon her hair.

"If I have you to back me, I am content," she said, with one of her ready impulses.

It was said with a flush and a sudden dimming of the bright eyes. Her husband leaned forward and regarded her attentively. Then, as though he recollected suddenly that he was venturing on prohibited ground, turned quietly and climbed the stairs to his study.

Once or twice Joan had ventured to pursue him thither. The first time she received a shock. In some new problem the Professor had forgotten their relationship ; the man was buried in the student. In him the quality of concentration was so developed

that, when specially interested, he had no personality.

Joan found him with haggard face and head bent over his desk, heavy volumes lying open on the floor at his feet. Quick-falling rain was beating in through the open window, the fire had burned to red-grey ashes, a cold draught was blowing on him but feeling was arrested.

Joan stood in the doorway for a moment, gazing at the pale apostle of closely ordered book-shelves. She noted his hunger-drawn face, the long, nervous fingers, hugging the volume in his hands. His absorption, his aloofness and deadness to the outer world, struck her with a sudden chill. Was it worth the loss of all else?—was it, after all? She crossed the room and laid her soft hand on his. He looked up with the expression of a sleep-walker; then flickers of disappointment clouded the dreamy eyes, as of thoughts disarranged before conclusion; then a gradual coming back, and a sigh.

“You have eaten nothing for twelve hours,” she said.

He rose wearily, and followed her. The first faint, unawakened instinct of motherhood stirred in her as she tended him; but, although she smiled, she remembered the sigh. Had he returned to his

normal state of absolute absorption in his work? Had she made a mistake in supposing that his phase of objective interest would last? Had it passed? How difficult life was!

Twice again only did she venture into the Professor's sanctum uninvited. Upon one occasion she found him fast asleep in his chair; on the other, he was bending over some MSS. ecstatically. He flushed when she entered, and, with a nervous movement, pushed it aside. She caught the title in an unintentional glance; but it was not for months afterwards that it held any significance for her.

It was therefore with a shut-out sensation that she laboured for her first public appearance as an elocutionist. Instinctively she avoided breaking down the reserve set up between her husband and herself, lest, the barrier removed, awkward disclosures might ensue. She realised, with surprise, what a stranger he was to her; how little she knew of him outside his university life, and how easily she had adopted his idea that she could help him. Would this farce end in tragedy? Had she presumed lightly to set the great, silent laws of Nature at defiance? attempted to thrust them aside with weak, presumptive hands?

A growing sense of failure and incompetence shook her former satisfaction. The pale face of the silent man in his study protested against her egotism ; was it impossible for her to make happy one single soul ?

She yearned towards Gertrude with a renewed yearning. Her self-effacement assumed a grander meaning, and in Joan's new-born sense of pain and realisation of her loneliness, she understood better Gertrude Goodyear's life, and gazed longingly many a night towards the red light in the porch of her so long-time home.

But, with the spring, all other thoughts were driven into the background by the fast approaching night of her first appearance. The thought of possible success encouraged her. To win public consideration might justify her in the eyes of her friend, and bring some honour to the name she had assumed ; give a vindication to the world—the Professor's world—for his marriage with her. It would be now a greater joy to be approved and smiled upon than it would have been some months ago ; for her motive was a broader one, although she was herself scarce conscious of it ; she wanted triumph for the sake of others, as a justification of her existence. She began to feel that life would be a degradation if

she could not say in effect to those who trusted her, "I have proved not altogether worthless."

Gertrude had of late been more difficult and satirical than usual, taking no pains to hide that she thought Joan's individual striving during the hours of the crisis of a broader cause both futile and self-seeking. She had proudly and systematically pursued her arduous task, as though seeking to throw off a weight that crushed her. But there was a deep-set melancholy lurking in the eyes that flashed defiance; and, at the end of her struggle, she was listless, haggard, and impatient for the result in Parliament.

It was the afternoon of Joan's *début*. A few hours and it would be decided whether or not she was capable of winning a reputation that would bring her credit. A letter from home had informed her that father and mother could not be present, owing to Mother's ailing. The girl thought it curious she should be so disappointed; she felt painfully forsaken. Gertrude had expressed no intention of being present that night, so her mother and her foster-mother alike would be away.

She struggled with her sadness and disappointment ineffectually, and, acting on a sudden impulse, put on her hat and crossed the road to Girton

College, resolved, if possible, to break down the barrier between herself and Gertrude; to storm the hostility or indifference that kept them apart.

When Joan quietly entered the old class-room, Miss Goodyear, who was standing at her desk, looked up, slightly started, but took no further notice of her. The hour of dismissal was at hand, and Joan, respecting the rule of silence, sat down noiselessly, watching, with fascinated eyes, the tall, proud figure in the sombre garb, and the exquisite white lace. There was a pathetic droop about the stately shoulders that appealed strangely to the girl; and when Miss Goodyear passed into the sunlight streaming through a window, she observed that the lines of the shapely throat were less soft and rounded. While Joan watched her, a telegram was handed to Miss Goodyear. She took it, placed her hand upon her side with a rapid movement, her pale face growing paler still. Then, after a moment, she tore the envelope, and read her message. Joan had watched her breathlessly, feeling with a pang how wide the breach had grown between them. In the old days she would not have been there the outsider of the outsiders. Her heart beat quickly. Gertrude's face had undergone

a transformation; anxiety was swept away by a flush of delight. She glowed, lifted her head, palpitated, grew wondrously young and beautiful. The eyes of a hundred girls were on her. A hush of suspense, magnetic, thrilled the room. Slowly Gertrude turned her head, her speaking eyes seeking the clear grey ones fixed upon her. It was the old search, the old outgoing for sympathy. A half-imperceptible movement of the hand towards her, and in a moment Joan was by her side, warmed and lightened, absorbed and vitalised.

"We have won," said Miss Goodyear, in glad tones. "Girls, the women of New Zealand have won their Franchise. This is a message of congratulation from the Premier."

Instantly there was a din of girlish voices. Gertrude's fingers closed tightly over Joan's hand. In her great hour she had forgotten smallness. Gladness made her eloquent. She stood with Joan's hand in hers, and spoke her crowding thoughts in eager, impetuous voice, stirring placidity to passion, urging, and daring. Then when she had dismissed the girls, the enchantress softened; her face lost its triumphant smile. Still holding Joan's hand—

"Well?" she said, "you haven't asked me to your

reading to-night." Her look was half-quizzical half-amused.

Remembrance brought a sudden glow into the girl's cheeks and a light into her eyes.

"Oh, Gertrude, will you come?" she exclaimed delightedly and humbly. "I came to ask you." Her voice grew softer. "I wouldn't have missed this hour of your triumph, but I dare not urge you; I may fail—and you are tired, very tired."

The glow had faded from the woman's face, and she had moved to the fireplace, in which a fire was smouldering. With rapid movements, half in fear of rebuff, Joan made up the fire, and drew Gertrude's chair to the hearth. The woman sat down, obeying the gentle touch of Joan's soft hands. She leaned her head back upon the cushion and, through half-closed eyes, watched the girl's deft, noiseless movements. Joan noted the dark circles under the eyes and the pallor of the lips, but said no word. There was a little cupboard in a corner, where tea-cups and saucers and a tiny kettle were kept. It was the business of but a few moments to make tea. She feared every instant that she might be forbidden; but Gertrude allowed the service, and Joan felt a new content in it; it was part of that new desire to serve that had of late surprised her.

Tea over, Joan sat on a low stool on the opposite side of the hearth, and rested her elbows on her knees, her face supported on her hands. Miss Goodyear turned her eyes on Joan's.

"Well, Johnnie?"

It was the old manner and tone precisely. Joan's heart leaped.

"You are killing yourself," the girl burst out impetuously. "And what will those women care?"

Miss Goodyear faintly smiled.

"Will they be grateful for the strength expended in their service? They will say, with audacious selfishness, that you were infatuated, intoxicated with an idea."

Gertrude leaned her cheek upon her hand, and watched, with intent gaze, the girl's indignant face. Her lips relaxed in a half smile.

"Women are creators of the world's atmosphere, child. You wouldn't have me stagnate? I can't keep still. I must be moving. I sha'n't reach the shore of my desire, of course; who does? The secret of content is the will to be impersonal. If the waves of the ocean stood still because they could not each separately lave the shore, we should have a dead sea."

Joan answered the smile. But it was with new

vision that she looked—the vision of human interest. Could nothing be done to save Gertrude Goodyear from her devastating passion of self-effacement? She looked with doubting eyes into those regarding her.

“Labour and duty and self-surrender, subordination, eternal repression! that is your creed, dear woman,” she cried, almost passionately. “And the end of this worship of duty, this blotting out of self? Forgetfulness, dear, if not scorn; the world dislikes virtue because of its reproach.”

Miss Goodyear gazed with more intentness. What made the child speak so bitterly? Had her hopes turned to ashes?

“Self-gratification is but a mockery. I ask work for you, and the special joy of seeing its result. There is so much true, earnest, faithful work that seems barren of fruit.”

She spoke with intense sadness. Joan left her stool, and seated herself on the rug at Gertrude's feet, leaning her arm lightly over the woman's knees. Gertrude's delicate fingers strayed to the girl's hair, parting it, re-parting it, touching it caressingly.

“In the unseen,” she said, after a pause, “all the accidents of the physical fade away. But love, the inspiring element of the divine, does not fade, nor

cease to be ; but, purified of the tingling blood, the panting breath, the quick heart-beats, the mighty force of tenderness lives for ever."

She spoke dreamily, only half conscious that she spoke the words of another.

"I know nothing of ultimate development," she added, waking up ; "but I know there is no failure in the higher law that governs life."

They sat on in silence, each following her own thoughts. Joan was disturbed by the look of Gertrude's face ; its mingled strength and delicacy interested her in a new way. In her own expanding mood, she was startled at the silent austerity with which this woman bore her suffering ; for it was easy to see that the energetic mind had taxed the physical health. Joan felt sore and discomfited.

"You must let yourself be cared for a little. You can afford to be idle, now that your victory is won," said Joan impulsively, caressing the slender fingers that dallied with her hair. "Shall we go away, as we used to in the old times ?"

"You and I together ?"

Miss Goodyear's voice was dreamy. Joan knew that the proposal was not unpleasant to her, but did not press the matter. She plunged desperately into another subject, moving her position so that she

faced her friend, her head thrown back upon the supporting knee. She raised her eyes, and her young face looked eager.

"We have not been accustomed to talk of these things. Sentiment, I know, lacks dignity in your eyes. But, dear, don't you think that it has power with some temperaments to spur them to performance?" Then, in a hurried whisper, "I do not ask for idle curiosity; your experience would guide me. Were you *always* so self-poised? Was there never a time when another influenced you?"

Some powerful emotion contracted the woman's face; her first impulse was one of angry astonishment that Joan had thus ventured to attack her. It was the second time she had presumed. Then as she searched the speaking face upon her knee, she felt instinctively that no idle curiosity had prompted her. Should she quench this new-born impulse to seek and impart confidence; nip in the bud the first tender shoots of what she had failed to bring forth in all the past. Might they not meet on a new footing—the footing of a common humanity, where they had failed to meet intellectually? The unusual excitement of the girl's face sprang from no idle curiosity. She was feeling her way to greater revelation of herself.

Gertrude removed her eyes, the stiffness passed from her manner. It was almost incomprehensible to herself that, instead of repelling, she replied :

“I was weak once. The man could not gauge me, nor I him. We had different standards.”

She spoke quietly and dispassionately. Joan removed her eyes. She could not watch the lowering of that proud head. The slender fingers played with the soft hair again.

“I could not go down to him.” Miss Goodyear’s voice proceeded presently ; the tones were a little husky. “He said that he would come to me. I waited—but he did not come ; he turned off into a different path.”

Joan turned her head farther away. So Gertrude Goodyear’s ideas had not been wholly gleaned from book. “He turned off into a different path.” She made the statement simply, but how pregnant it was. This was why she had so assiduously endeavoured to turn the eyes of her girls away from “lovers waiting in the future years.” If she had but known, might she not have found the courage to lay bare her own difficulties.

Gertrude had sunk into a quiet sleep. Joan, fearful lest her movements might disturb her, covered the sleeper with a light rug, then crept away. The after-

noon shadows were lengthening, and the woman's face, seen in the fading light, seemed strangely wan. Joan looked earnestly, taking her fill of sad impressions while she gazed. With much reluctance she at last turned away; it was time to prepare for her own eventful hour. At the doorway she paused, came slowly back, and, kneeling down, softly kissed the hanging, nerveless hand. Joan's eyes were big with tears.

The woman slept till the last of the light had faded, then wakened as unexpectedly as she had fallen asleep. The warmth of the rug about her contributed a sense of comfort. She did not stir for a moment, then she gently put out her hand.

"Joan," she said softly, and then a little louder, "Joan!"

No answer breaking the silence:

"Ah! I remember now," she said.

She sat for a short time, then stood up.

"How dark it is. I did not think it possible that I could be so tired. To-night, too—the night of my victory and Joan's."

She crossed the hall silently in the dark, and went into the cottage through her private door. Very slowly, but smiling at intervals, she dressed herself in the rich purple gown she had worn at Joan's wed-

ding, adorned at the wrists and neck with her costliest lace. She looked at herself in the glass attentively. The proud, pale face, with crown of golden hair, seemed not ungrateful to her; she moved the locks from off her forehead.

"Fading!" she told the eyes that watched from the mirror, and smiled again at her own vanity.

"I might as well be wholly foolish while I'm about it," she added to herself; and, unlocking a cabinet, took out a glittering ring, and put it upon her finger.

She held it for a moment where the light flashed upon the diamonds; then, wrapping a cloak about her, she went out.

CHAPTER XXI.

AWAKENING.

THE concert hall was crowded with a well-dressed company ; the concert preceding Joan's reading was over. Upon entering, Gertrude surveyed the audience leisurely, and seeing an unoccupied chair near the door, sat down unnoticed. She soon became aware that the audience was unusually excited, talking over something in eager, though lowered tones ; the women were radiant, the men mostly listening with amused or scornful smiles. Of course it was the social question of the hour they were discussing. The woman in the back seat looked on as an outsider. She had run away from fight to-night ; the public stir affected her little ; a new peacefulness lulled the old eagerness. A faint smile hovered about her lips as she watched a little group in front of her—a bearded and bronzed celebrity, a young girl with serene brow, and a placidly smiling mother, all apparently interested in the one subject.

Gertrude was incapable of jealousy, or she might

have felt a pang at the quick forgetfulness of the subject that had cost her years of thought and months of passionate zeal; for Joan now rivalled her.

Miss Goodyear's heart fluttered with that of the crowd when the girl stood upon the platform. The audience greeted her with absolute silence; then heads and shoulders moved to get a better view of her, opera-glasses were levelled, and someone whispered audibly:

"Oh, you dear!"

She stood in pale composure, garbed in unrelieved white, the soft empire folds of her gown clinging to her graceful figure. Her arms were bare; in her folded hands she held an ivory-bound volume of Tennyson. The attitude was eloquently familiar to the watching woman. A hundred recollections of it swept across her; the steady gaze of the brilliant eyes, and the trick of pushing the clustering curls from them. But there was an expression in the youthful face she did not know. She had caught a flash of it this afternoon—a look of suppressed passion that should not be at twenty years.

It went to Miss Goodyear's heart. What was the child, her brain-child, longing for? What was

beyond her reach? Had *she* had anything to do with diverting her from her best good?

A slight stir distracted Miss Goodyear's thoughts. A young man of rather commanding figure had pushed his way from the door along by the wall. He was dressed in a light grey tweed suit, and it occurred to Miss Goodyear that she had seen him before. There was a stubbornness in the face she seemed to recognise. He had met with a rebuff at the door, perhaps, and had fought his way in.

He took no notice of the crowd about him, but stood leaning with his back against the wall, his arms folded across his chest. He was smiling half satirically, half sadly.

Gertrude started. She remembered him now. She had seen him at the harvest home. Her eyes went back to Joan. Her face looked like the face of one who sees a vision; yearning recollection was stamped upon it; her lips were slightly parted in a smile.

“ ‘ There lies a vale in Ida, lovelier
Than all the valleys of Ionian hills.
The swimming vapour slopes athwart the glen,
Puts forth an arm, and creeps from pine to pine,
And loiters, slowly drawn. On either hand
The lawns and meadow-ledges, midway down,

Hang rich in flowers ; and far below them roars
The long brook falling thro' the clov'n ravine,
In cataract after cataract to the sea.' "

Joan had all eyes, arrested every ear. Her face glowed as if in recollection ; her voice thrilled with an undertone of suppressed pain. Was it art—entirely art ? The audience waited.

“ ‘ The noonday quiet holds the hill ;
The grasshopper is silent in the grass ;
The lizard, with his shadow on the stone,
Rests like a shadow, ~~the winds are dead.~~ *and the cicada*
The purple flower droops ; the golden bee
Is lily cradled, ’ ”

the liquid voice went on. Lips smiled, heads nodded. They saw the picture perfectly, the “ Mournful CEnone, wandering forlorn ” ; then they were thrilled, arrested, hurt by the cry :

“ ‘ I alone awake.

My eyes are full of tears,

My heart of love ;

My heart is breaking, ’ ” *and my eyes are dim*

and I am all aware of my life.

There was a rustling stillness. The sobbing whisper crept to the remotest corner of the hall. Gertrude glanced involuntarily at the young man by the wall. The cynical smile had left his lips ;

he was very pale. But from that moment Miss Goodyear forgot who was around her. The beautiful young creature on the platform was to her, as to the breathless crowd, the forsaken love of Paris. Only once the woman's face betrayed a consciousness not wholly born of the emotion of the hour.

“ ‘ I will not die alone, for fiery thoughts
Do shape themselves within me.’ ”

Her lips quivered. She closed her eyes and leaned back; then, opening them again, she turned them on the girl she had loved with more than a mother's love, looking anxiously like one who sought an answer to some momentous question. What she saw thrilled her.

“ ‘ I dimly see
My far-off, doubtful purpose, as a mother
Conjectures of the features of her child
Ere it is born.’ ”

A few moments more, and there was a lull, followed by a storm of applause and a shower of bouquets. Joan stood smilingly among the flowers, bowing her thanks. Presently she stooped, and, lifting a spray of yellow gorse that had fallen at her feet, fastened it at her breast.

The young man from Otira Farm passed out before Miss Goodyear could get to him; she was almost startled at his look of suffering. With scant courtesy, he elbowed his way through the excited crowd, as though he dreaded that someone might detain him. When Gertrude gained the street, he had disappeared.

She went home, as she had come, alone. She was in no mood for company, and, with scarce less dexterity than the young man had shown, dodged the crowd about the doors; then, leaving the city, turned to a river path, following its circuitous leading till she reached the hospital suspension bridge. On this she leaned, her back to the city, and gazed across the gardens to the lighted windows of the hospital.

"The world is beginning again," she said. "A new influx of life runs through the whole creation. Man alone expends himself in a single effort."

She was startled to receive a reply.

"You can't be sure. But, even supposing that it is so, is it nothing to have added to the general harmony of things?"

It was the Professor's voice, but it was a live voice, trembling with some new emotion. It gave the woman a shock—a mental shock—rallied her drooping spirit. In a flash, she realised how the old fire

had died in her, when the new spark in this man more than surprised her.

"Each wave rises to its crest once," said Stanley Stanton meaningly.

Gertrude turned her back to the refuge of the maimed and dying, and met the glance of the eyes that once it had been so difficult to bring from vision-gazing.

The man stood upright; he was there in that moment; all else might have been a smoke-wreath.

"Thank you for the reminder," she replied slowly, not able to comprehend how it was that it was she who was dreaming, and that this dreamer was awake.

They turned towards the oak avenue, where, long ago, they had walked and talked, when it was Stanley Stanton who faltered and despaired, and Gertrude Goodyear who sounded the bugle-call. His mind was travelling the same way evidently, for he said, as though she had accused him :

"I was wrong. I limited man's achievement; there is no limit until the end; for what man knows the hour, the experience that may quicken his soul?"

Gertrude did not speak. Had not she been the one that last time to say :

“ ‘ Ah ! but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what’s a heaven for ? ’ ”

They had entered the avenue ; the brown buds of the oaks had scarcely burst into leaf, and the late rising moon had flooded its light through the interlaced branches. In the cloistered quiet the petulant fret of the city lost its meaning.

She slackened her pace, and the man fitted his steps to hers.

“ The relegation of life to past or future is sin,” she said, like one who repeats a lesson with mind far away. “ Now is the accepted time.”

“ I sinned,” he answered promptly. “ Some people are born dead ; some die before they reach maturity ; others never die at all. I died in hopelessness before I had arrived at manhood . . . and was resurrected.”

“ Ah ! ”

He meant, of course, that Joan called him from the tomb. And yet his voice was not the voice of an exultant lover. She tried to force back her grudge against him, to judge him dispassionately. Had he come to her in the hour of Joan’s triumph, the hour that witnessed the girl’s supreme play upon the senses of her kind, to deluge her with his overwhelming satisfaction that his, and not the

woman's instincts had been right about the girl?

She regarded him attentively. His face showed signs of nervous strain and excitement: there was something almost forlorn about him. She drew nearer to his side, and rested her hand upon his arm.

"I am a little tired," she explained, almost apologetically.

He bowed, and the arm she rested on was braced to her support. What change had come over the man of forgetfulness?

"I saw you in the hall," he said, finding that she did not speak. "I tried to reach you afterwards; I wanted to congratulate you; but you appeared to desire solitude, and I followed at a distance. We have met rarely of late. I have something to tell you."

It was coming, then, the man's exultation; the glorying of passion over a woman's devotedness? He had spoken hesitatingly, abruptly. Now for a lover's rhapsody.

"I have written . . . a poem . . . which . . . I permitted to pass my own imperfect criticism. It was published in London to-day."

He spoke quite humbly; but he was trembling.

Miss Goodyear's hand tightened on his arm. She leaned forward, and scrutinised his face. He looked down upon her anxiously.

"I wanted you to know. Later you shall judge me!"

"Does Joan know?"

"Joan?"

He looked almost startled and more dazed than he had yet to-night.

"No," he added hurriedly; "Joan must not know . . . until . . . I am proved right."

The hand upon his arm pressed heavier. Joan, who lived with him side by side, not know? Was their union but an appearance, a nothing? She was puzzled. She wanted to know what this man meant by his resurrection from deadness and materiality. What voice had called him from his speechless tomb? She must have asked him, in her determination to know, for he answered:

"Pain."

"Pain?" she echoed. "Not happiness, not love?"

"Pain," he reiterated, "the forerunner of birth. But what woman, having brought forth a living child, grudges her pangs? and does a worker mourn his labour in the day of his accomplishment? The

world judges by the completed image. . . . Perhaps God . . . prizes the embryo."

He wrung both her hands, and left her opposite her own door.

Her maid received her, and handed her a pile of telegrams. She took them, smiling.

"Congratulations," she said. "Go to bed. I shall want nothing till breakfast."

She gathered up her telegrams without opening them, and went into the schoolroom. The bright moonlight flooded the apartment; she crossed the floor, and took her old seat at the desk.

It was here that she had conceived many ideas, suffered many disappointments, fought many battles, achieved some success.

Her head went down upon her folded arms across her desk. A physical faintness partly overpowered her.

"Oh, I am tired!" she said, and then she lifted up her heavy head.

It was here—here in this spot—she had first heard Joan read, the girl who, to-night, had outshone every woman in Christchurch; who had dazzled, bewitched, and fascinated every separate soul in that vast audience. She leaned forward, her eyes fixed upon the moonlit patch where the child Joan had stood.

"Dear!" she murmured, addressing the vision of her mind. "My dear—my little one."

Her head went down again, and the silver moon-beams touched it caressingly.

Had her love, her efforts for the child been one of the embryos dear to God? Was there anything at all in those conceptions of her youth that had never seen life? Perhaps and perhaps not. To-night it didn't seem to matter either way. Her thought went back to Joan.

"What hurts you, child? What is it that you want?"

She stretched out her arms; they closed on nothingness; she sighed and drew them in.

Perhaps she had led astray her brain-child. Surely she had not been wholly wrong? Suppose, after all, that renunciation was not progression; that union was liberty? Could she unlearn? The stern victory of to-night seemed cold, grey, thankless after the brilliant hour she had just witnessed. Did this perpetual search lead anywhere? She put out her hand and felt the pile of unopened letters; it meant that many weak women would have their burdens lightened. She smiled. It was good, it was—she reiterated—to feel the ache of burdens not one's own. This was the crest of her wave; she had lifted a weight from some not strong.

"Oh, God!" she prayed, "it is all that I could do—fight."

She spoke in the past tense, and noticed, a moment afterwards, with her old habit of analysis, that she had done so. But she let it stand uncorrected, and lay with her head low in her place of authority. She had striven to conquer natural affection; had natural affection conquered her?

After a time she took up a pencil and wrote for several minutes; it glided quickly over the paper. At last it stopped.

"‘I dimly see my far-off doubtful purpose,’" broke from her lips. "I have stumbled to attain it," she added brokenly; "but I see—and I—will—reach it."

She had lifted the proud head once more, with its old imperious carriage. Presently it sank upon her arm again, and, for an hour, she lay quite still. Then she felt for her ring.

"Frank," she faltered brokenly, murmuring a name unknown among her friends. A long time after, she called out quite loudly, "Joan! Joan Jefferies!" and then she lay quite still.

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"I will go to her," said Joan at daybreak, when she rose from her great bed after restless, sleepless

tossings. "I well tell her everything from the beginning, and ask her what I ought to do."

She dressed and fastened the sweet prickly gorse spray in her belt, and let herself quietly out.

The sun was just coming up from the under world ; it was too early to awaken Gertrude yet. She started at a brisk pace along the river ; the air was fragrant with the wafted breath of spring, instinct with life. A promise of joy thrilled her young blood.

Gertrude was wise ; she would ask Gertrude. She knew her early habits, and was not surprised to find the schoolroom door unlocked. There was Gertrude.

Joan paused at the threshold at sight of the tumbled purple silk, the cloak fallen upon the floor, and the bowed golden head, upon which the morning sunlight shone. With a gasp, she went swiftly forward.

"Sleeping?" she just whispered, a strange fear contracting her heart. She went slowly down upon her knees and touched the bowed head. "Wake up, dear, the sun has risen."

But Gertrude knew that.

Joan glanced at the unopened messages, saw in a flash the pencil fallen from the stiff fingers, and traced the written words :

"To-night I am feeling that heavy oppression of

atmosphere which weights me, and robs me of the physical force necessary to push through my deferred tasks—push through! for I have lost the vigour of mind that generated enthusiasm in all circumstances, sufficient to over-ride the drag of body. I *do* my work now—not work! One is spontaneous, the other conscious effort. Much has been said to the effect that battle brings the best forces of character into play; but combat may be too prolonged, strength exhausted. It is then that help from outside is of value, absolutely necessary for individual recovery; or may not help be death?

“In striving after self-sufficiency, I have overlooked the natural diminution of power. After maturity comes decline, and, could I remodel my plan, it is possible that I should—admit life’s side-currents—”

CHAPTER XXII.

WITH OPEN EYES.

JOAN was shut in her great silent bed-chamber with blinds drawn to exclude the bright spring sunshine—and a sight she would not see. She suffered as she had fought her battles—silently. With tragic pathos she had returned to her home that morning, her unusual impulse of confidence thrown back upon herself, and had stated the fact simply, “Gertrude is dead”; then had withdrawn herself from all.

The windows of her room were open; intermittent sounds of marching feet floated in at intervals, but she did not move. She sat in the great chair by the bedside, where she had first sat in the Professor's house, her dull eyes fixed upon the little sun-glints that played hide-and-seek upon the carpet with every gentle movement of the curtains. One arm rested upon the elbow of the chair, the other was lifted to support the drooping head; the whole attitude expressed abandonment and pain, the haggard lines

about the mouth and dark circles under the tired eyes revealing the concentrated sorrow of her thought.

Gertrude was dead! that was all she could clearly grasp. Her young soul was in the throes of its first loss and doubt, for Gertrude had died with an apparent uprooting of life-long convictions, in an hour of bewilderment and uncertainty; her pure ambitions had, to all seeming, failed. Was it physical only, that failure in the supreme hour of her life to realise joy? She had owned to utter weariness. She had effaced all personal aim, made no concessions to self; her eyes had discerned only the realities of the mind. Had she felt herself mistaken? An unutterable longing swept over the girl to cross to the cottage in her neighbourhood, enter the study, and find Gertrude sitting in her old chair at the desk. A little cry broke from her as she realised that no more would the strong, proud personality dominate the familiar body. Numberless incidents reproduced themselves in vivid pictures, ending always with the bowed golden head.

That was the end of it, and she should never know which Gertrude was right—the one who had lived, or the one who had died; the teaching or the recantation. Everything was chaos. Her old foundations had been removed, and in her lonely grief and

perplexity, she felt her new sensations shifting sand beneath her feet.

Between her and the window a tall shadow intervened. She lifted her eyes and saw Stanley Stanton. His shoulders were very stooping to-day, his face pale, and his eyes testified to long vigils. He made a slight, deprecating movement with his long, slender hand, grown thin almost to transparency. Joan noted all this, while a portion of her brain was busy with other things. A sudden pity for the man moved her. If Gertrude's last thought was right, and not the impression only of a wearied hour in which she mistook bodily collapse for intellectual defeat, what a ghastly mistake she and this man had made!

She beckoned him with a slight motion of the hand.

"Yes, come," she said wearily, as though trying to be fair, divining that he was abashed at the boldness of his own entrance.

A light illuminated the sad countenance; he stepped softly to where she sat, like one who trod holy ground. He glanced quickly round, as though noting the changes the room had undergone.

Near a white rug upon the hearth stood a writing-table with Gertrude's portrait framed in ivory; the

pictured face wore its proudest smile. He turned his eyes slowly from the face that seemed to mock him to the young, living face pinched with human suffering. He knew very little of women and their ways. Joan's seclusion had disturbed him. He had missed her terribly; wondered, while sitting at his lonely table, making ineffectual attempts to eat, whether she was very miserable and wept much. He could not gauge exactly, he admitted, just what a woman's feelings might be in the circumstance. He had fallen back upon "In Memoriam," and found that, beneath his intellectual understanding, a pang assailed him at the thought that perchance the girl in her room might be suffering something akin to the presentiment of the poet. He almost gasped when he met the wide, pleading eyes.

" 'A hand that can be clasped no more—
Behold me, for I cannot sleep,' "

he murmured, beneath his breath.

"No," answered Joan, who had caught only the last words, and mistook them for an inquiry; "I cannot sleep. I feel as though I could never sleep again, till I have found an answer."

The weariness of her voice matched the weariness of her eyes. He perceived her grief contained an

element outside the fact of death. His helplessness to plumb the situation tortured him; he could see a forlorn, slight, drooping figure in the great chair, but he had no intuition of how to aid. His face sharpened with anxiety; he stretched out his hand as he would have stretched it to rescue a trapped bird, drew it in, and waited for her to explain. A quiver flitted across Joan's face.

"Answers *will* come," she said, with simple candour, "and then I can go on. Meanwhile, I seem to have arrived at a dead wall."

Then, while he was trying to frame an answer, she broke out suddenly that, if they had been exaggerating, distorting the greatness of intellectual attainment, their soul dulled in ascetic stupefaction; if the natural was a law, life in its movement would overthrow, would cut the ground from beneath their feet.

"The thought is strange to me," she finished; "it recurs and recurs, and I cannot answer it; but I must answer it out of my own heart. Oh!" she exclaimed, tapping the bed with a restless hand, "I have lain there such weary nights, wondering whether or not we have made a mistake, whether I was not too willing to come, and you too willing to take me into your home. I am not useful to you; I waste

your time, your strength ; yet I have not dared to accept the idea that we were wholly deceived."

His pale face became still whiter ; he removed his gaze. She admitted that married comradeship alone was not sufficient, yet it did not occur to her that he might, perchance, have a warmer feeling towards her ; she took it for granted that he and romance were far apart. She regarded him as a type—an equivalent of certain qualities, not as an individual. Half unconsciously, he turned Gertrude's picture where the intent eyes could not seem to watch him.

"And . . . if . . . you decide . . . that we—you—have made a mistake?" he asked gently, long pause between the words.

"I have not counted the after-cost ; how could I, till I knew how it would affect you?"

She leaned towards him, her honest eyes upon him.

In what way "affect him" did she mean? he wondered. She would not shirk life beside him, perhaps ; she was not scheming for escape and withdrawal from their bond ; but how would she accept his love as a proffered substitute for her present loneliness?

Something in his eyes made her remove her gaze. She did not know it, but he was urged by an impulse

almost irresistible to gather into his arms the weary girl and caress her with a man's caresses ; but the habit of his reserve and delicacy was too strong. He could not force upon her a passion she so utterly ignored ; a sense of honour held him back ; also he feared to risk his present standing, the old path, the sweetness of her presence were too precious to be jeopardised. Were he to make known his sentiments, he might become repugnant to her. He contrasted the days before her coming with the present ; found in his asceticism a pure joy of contemplation of the soft child-like thing, and revelled in the recollection that the voice which many loved echoed through his silent rooms. Thus much was his—all his.

He led her from the darkened room to the sunlight of his study, supporting her with his arm. The soft contact of her body thrilled him ; pride in the right which permitted this familiarity brought a colour to his cheeks.

He flung wide open a western window, and let in the sweet air from the river.

Joan seated herself where she could inhale the fragrant odour of wild mint. Gentle, gurgling sounds proceeded from the stream, soothing as soft music ; and gradually her overtaxed nerves relaxed, the lines about her mouth became effaced. How

good this man was to her ; he, who had the right to command, forebore even to persuade. Could these relations be maintained ? In the variable conditions of daily living, would they always be of one accord ? Clearly one thing was to be done—to keep faith with him ; to keep him posted in those invading influences which threatened their relationship. There was a chance that their marriage had been right. But, supposing they had blundered, there could be no immediate consequences, no particular modifications of their present position. When she had answered herself definitely, she would give him her conclusions, and they would go on from that point, superior to the senses.

With surprised eyes she watched him making preparations for her tea. He waited upon her with almost Janet's thought and tenderness. He seemed to have forgotten everything except that she was in need of nourishment. If they might go on for ever without a crisis, there would, at least, be peace. Peace, at twenty years ? No ! cried an under-voice she tried to stifle ; resignation was only subdued despair, an acceptance of defeat. But knowledge she must have—knowledge, with pain, perhaps—knowledge must be paid for. She could achieve nothing further till she had put her questions to the test.

Whatever might be the answer, she would rise to this man's ideal ; if she tried to shirk knowledge of living life, her accomplishment would be small. She was not a coward. Her next words had an effect that she had not calculated ; she took it quite for granted that the Professor would view dispassionately the situation ; that the truth would interest him ; that the operation of understanding would be his only exercise.

"I have a vivid impression," she began, "that there is a subtle bond of flesh, without which marriage is incomplete ; that this bond cannot be wholly broken by an effort of will ; that union of mind alone is not that union which makes husband and wife a part of one another."

He was seated at his desk, that place which, of all others, he felt justified his existence ; yet he met Joan's eyes with an uncertain gaze, as though wrestling with an unspoken thought. She went on with cruel directness like a child, who, just discovering a truth, presents it as new to one who has learned already all its pathos.

"If that instinctive longing for a particular presence is the accompaniment of that love which is the highest, as well as the lowest, order, a union such as ours becomes a mockery ; for neither of us possesses

for the other that peculiar sympathy which obliterates the consciousness of separate personality."

Stanley Stanton's face was an enigma. How could he tell this girl that what she but now perceived had tortured him with tragic certainty for months? But neither he nor she was to blame; that knowledge had come late—too late, he feared, to save her suffering.

"It is very hard for you," he said, bending over his desk, "that your peace should be disrupted by such doubts." Then hurriedly drumming with his fingers upon the blotting-pad. "It is possible our conceptions have been warped. I persuaded you . . . honestly. If I could liberate you to-day . . . I would. You could then . . . choose. I believe," he added slowly, "that I should again forfeit all else for . . . your friendship. The gain is mine; you have inspired me, and I cannot make you happy; it is not my privilege. The debt is on my side; command me, and I will pay it."

His cold, steady tones broke into a note of passionate beseeching; and from his eyes there flashed a look that was almost of revolt.

"All my desire is to pay . . . my debt."

"Ah!" Joan exclaimed; "don't you see—that is my meaning? We two are not one flesh; we are

conscious of traffic—commerce, give and take ; call it what you will ! ”

She stabbed him to the heart, not only by what she said, but by what she implied.

He bowed his face upon his hands. She rose suddenly, and went over to him, the tears she had not shed since Gertrude died welling up into her eyes.

“ Shall I go home—for the sake of both ? ” she asked.

He made no answer.

“ There is something I want to know—in the interest of both,” she faltered. “ I am sorry to hurt you—Stanley.”

“ Don’t ! ” he murmured brokenly.

“ But, if you will—let me go—for a time. Trust me. If I return, I shall come of my own free will,” she pleaded.

“ Ah ! ”

He lifted his head with a smile of anticipation ; ineffable love was in his eyes.

“ Do trust me,” she besought, moving nearer, and placing her hand upon his breast, as she knelt down before him. “ I want to try and find out whether what frightens me is a phantom or a reality. Let me follow it, and face it.”

"Can't we face it together?"

"No!" she answered; and he echoed the word despairingly:

"No!"

"I must know," she went on hurriedly, looking at him with truthful, pleading eyes, "whether what I was trained to believe illusion *is* illusion—or fact. I *couldn't* go on in uncertainty; it would cripple me, ruin all chance of satisfaction. How futile, how needless, to close one's eyes to fact; to pursue a fool's errand to the last, and not be quite sure at any time, not even at the very end, that one was in the right. If my talk seems wild and pointless to you—be patient. I will tell you my conclusions later. We have been trained to accept the truth. . . . If the truth makes havoc—I am not afraid of the responsibilities, if you are not."

All the stolid calm of the student forsook him at these words. The man took alarm. These incoherent utterances had some very real meaning to the girl, who pleaded as though for life.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, with austere severity.

A sudden remorselessness, born of fear and jealousy, swept all gentler considerations from him. The girl, palpitating at his feet, with her sweet lips

and clinging hands, was his. His eyes dilated ; the animal dominated the poet in him for the first time in his life. The clasp of his hands tightened upon her wrists.

“ You shall not go,” he said ; “ I want you.”

For an instant Joan looked at him, then rose, her proudest and coldest expression accompanying her words :

“ As you will.”

Spontaneity was frozen. She did not take refuge in pleadings or reproaches ; she ceased instantly to supplicate. Her grey eyes no longer besought through a film of tears ; they grew dull ; she turned away.

“ Good-night,” she said coldly.

Through the coldness there vibrated a tone that implied that she had bowed to his decree from a sense of duty. It implied also that she would make no outcry, but that commands imperilled his position. Her back had straightened, the upturned face hardened, but there was a melancholy, almost a forlornness beneath the surface stiffness that cried out loudly to the man. His face flushed ; she fascinated while she puzzled him. He drew her back from the doorway.

“ In the name of God,” he burst out hoarsely,

"don't thrust me from you. If I may not receive your thoughts, feel with you, don't altogether thrust me from you."

Then he forbore. He dropped her hand, his own fell to his side. He bowed his head, and quivered in every nerve.

The girl was startled, and watched him breathlessly. What strange phase was this?

When he lifted his head he was deadly pale; his eyes had the dumb, stricken look of a beaten dog.

"I beg your pardon," he said quietly.

There was a perceptible drawing up of the whole figure; he opened the door, and waved towards it, with a slight gesture.

"This house is ours. Go or come, my wife, as you will," he said, with almost majesty.

He listened till he heard her close the door of her room, and then, with rapid footsteps, went down the stairs; catching his hat from a peg in the hall, with quick movements, unlike his own, rushed out into the cool evening air. Serenity, calm encompassed him. The stately colleges reared their heads with solid grandeur against the pale grey sky; the Avon flowed serenely on, stedfast of purpose, towards the sea. The man's steps grew quieter as he followed its course and retraced his way to the avenue of oaks.

He glanced involuntarily towards the porch of Girton Cottage. No red light gleamed from among the evergreens. Yet she had not passed; she was not wholly dead; she walked with him there as she had walked before, her life speaking to him. He was reproved by memory; reproved out of his own mouth. What had he said only a few nights before? that one prize, one success in life, was victory, worth all that it might cost. If he had spoken truth then, that truth remained. Nothing had changed, except—

“I love her!” he said, uncovering his head. “I love her as a man loves.” He stopped as he breathed the words, as though tasting the bitter and the sweet of them. Then he lifted his head proudly. “I love her,” he reiterated. “What then?”

He hesitated in his step, stooped again, retraced his way slowly, with his eyes upon the ground. He had loved her all along, but had not known it. He knew now—what then?

She was his. She would not struggle, if he made demands. She would become his creature. She was too proud to disobey. He bent in spirit towards her, touched her with gentle hands, dallied with her sweetness. She would give herself to him if he asked, and the bond, once signed between them,

would seal her his for ever. He knew her rectitude. If she left him to test her love—

“I want you, dear,” he cried; and, when the clocks had chimed the midnight hour, he went back home.

The solitary house was deadly still, the hall light still burned. He extinguished it, and went with hushed footsteps up the stairs. At the first landing he faltered, paused, looked at his wife's door, then proceeded to his own apartments. *His wife's!* he emphasised the words. He took his shoes off and crept close. All was still within. Yet, what was that? a sob, a muffled moan? The uncertainty made his heart leap, then stand still. Had he deceived himself, or was the girl, his law-given captive, crying in her prison? He softly turned the handle of the door.

“If I must, I must,” came in smothered gasps; “and if I must, I will.”

He drew the door to quickly. A spasm passed over his face; great beads of moisture, wrung from the pain of his compelled compassion, stood out upon his forehead. All his being was concentrated in the unconscious effort to hear what she said. He pushed the door ajar again. Heavy sobs smote on his ears like blows. In an instant he was beside the bed, feeling for Joan's hands and kissing them.

"Hush!" he whispered; "you break my heart. Hush! sweet, there is no must." He put his arms about her shoulders timidly, and drew her head to his breast. "Rest, child, rest. I have been a coward—clumsy—to blame! No, no, dear heart; there is no *must*."

She was sobbing bitterly; all the pent-up sorrow of the past weeks found vent. He trembled with awe and penitence; a woman's tears were sacred to him.

"Be quiet," he said at last, burying his face in her hair; "I can't bear it."

She ceased her sobbing by degrees; and lying still against his breast in unconscious unrestraint, she tried him almost past endurance. The sweet perfume of her body, her milk-like breath intoxicated him. He gave himself to her in that hour wholly, for in the struggle she was conqueror. He strove for speech.

"Dearest, I am yours. I yield my life to you. I owe you thanks—thanks. If so be that I have won—one laurel—at your feet—your feet, I lay it down. My love . . . the pain of love inspired me. I spoke harshly to you; forgive me. Come what may I shall have had my day. I have lived in the presence of inspiration—enjoyed a loan of good. Go, dear, if

you will . . . return, if possible. Whatever you do, I thank God that I have known you. I love you . . . love you."

Her regular breathing told that she had fallen asleep. He stifled the smart of her complete unconsciousness of his suffering. But she had given him liberty and breadth, the happiness and heaven of expression; and should he stifle and cramp her? He had reached a point that rendered him unable to abuse. He looked at the face upon the pillow, made visible by the moonlight, all its grief unveiled by sleep. Never to tire of gentleness, to grow sympathetic, human, tender, that was his hope. To trample out the ignoble desire of to-day, to see her calmly happy beside him bearing his name—this would be enough. Let him enjoy what was his, without ungrateful grudgings; acknowledge his enrichment, even in bitterest pain. He had been dead, lost in the technicalities of life; and now that birth had come, should he cry out because it hurt?

CHAPTER XXIII.

ANOTHER SPRING.

A DAPPLED sky and a world of buttercups lulled Joan's irritability; the exquisite perfumes and breezes, the blossoming meadows and orchards propitiated.

David was absent. His absence recomposed her. She could regain the freedom of thought which reminiscence had held in bondage. The familiar scenes, re-visited without the figure which gave them undue meaning, would lose the disproportionateness that had perplexed her; the old relations would re-adjust themselves. That violent and passionate eruption was not normal, but an upheaval of numberless fiery elements of dissatisfaction, discontent. It was over. The green grass of contentment, the flowers of accomplishment would grow in the old crater; the place would mark her humiliation, teach her universal sympathy with, and understanding of, the follies of others. Henceforward a sedate comprehen-

sion of life, a progressive mental development was secure to her.

She went out in the mystic dawn to see the milking, and smiled to remember how handsome David's head had appeared against the background of the animal he was milking. What an exceptional strength this boy had shown; his conservative ancestors had transmitted to him blood worth the having.

"Spring-time, the only pretty ring-time,"

sang the green corn blithely as she passed through it. But it pleased her to assume airs superior to nature; knowledge profounder. The barbarian in her had interpreted last spring; had weakened her. She was no longer hesitating and doubting; the new growths within her were not of passion. How glad the Professor would be.

Gertrude was dead; she could not escape that desolation; but Gertrude's work should not die.

Father was hale and happy. The success of his daughter had blotted out his sorrow at Gertrude's death. The same papers had contained an account of both.

"The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away,

blessed be the name of the Lord!" he said, for his religion had not yet reached heroism; he had not been called upon to renounce. He would have preached a funeral sermon in the barn; but Joan interposed.

"You can't solve the problem," she said, with what seemed to him almost indifference, "and criticisms irritate."

He expressed his disappointment to Janet.

"If you can't dig deep enough to uproot a sorrow, you'd best let it be; raking the surface isn't any good; the trouble springs up again," she said quietly. "Words, if you don't hit on the right one, is a poor Job's comforting sort of business. Stanley Stanton's in the right of it there; there's only one word that just suits each case."

Father puffed at his pipe silently, and looked hard at Mother. She sewed placidly, but her hands shook a little.

"I wonder what word he'd place alongside of trouble," he said presently.

"God," she answered, "if he knows the meaning of soul."

There was a grey look about Mother that troubled Joan; but Janet would have welcomed any sickness as enjoyment that brought tendence from her girl,

and the dim horizon of her feebleness was illuminated by many rainbow lights. But her pleasure was only momentary ; she seemed to labour under a fear that it would pass.

She watched her daughter with contemplative eyes ; her unusual sweetness struck her pleasantly ; no attention escaped her. Joan noted that she did not mention David's name ; Father chafed at his delayed return. Every few days brought news of him ; intended prolongation of his holiday.

"A queer idea in the spring-time," grumbled Father, "with shearin' an' what not ; I am astonished, I am."

"There's a deal of things beyond the mind of a man," remarked Janet, without malice.

"If he wanted to make me feel the miss of him, he's hit the right nail on the head," responded Father uneasily. "This place 'as grown beyond my desire. We've prospered in the land, an' now we're growin' old, Mother, my dear, you an' me can't see too much of one another. We began side by side ; let us end the same. An' the farm comes between." There was a tender vibration in his voice. He went on boldly in his affirmation, nothing doubting that he expressed the thought of both. "We've nothing left to wish

—except to see the old place kept green on the face of the earth.'

He drew himself up to his full height, and tossed his grey hair off his brow.

"Joan will bring our grey hairs with honour to the grave. A Jefferies shines," he added confidently; "our girl don't need to soil her hands; an' so, this yoke growin' heavy upon me, I purpose placin' it upon a younger back—of givin' David a share. When the old man dies, the young one will reign in his stead."

So David was to live here after all. David and David's children to occupy the old home! She was to have her heart's desire after all—how differently! But she would have the boy, with his energies and care; she felt tremulous and shaken. She would have his arm to lean upon, though not a son's arm. She should never get at the bottom of the lad's heart, perhaps; but he would not go. His would be an abiding presence. If only David's children might have had Joan's eyes! But she supposed that, when it came to the point, she should dress them in the lavender-scented garments.

,"What are you thinkin' of?" asked Father abruptly.

"I was thinking," answered Janet, blushing like a

girl, "of the nights I used to sew, and you read those baptism tracts." And then she sighed.

Joan entered in time to hear the sigh. She went into the kitchen presently to question Mercy.

"She don't take the same interest in nothin'," answered Mercy, with a sour look at the daughter of her mistress; "but there she sits in the old rocker, a rockin' an' rockin' for all the world as though she'd got you a babby again. I believe in my own mind she wishes she had; or a babby o' yours," she added unexpectedly, to Joan's confusion.

The woman saw the colour mount, and, vigorously larding the scrubbing brush with soap, dipped it viciously into the bucket beside her, swirling a few spots upon Joan's lilac gown, and then scrubbed savagely at the dresser.

"Some folks," she proceeded, after snorts that sounded like blaspheming, "go contrariwise from everybody's expectations!"

Splash went the brush into the bucket again. Joan stepped back, eyeing the woman as though to discover the cause of grievance.

"Once it were all for the young things that missus were carin'. A bit of a ducklin', a scrap of a chick, a wool-ball of a lamb, would keep her singin' to herself the day through. That's when she expected '*im*."

"Him?" queried Joan, almost as humbly as she had approached this female Hercules in her childish days, for Mercy had noted the subdued mood and had not been slow to take advantage of it. She snorted more blasphemously than ever, and, catching the smile in the large grey eyes, sent more water off the brush.

"Your brother!" she said resentfully; "'im as was to 'ave been born instead of you. You always were aggravatin' an' unexpected! Excuse my sayin' of it, Miss Joan, but you cut in where your brother feared to tread." She waved the brush dramatically, and glanced round the kitchen, gleaming and spotless as of old. "An' you've gone on bein' aggravatin' an' unexpected, if you'll further excuse me."

Joan did not appear to find her talk embarrassing; took it, in fact, as a tonic. She measured the room with her eye, calculated first the distance that the water from the brush might travel, and placed herself a little beyond it, leaned over the back of a chair, and regarded Mercy seriously. She had associated the hard-lined, mahogany-complexioned woman so many years with home-made bread and preserves that she found this assertion of a consciousness outside the kitchen interesting. Mercy wrung the floor-cloth as though wringing the neck of an enemy; her sharp elbows grew purple with exertion.

"Tell me in what way I have been most aggravating and unexpected?" asked Joan, as though she wanted to know. "Outside that first impertinence, I mean," she added quietly.

"Well," said Mercy slowly, "you never do the things one calculates on."

Mercy seemed disinclined to carry the conversation further; she applied herself with renewed energy to her scrubbing, and left Joan still wondering.

"Was my mother disappointed that I was not a boy?" she asked presently.

Mercy could not say that this had been the case. She remembered her own poignant sense of isolation at the time.

"She'd got her baby," she grunted grudgingly.

The woman's grumbled words left the impression that, in that fact, Janet Jefferies had found her heart's desire. She was a little sore at heart that her own personality had been quite outside this special mother-love. Any other child would have done as well. She was startled at the new thought it gave her about Gertrude. The affection she had received so easily had been hers exclusively.

"Was my father disappointed?" she asked, smiling a little.

"He shifted his ideas off the boy on to you."

This was a little involved, but Joan understood. He had loved his thought—his ambition. She had, at least in part, fulfilled his hope. She slipped her wedding-ring up and down her slender finger. Yes, she believed she had, in some measure, satisfied her father. It was a humbling thought, after taking oneself so very much for granted, how far one fell short of other people's ideals. One couldn't realise them all, of course, with any measure of consistency; ideas were perpetually clashing; but it was interesting to get outside one's own conception, and learn the views of others.

She folded her arms in a new fashion, and challenged Mercy, with a steady, slightly-frowning gaze.

"Were you sorry?"

"I was," replied Mercy candidly. "A child wasn't wanted about the place at all. Think of all the worrit we'd a bin saved if you hadn't come!"

This view of the case had not occurred to Joan.

"But 'avin' come," supplemented Mercy honestly, "I liked you none the worse for bein' a girl. It was your total disregard of your privileges that angered me. I was proud o' the sex in those days."

Joan unfolded her arms, and toyed with her ring again.

"In *those* days?" she emphasised.

Mercy wrung another imaginary neck, but avoided the searching eyes.

"Lord!" she exclaimed, "how you do catch one up. I said *those* days; I was young then! Am I to blame if the Almighty puts it into a woman to be cock sure He reached His highest point when He made her? It's in His wisdom, I don't doubt. If a female was deluded she'd wish she'd never been born. The Creator started it, man goes on with it, an' the children finishes it off!"

"How does the Creator delude a woman?"

"How?" retorted Mercy tartly, rubbing her nose with the back of the wet brush. "Why, it's plain enough. A young woman feels superior; that's what keeps her straight. 'I'm a girl,' she says, an' smiles to herself, an' thinks she ain't lonely when men are 'avin' a good time without 'er; 'I'm pure an' innercent,' she says, and wipes 'er eyes on the quiet. 'I'm desperate good, an' man's desperate wicked; it takes the likes o' me to show the likes o' them a thing or two.' That's firstly!"

"And secondly?"

Mercy drowned the musical voice with the brush.

After a moment's vigorous labour, she jerked out between her efforts :

"The secondly—is—that a man deceives her. He backs up that notion the Almighty gave her about bein' good—an' tacks another on to it—for his sake."

Joan looked away from the hard face, through the open door. The stir of the farm-yard caught her ear, the sunlit mountain peaks her eye.

"He makes her believe that life without 'er is impossible," supplemented Mercy.

"And—?"

"It isn't," she grunted; "an' she finds it out sooner or later. Then comes 'er thirdly," proceeded the thin-lipped philosopher; "she deludes herself about the man's children then."

Mercy laid down the brush, and folded her angular arms upon the damp dresser; her lustreless eyes turned where the bright grey were fixed on the snow peak in the west.

"An' children is disheartling," she added, after a pause.

"Isn't there a fourthly to this pessimistic sketch of married womanhood?" asked Joan.

"Pessimistical? Pessimistical is a book word for what's true, I take it," answered Mercy at her gruffest.

"Yes, sometimes there's a fourthly ; the woman gets somethin' of her first idea back—that, bein' a woman, the world couldn't get on very well without her after all ; an' she tackles 'er work agen, an' thinks she's 'appy in the doin' of it ; or"—she gulped—"she dies. It takes some kind o' belief to keep a woman alive, married or single. 'Ere, get out o' my way," she added brusquely, rousing from her reverie, and plunging for the brush. "You're always askin' questions ; always was, an' always will be, I expect. 'Mercy,' you asked me once, when you sat in your 'igh chair at the table eating your breakfast, 'Mercy, how does the egg get inside the shell ? an' what is it made of ?' 'How should I know ?' I says. 'Well,' says you, 'I shall know, an' I won't eat it till I do ;' and you didn't. But you never rightly enjoyed eggs afterwards. So, if you'll take my advice, Miss Joan, you'll eat the egg that Providence provides, an' ask no questions."

Joan watched the stern-browed woman, with something of the half-fascination, half-awe, she had felt for her when a child. With all her narrow prejudices Mercy had a certain limited penetration, and threw lurid gleams of light upon a subject, here and there. Her views were very sombre. Had this hard-featured woman ever had any comeliness, Joan wondered.

"Did you ever love a man, Mercy?" she asked, undaunted by her snubbing.

A dull red wave passed over the woman's face and spread from her brow to her sinewy neck, showing up pitilessly the unbecoming iron-grey hair, mercilessly revealing each line on forehead and cheek. But the lovely girl saw no occasion for mirth, perceived with new-born insight all the humbling consciousness that her plain sister suffered in her maidenhood. Before her faltered "Forgive me," could be heard, Mercy had turned upon her with a rush of words. They fell unheeded; Joan did not resent the woman's bitterness; she caught a sentence here and there.

"An' if I 'ad, one fool more in a world o' fools wouldn't be conspicuous. . . . An unloved old maid ain't disgracefuller than an unlovin' wife. . . . But if I'd 'ad a mother—Lord!"

The tone left nothing to be said of her ancient jealousy and pain.

Joan drew nearer.

"What—what reason does my mother give for her diminished interest in young things?" she asked presently, in uncertain tones.

Mercy wiped her hot face with her apron. She

looked sullen, but Joan's compelling eyes were fixed upon her earnestly.

"She said she'd found 'um disappointin', disheartlin' like; that you loved 'um an' cared for 'um, an' when they'd grown strong the first use they made of their legs an' wings was to desert you."

Joan spent the rest of the day in the barn-yard and byres. She came back in the twilight, walking, in her old childlike fashion, with her arms behind her back.

"It is true, quite true, this tyranny of the young, quite true that each generation leaves the old behind; but then, it is also true that the young inherit this sublime self-sacrifice, and become in turn self-sacrificing."

After that day she enticed Janet back into the poultry-yard and fields; and in a hundred different ways—while drawing attention to the habits and eccentricities of the mother-birds and mother-beasts—conveyed the idea that the mother mission was to train good fathers and mothers and so benefit the race.

The shadow passed from Janet's face. To have her maid fraternising with her in this homely fashion was unprecedented; her spirits rose with her self-respect; her bruised feeling passed; she was no

longer humiliated before the world as one whose daughter had turned aside from her.

When mother and daughter were not idling together out of doors, they were having fun together indoors, for Joan declared that it was quite time she learned housekeeping, now that she had a house of her own.

Mercy's sharp tongue frequently interrupted the merry duet, with remonstrances about the way her stove and pastry table were "mulled up"; but Joan, inwardly shuddering, persevered with her pastry and soups. Mother ate beyond her need to prove her appreciation, and strutted about from store-room to larder till she was ready to drop; mentally she was whole.

Joan watched the faint pink deepen in the dear, sweet face, and the soft brown eyes grow young; but when she was alone, her own smile faded, a nervous depression took the brightness from the peaceful landscape.

"Sweet lovers love the spring,"

the larks carolled; and she was half-tortured, half glad, that she had been left alone to struggle to her feet.

One evening in late summer, Mother and Joan

were strolling back from the plains. The elder leaned upon the younger woman, her serene face smiling, her withered fingers clinging to the girl's rounded arm.

The sun had dropped behind the mountains, and the intense stillness of a country twilight reigned. As they neared the stile, Mother withdrew her eyes from Joan's face, and, with a start of surprise, exclaimed, in delighted tones :

“ Why, here's David ! ”

Every pulse in the girl's body thrilled. Her cultivated indifference was swept aside by the leaping of her heart.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ANOTHER HARVEST.

"THE summer is over, the harvest is past, and my soul is not saved," said Joan.

"Nor mine," was David's answer.

They were leaning over the old field gate, their backs to the autumn sunset, facing the plains. Her voice was like mocking music, a half smile lingered about her lips. His tone, like his face, was sullen.

"Not saved does not mean lost ; do you remember ?"

"Aye, I remember."

He withdrew his gaze from the plains, that were shimmering under the twilight rays, and, for a moment, let his eyes rest upon the face beside him. It was white, hard, mocking. She was garbed as on that other evening, in white ; as on that other, also, they had come to watch the moon rise, and to be alone together, for the first time since his return. She had shrivelled him with her irony, made his love seem almost ridiculous in his own eyes, while she had

played the domesticated Martha, ever busy about many things. This evening, to his astonishment, she had asked him to watch the harvest moon rise. But her face showed scant sympathy with the sentimentalist.

"I like consistency," he remarked, *apropos* of nothing. His eyes and gestures were expressive of impatience. He had come back to his first thought of her ; she was a coquette.

"I follow your thought," she said easily, with the embryo of a smile. Then, with sudden and unexpected energy : "It is a lie ! Since I can remember, life has been all perplexity ; but I've never been a sham. That is why I asked you to meet me now. You said once, here in this spot, that you believed I loved you. You remember ?"

There was no element of passion or pain discernible in her face or voice ; she leaned upon her folded arms and looked straight before her.

"Remember ?"

Reproach, caressing, pain and pleasure trembled through his word.

"You also said," she proceeded quietly, "that, if I loved you, love would claim me, and I should own it."

"I remember."

"I denied that I should; I was mistaken. I do love you; I did then."

Her brows were drawn together; there was no sign of agitation about her, except her pallor. He felt like a man who, in midsummer, suddenly experiences a chill. He mentally shivered, and drew the rags of his self-respect about him. He would have preferred open scorn to this calculating acknowledgment of love. He gradually became aware that Joan was speaking again.

"I perceived the truth late. The impression no longer depends upon my will; it overpowers it. It is just that I should own I was mistaken."

"Two and two have always made four," he observed coldly.

"To people who count," she responded promptly.

"You were always a clever arithmetician," he retorted.

"Yet it is pitifully unexciting to have nothing to carry over. Even numbers are so flat. Our sum total is four."

"Four!" he assented.

"Truth for truth," she went on; "I owed you that. It hasn't been an easy thing,"—a slight catch in her breath—"not easy to own to my mistake; but it is right—to you."

"Thank you," he said, wondering, while he listened and spoke, when the moon would rise and silver the plains as on that other night, when he had conjured the vision of a woman defenceless against her love. At the crisis of her life, the woman measured her words; no passion, not even of regret, stirred their coldness. Her love was shrewd, logical, calculating, lifeless! She lived only in her art. Her realisation of passion was a mediumistic realisation. Ænone had an exponent, not a counterpart, in the girl who rested her folded arms quietly on the gate, and told him, in unconventional fashion, that, yes, her love was fact.

"Ah! there's the moon!" David cried involuntarily.

" 'The moon flies face to face with me,' "

she murmured, with the Professor's trick,

" 'Aye, look and say whatever you see,
Little brother;
O Mother, Mary Mother,
What rest to-night, between Hell and Heaven?' "

Her last words were a whispered, passionate appeal.

"I'll go," she added wearily; "there's nothing else

to see, and nothing left to say." She bowed her head. "I did not think it possible that I could grow so tame. One who errs should acknowledge error." She moistened her dry lips, and cleared the hoarseness from her throat. "Often at night in my dreams I shall live my humiliation over again—years hence—after years of faithful duty."

She pushed the gate open and passed towards the plains. David followed her mechanically. She drew up her slight figure proudly.

"No," she said haughtily. "I have nothing further to say ; go to your horses, rule them. I wonder that you have dared to listen to a woman's sorrow in silence. I held aloof from you because I did not understand my own heart. I have humbled myself because I do. I crave your pardon for any pain I gave you then, or now. You were right, if that will help you. I was wrong. It is helpful at least to know the truth. Knowledge is the remedy for ignorance."

A sudden heat warmed her veins ; she stepped out briskly. The brightening night seemed conscious of her shame. She hung her head, like one convicted of wrong. Why should she feel this approbation—sympathy indispensable? Was it not enough that she had been honest after her own understanding of

the word? Should she not be content that her intentions had been right?

"But you see, I cannot; I cannot, as you see!" she cried, addressing she knew not whom.

David believed she was untrue; she had fallen for ever in his eyes; she suffered a ghastly fear, too, that after this episode was dead, it would haunt her consciousness for ever. Whatever happened, she would not again see David Aubrey. She would go back to Stanley Stanton, and find peace there. She would tell him all the miserable tale; perhaps he would not understand it, but she would tell him.

She had walked a long way, when her own name sounded pantingly in her ears.

"Joan!"

Her heart leaped; the old joy billowed over her again. The wound he had inflicted ceased to hurt.

"Joan, I am a brute; forgive me. Come back, come back, dear. I have followed you for an hour. Where are you going?"

He spoke in broken words, with his hand upon her arm. She put up her hand to push the hair from her face. It was wet with the humiliation of her flesh.

"I was going home," she answered absently.

The words stirred him more than would have any shrieking. There was such hopeless resignation in

them. He took her cold, passive hand, and turned her about.

"I have tried," she said, "but I can put nothing right. I have emptied my heart of my old pride, sought to give back what was given to me."

The tears were streaming down her cheeks. The arm on which she rested trembled.

"Will you please not cry?" he blurted out.

"You have not known the dreadful pain of a woman!" she went on, apparently not conscious that he had spoken, "who has been taught to expunge all feeling, and discovers, too late, that she is not a machine to be regulated scientifically."

"Will you please not cry?" he said again.

And then the dam of self-control broke down, and passion forced its way. Did she think him a man of iron? It was enough that he had worn an iron mask. Did she know—had she any conception—how he loved her? He had gone away, remained away to escape the sight of her! That night in the concert hall had tried his strength. Every man had his limitation. He could not bear to see her, and not cry out; could not think of her without desiring her. Did she not know, could she not guess, what it had been to him to stand beside her to-night, and hear from her lips that she had loved him all along—but knew

it too late? Her warm breath fanned his cheek as she raised her face, and a sweet sound, almost of laughter, broke from her lips.

He bent his head, and searched her almost sternly. Then he took her face between his hands, and turned it to the moonlight.

"Child," he asked her, almost fearfully, "are you glad?"

"Very glad," she answered, with shining eyes. "Can't you see why? It was piteous for me to think I had been wrong. You do not know how clearly will stand out, amid surrounding dimness, the reflection: David did love me; I did love David; there is love. You will go one way and I another; there will be no more perplexity; love is love! I have had doubts and shames that there is no need to speak of; it is like the confusion of one's brain before one grasps the fact. First I was bent one way and then another. I *know* now."

She leaned against his shoulder with an upward look, too rich for utterance.

"There is no more need to speak of it," she said again, after a pause. "We have great knowledge, have we not?"

His coarser egotism was reprov'd. Her nobler instincts checked him; she held out to him no

brutal licence; her voice of purity and justice appealed to his humanity. She gave weight to the claims of conscience. Love was holy in her eyes; let him not cheapen it. He aspired to rank alongside of her in thought, to escape the tyranny of flesh. And the thralldom of her beauty was upon him. Should he drag her headlong with him into an abyss of darkness? sweet darkness, perhaps, but darkness all the same. No, never. The exhausted girl was sheltered by his arm; although the voice that spoke of the happiness of their love was but a phantom voice to him; what was liberty to her was his death-sentence. She halted at the porch, looked up at him irresolutely, then lifted her arms and drew his face to hers.

The door stood ajar, and, in the hall, Joan came face to face with Mercy, gaunt, pale, stern-eyed. She stood like one struck dumb with wonder. Her attitude struck a chill to the palpitating girl.

"Is anything wrong?" Joan asked, with shrinking.

"Not so wrong but, please God, it may be mended," she said sternly. "Get away to your bed, and don't waken your mother; let her sleep while she can."

Mercy had always cherished a secret animosity towards her, the girl reflected; she supposed she

was vexed that she had not returned to supper. She hastened to her room beneath the eaves, in which she had spent rainy days and sunny days of childhood. Her nerves were strained to their full extent; she could not sleep; an indescribable sense of exultation kept her wide-eyed. Her full joy was inaccessible; but a sweet sense of possession cheered her, nevertheless. Love was love; love was hers. It did not occur to her to apply the knowledge to her environment; only the spirit voice of her love now spoke. Till the last few months her knowledge of life had been scientific; her actions had been based upon the arguments of reason; her imagination was now fired by her new perception; as yet her senses were subservient to principles.

But the man, striding over the plains, fought with his weakening forces of resistance, his blood exulting; while Mercy, grim-faced and white with fear, sat in the porch awaiting his return, her sinewy arms folded tightly across her chest.

CHAPTER XXV.

BETWEEN HELL AND HEAVEN.

THE sky was whitening in the east when David's rapid footsteps crunched the gravel path.

"The darkest hour's before the dawn!" the woman murmured to herself, as she raised her haggard eyes to the brightening line in the sky that made the background to the man's approach.

His appearance was well-favoured. Mercy knew the look in his face; his carriage and whole demeanour told of mastery. She stepped out of the shadow of the woodbine and stood face to face with him, the dawn emphasising every unloveliness of feature and expression. David stared blankly at her. It was as though hard ungracious fact had suddenly confronted his rose-tinted dreams.

"David Aubrey, are you gentleman or scoundrel?" she asked gruffly, her searching gaze trying to pierce the twilight dimness and read his very soul. Was it the effect of the changing light, she wondered, or

did a dozen different traces of emotion pass over his face? Her brows were drawn together tightly, her hard mouth down at the corners.

"I hope—I am a gentleman," he said at last deliberately, removing his hat.

His eyes challenged hers. She drew her breath with a gasp of relief, and, unfolding her arms, lifted her snowy apron and wiped great beads of sweat, that meant suspense, from off her forehead. Her whole body relaxed with the relaxation of her mental strain.

"Ah! for that, thank God!" she said, in a low tone, her dull eyes seeking the rays then traversing the sky.

Her manner and appearance both were tragic. Something in the face, something almost terrible in its earnestness, startled the man fresh from dreams. He had a sense of sudden awakening, a presentiment of coming loss.

"Lad!" continued Mercy, bringing her glance once more straight to his, "you must go—at once. There ain't no time to be lost dilly-dallyin'. It's a question of life or death; life to the honour, an' the peace o' this house"—she waved her arm with a movement almost dramatic towards the shrouded windows—"or death. They're all fools

after their kind, master an' missus, the Professor an' *her*,—trustin', ignorant, unworldly fools ! It's for you to be wise. The fields an' the beasts, the peaceful 'ome an' the friendship—you must leave 'em all, David Aubrey ; or trouble 'ull come, sooner or later ; an' it ain't deserved by any inside these doors. You'll 'ave to go ; there ain't no other way o' savin' your soul. You can't be calmly 'appy no more, for the smile an' enchantment of a woman is upon you, the smile an' enchantment o' Joan."

Mercy, delivering her message of righteousness, was a grim image of truth ; yet for once, though she did not know it, she had spiritualised the occasion. There was something startling in her unexpected entrance upon the scene. David had been losing the thread ; she gave him his cue. But one cannot be a saviour without sacrifice. Mercy was tolling the passing-bell to her own delight. The man who had put her in touch with youth would never understand that ; she herself scarcely comprehended.

"Lad," she resumed, restraining a desire to place her hand upon his shoulder, "since the day you first come to Otira Farm, you've been strength an' comfort to it. Men an' women an' the cattle in the fields feel you strong. I've felt it—an' I'm strong myself," she added, with a sudden thrill of pride.

"There ain't no sort of dignity in haphazardness. Some folk drop on their feet, when they 'appen on the right ; others scramble to 'um ; others walk of their determined will—"

"I'll walk !" he interrupted, with a half-amused smile ; "metaphorically and actually."

"Soon ? " she queried.

He turned his back to her and looked eastward. When he looked back, his face was set in its most determined lines.

"Before sunset," he said brusquely.

He stood quite still for a long time, not hearing or seeing Mercy leave him. He was neither artist nor poet ; he had not the subtle analysis and emotion that weave round suffering a glamour, and invest it with intangible utility or gain, Nature's compensation to the artist temperament, thus enabling your poet-soul to suffer more and more, often without despair. It was loss—bitter, horrible loss to him. Mercy had taxed him with his passion, with its callous selfishness, and he accepted his rebuke with resignation. He stood staring blankly at the reddening mists, and the fantastic clouds took on the shape of trees, roofs and a gilded spire. With a throb at the heart, he thought of the old English

village and the vicarage, where his father was, and his mother had been.

"I suppose it's in one's blood," he murmured; then turned from the picture painted in the sky to one on earth.

Joan was standing where Mercy had last stood. The woman had embodied grey, colourless, stern, matter-of-fact, pulseless sacrifice: Joan, flooded by the crimson light now bursting through the yellow mist, was a radiant impersonation of warm, throbbing girlhood, of youthful life and love. Smilingly she held out her little hands to him. There was a new look of misery, strange to her, upon his rugged face.

"Dearest," he breathed.

She saw the strong mouth tremble; he dropped her hands, and they turned together towards the stream. The smell of sweet earth and dew was fragrant on the air; the glistening autumn leaves glinted in many coloured ambers; the drowsy sounds of middle-aged birds came from the bush clumps; but, for all its sweetness, the atmosphere was heavy—laden with reminiscences and languorous regret.

For the moment, there was no world to the two who stepped forward over the damp leaf-carpet to the gorge, except that unreal spot; no time except

that drowsy hour. Heroism was out of place. The savage vehemence of passion overpowered David's strength. Joan scrutinised him curiously; she thought he lashed his anger against her, mistaking his emotion; his long-drawn respirations hurt her; she felt that each one caused her own chest a strain.

When they came to the spot at which Father long ago had insisted upon discipline, while she gathered flowers, David leaned with his back against a tree, and looked away from her to the mountainous west, his arms tightly folded. She had not deceived him of set purpose; she had deceived herself as well. She took a little step towards him.

"Well?" she asked, looking up at the pained, young face, with questioning on her own.

"Not well!" he answered hoarsely. "My God! what can I say or do? I am so helpless."

She held out one hand to him sideways, and stood looking with him where their sun would set that night. His despair seized her; the hopelessness of his voice presented their position in a different aspect. She dropped the hand that gripped her fingers, and sat down upon a boulder at the margin of the stream. Presently her face fell between her hands, and her great eyes watched the wimpling, flashing water.

"There is nothing to say or do—except love," she answered.

In the quiet that followed, the murmuring of the gorges among the hills was audible. Scarce a leaf stirred, the atmosphere grew more oppressive every moment. The new day, like a promise unfulfilled, was clouding over. David turned his eyes, with the instinct of the farmer, and gazed at the heavy, copper-coloured bank of cloud that was creeping slowly over the sky.

"There'll be a storm before night!" he said.

"Perhaps!" she replied indifferently. As yet the thought of night had no interest for her. "You are not happy," she faltered. "I have spoilt everything for you; I was too dull to understand. I was not deceiving you. Perhaps it would have been better, now that I do understand, to have said nothing. But you were in the right, you see, when you said that, if I loved you, love would claim me from all the world."

He laughed a little roughly. She was torn between her remorse and that strange, new happiness which, in spite of everything, had made life so well worth living that she could not stay in bed this morning. She wished that accent of pain would leave his voice.

"You are not happy!" she reiterated regretfully.
"Happy? when I must leave you!"

She lifted her eyes, then, with a startled look to his face. What she saw there sent the bright colour from her own; cheeks and lips were grey when she looked back at the stream. In the moment that followed she heard every undertone in Nature—the sad sighing in the heavy-eared autumn grasses, the little moan of the breeze where branches were bare, the plaintive thrill of birds whose nests were empty. How old this stern necessity made life. She had been trained to put aside sentiment and illusion; to will with the law. The austerity of Miss Goodyear's creed had nipped her fresh emotions in the hour of blossom. Poor Miss Goodyear, poor Professor! She understood now how rigid their martyrdom to the law of life had made them. She, who had felt such strange exultation an hour ago, had seen the world through rose-colour, seemed suddenly cold and old. But through her shaken sensations came the emergence of hard fact, she had learned to accept the truth.

"You must go," she said.

She was conscious of the harshness of the decree; but his side of the question appealed to her. Something of cynicism entered his impulsive thought; he

lacked the finer educational instinct to reason from both sides of a subject.

Joan's despair was not visible upon her face; the grey eyes watched the play of light upon the water.

"It seems impossible for me to live another day," he burst out passionately, stung almost beyond endurance by what he mistook for her passivity. "Only the necessity of our position will sustain me. It is not possible for me to see you day after day, unless I can claim you wholly. The situation would become unendurable. You do not know the heaving volcano beneath my calm. I am drifting away from honour—from duty. Ah, well! I shall not cry out again. I am a hound to do so now. I am ready to meet the silent years, but not to drift into a current that will harm you, dear. Neither time nor space could part us now—if I so-willed. But I do not will. Johnnie," he pleaded, drawing her hand from her face, "tell me, sweet, that I am not a coward to go."

"I think," she said, "that all your conventions cry 'crucify him!'"

She was making it desperately hard. She scrutinised him curiously, evidently trying to put herself in his place, and to realise his obligations.

"I was not mistaken in my estimate of your loyalty," she pronounced presently, to his great relief.

"It is of little consequence what I feel beside what I know. You know how my heart will hunger for your dear company. Last night I thought it possible that we could remain friends ; but I was mistaken. Better be mistaken in my own thought than in you. I shall be lonely ; but you will suffer no diminution in my estimate of your character."

How critically she judged the situation. But he yearned for a moment of abandonment. He bowed his head upon her knees. God forbid that he should cloud those truthful eyes. Her fingers strayed caressingly to his hair.

"You are strong," she murmured proudly.

"Strong!" he groaned. "I will become all you hope for me," he muttered, "when I get through the fierce ardour of this furnace. I will exorcise my devil."

"What devil?"

"Covetousness ; I covet you. And I am not a Philip ; I am not content to be loved a little after Enoch, even though your Enoch only stands for— There ! pardon me ! my head is heavy with unspoken thought, as my hands are heavy with my powerlessness. It is best that I should go. I could not be content till I had rivalled your conscience and understanding. I am compelled to see that I come a

little after Enoch? mind? soul—something? Your calmness tortures me. Joan, Joan, good-bye, beloved, level-headed, baby-hearted, snow-souled Joan, your name is sweet to me! A royal woman—a little woman! Somewhere, some day, we shall meet again, princess. Let me hold you in my arms a moment—so. Look in my eyes. I have left so much unsaid in the days we were together—but remember that I will live and conquer.”

His voice broke; he let her go from his embrace.

“The storm has battered me a little,” he said apologetically. “You have your art; I have nothing else in the world but you. I would have worshipped you always—but we part to-day.”

He turned away and strode quickly towards the house. Joan sat quite still where he had left her, her head upon her hands. When at last she staggered up, her limbs felt heavy and stiff, cramped, like her mind.

She tried to harden her heart, to possess herself serenely, and answered Mother’s searching looks at breakfast and Father’s loud-voiced protests sanely.

“Going?” the man said, almost in tears. “Hurried decision!” He’d never heard the like, couldn’t understand it. It was flying from Providence, throwing away a career! Confound these sudden changes of

weather! they made his eyes smart. Felt as though the heavens would fall, he did. What with the heaviness in the air, and the unexpected news, all the grit was taken out of him. Did Mother hear the gorges in the mountains and the cry of the birds? There'd be a storm before night.

Mother heard nothing. She was packing David's trunks, packing them with exquisite care and skill. It was a task her fingers performed with instinctive pleasure, the while her tears dropped fast upon the spotless linen. But although she wept, she did not say, "Stay." The son of her affection was to leave her; but she asked no question. She reproved Father once for his noise, with a peremptory "Hush up!" She felt his commonplaces out of season.

And Tom Jefferies, astounded that anyone could belittie the chance of a partnership in Otira Gorge Farm, discovered that he had a pressing duty in an opposite direction, and, after a hasty mid-day meal, went off.

David refused to be driven to the station. Let his luggage be sent after him; he would walk, first taking a farewell survey of the farm. He held Mother's hands in a tight, strong clasp.

"God bless you, lad," she said tremulously, trying not to look all she felt.

Mercy busied herself in the kitchen, her gentleness a thing of the past, her irritability and sarcasm overstepping her last remnant of good manners.

CHAPTER XXVI.

JOAN'S CHIVALRY.

JOAN, from her attic window, saw David depart. She had been fighting many hours for serenity. She had said good-bye to the flowers and happiness of life ; had, she believed, executed self. To feel was nothing, she had asserted ; to act was all. She knew what she must do. She was worn with the conflict, her young face harsh, her brilliant, grey eyes menacing. Then when it was over, as she supposed—this battle with opposing forces—she caught a glimpse of the man she loved, his back turned to her and hers. He moved with implacable and pitiless determination ; strength and resolution spoke in his very step ; and yet how solitary he seemed, going out under the lowering and mournful sky. She watched him till he turned into the byre, then stretched out her hands with a passionate cry. He was taking adieu now of the animals that came at his call. She gazed out past the byre to the snow-peaks, that had lost their bril-

liance in the heavy air, trembling in every suffering nerve. Her self-assurance had departed ; the torrent of dammed-up feeling broke loose, and swept before it all her analytic inwardness, all the obstinacy of will that had given her command. She saw herself, as in a vision, when youth and a lover's wooing would be past, old, hard, forsaken, cynical of love, doubtful of trust ; she saw her garnered sheaves of labour—perhaps fame—rusting, rotting, unappreciated in the dreary barn of life, of loveless life ! Saw herself bereft of a woman's sweet crown of mingled thorns and roses—roses and thorns of true wifhood and motherhood ; saw herself, like Gertrude and the Professor, lifeless, loveless, discontent. She hurried from the western window to the one looking east. He would pass that way, over those plains that had ever divided her from her desire ; go with a restlessness of spirit she could have satisfied ; go unselfishly, detach himself from all that would have meant charm and prosperity to him. She had been his search, his desire and his hope, and she was letting him sacrifice all, and go alone. There had been no question of compromise ; the demands had been all hers ; she had bargained, profaned, and destroyed. Was not his lot by right hers also ?

She knelt at the window and looked out, with gaze

strained for his re-appearance. Everything was born afresh within her, by the hint that her banishment was due with his ; that renunciation would be her true progression ; that plenitude of life lay within his arms. Diminution of soul and mind and body, sweet sophistry clamoured, was in their separation. Her senses reeled under the magic stress of passion ; duty put on a false appearance ; what might not be became not only feasible, but right ; right wore the mask of wrong.

Her powers, her liberty would go with him ; she would accept her destiny and go where he went. She could not let him pass alone beyond the boundary gate.

With shaking hand she penned a few lines to her father, and laid the note upon her pillow, then threw her travelling cloak upon her shoulders, and, drawing the hood about her head, went swiftly out. She stopped at the orchard gate, and looked behind her. The old house seemed eyeing her with reproach ; the wind had risen and moaned mournfully through the branches, that shook down a shower of yellow leaves upon her. There was a consciousness in her unconsciousness of fatality and death ; she dimly perceived that the crisis of her life had come ; that this hour was one it would not be possible ever to for-

get ; on it rested the issue of all her future, far as her soul could sense. She knew that she should look back one time, here or elsewhere, and judge her action critically, abide by the sober verdict of retrospection, and take up her cross or crown with strength and patience. Cross or crown ! Ah, God ! she didn't know ! She didn't know what was her right or wrong. Not the first soul swept onward with the tide of feeling, she felt herself caught up and carried onward helplessly.

She and the gloom and the risen wind seemed one. The stir of tumult was in her blood ; she defended herself against the elements as against a foe ; she would conquer, or be conquered ; the final was not yet. She felt no terror or bewilderment now ; the grandeur of the rising storm found an echo in the grandeur of her choice. Destroy ? perhaps. There was no victory without destruction. She had been an instrument, a chorus of Fate hitherto ; for this one hour she was the creator of her part. She lifted up her hooded head and smiled at the frowning sky.

“ ‘ And let come, what come may,
I shall have had my day ! ’ ”

she said.

David had said good-bye to the cattle, as a mother says good-bye to her little children. He blasphemed his luck, but patted the calves. He gave instructions brusquely ; loitered to extract a thorn from the foot of a pup, and to bind up the wound.

"Lie down !" he said ; "howling won't heal you, you little duffer."

Then came his own turn.

"Are you ready ?" he asked himself, when he turned his back on his last friend.

He put his hands in his pockets, and whistled a martial air, while every memory of the past two years revibrated in his brain. Look back ? Fatal ! To be dependent upon the past was weak. The present was hell ; but there was the future ; what would it bring ? He left to Fate the unravelling of the skein. One thing only was necessary—occupation. He whistled and ducked his head to the wind. One moment here at the stile—a moment of recollection, gratitude for life's loan of love to him ; and then to be a man !

He raised his eyes—and there at the field gate stood Joan.

"Dear," she said, "I belong to you. Where you go, I go also."

He looked at her, at first surprised, then trans-

figured by the exultation of triumphant passion. Hot words followed; he would shield and protect her always; his tenderness should be her compensation; she should never regret. All his ideas should be subservient to hers. The sudden encounter had bewildered him; he was tender, humble, grateful, and drew her arm through his caressingly as they faced the open plains and the coming gale.

"I never dreamt of this," he went on hoarsely, closing her hand in his.

Joan trembled, but made no answer. They both stepped out quickly. The afternoon was nearly gone; their train would pass a few hours later. They rehearsed no plans, no methods, but pushed on on their stormy path, indifferent to the future. In their glow of joy, the presence of each other was all sufficing.

"You see," she said at last, in a quiet whisper, "we have loved each other from the first."

"Love has brought us together," he answered bravely, "here from all the world, in spite of all the world."

They tramped on over the tussocks silently. At every fresh gust of wind he held her slight form securely to him. Once she laid her head upon his arm.

"I have no life now," she faltered, "except yours."

He drew her closer to him.

"My queen," he said ; "my dear queen !"

Queen ! was she queen or craven ? If only she were sure ! If she were vouchsafed a vision, a revelation, now in this hour, she would judge her own act—abide faithful to the trust. There was something in the man's face that awed her, humiliated and made her ashamed. With all his tenderness, in spite of his gentle consideration, she was conscious of a cheapening—a subtle something that jarred, terrified, and bewildered. The storm of feeling that had swept her into this man's arms might pass, and leave them stranded where there was no sacredness ! She could hardly breathe while struggling with the wind and this new terror. She turned to David, pressing his arm with her trembling hand.

"Dave," she pleaded, "my life is in your hand ; this hour proves my subjugation, my sorrow for your sorrow, my willingness to be nothing for your sake. Tell me, is my daring foolhardiness or courage ? Man," she proceeded passionately, "save me from being weak and small. Listen to me. If what I do is right, strong, unselfish, let me do it ; but, if it is below the highest, I charge you tell me to go home."

"Give me a little time," he said.

He did not need time really, only to adjust himself to his new thought. From all the world she had come to him ; come to him, at last, subdued, emptied of scorn, tamed. All her pride had been swept away by passion—everything had subordinated itself to love. And, in the moment of her yielding, she cried out to him to save her from himself ! An hour or so ago he had overcome temptation ; was he to deal with a new position beyond the strength of man ?

“ It means,” he went on, almost harshly, slackening his pace, “ that, in an hour or so, there will be nothing in all the world for you—except me ! ”

Silence followed on his words ; then he burst out impetuously :

“ Why deceive ourselves ? You will be a castaway. There is the brutal truth. You may trample on your pride, scourge yourself, kill self, be pure as snow, purer by far than the world that judges you ; but the world will judge ; there is a judicial imperativeness one cannot escape,” he added, almost savagely. “ God made law, and God Himself can't escape the consequences. Right cannot be defied ; whatever comes in its way is broken. The devil of irresponsibility is gracious—till the tide comes in.”

“ I understand,” she answered quietly.

“ If one could gather all the consequences of de-

fiance into one's own life," he added, "I should say 'defy.' It would be brave could one suffer solely for one's own act. But the decree has gone forth that no man liveth, neither dieth, to himself."

"Then," she answered, "there is no freedom for man?"

"Except in bondage," he replied.

They gazed into each other's eyes with pitiful conviction. Joan no longer shirked the truth. David was again a hero in her eyes; he would not take her under any pretext. The struggle of the past hours was over. She knew the truth. The pitch of intensity that made this hour possible could not be kept up. She and David must face later those cold, pitiless, searching hours of conviction that, like the dawn, found human flesh at its lowest ebb—life at its unloveliest. Their pact without the vitality of right would lose its force. If law was God's ordinance, they must follow it. Intellectual oppression was resuming its sway, the old habit of analysis revitalising. It was not religious dread, not womanly shame that held her back; but she could not wrestle with truth. Fact was fact, as love was love. She recoiled from the thought of sorrow for those she loved. A cry of a human voice brought her back from thought, the voice of David calling to her.

"My love! O God! You must go back!"

She leaned against his shoulder while he struggled sternly with himself. Her whole future was concerned, and he loved her. It would be a crime to permit this impulse to allow the step to become irrevocable. He had wished with all his heart to see her sweet abandonment; but—she was clinging to him for support! In his most desperate strait he could not betray her. The thought of shame for this proud creature wrung his heart. It would be torture to leave her, but double torture to watch her awakening, her inevitable scorn. When knowledge came, she must reproach him for the betrayal of her ignorance; for the betrayal of all her high ambitions. She had given herself to him with unguarded weakening. He drew her to him, then turned his pale, set face to the way that they had come.

"I am going, dear," she murmured patiently, white as he. "If I hurry, I shall be back before it is dark."

All the light and youth had left their faces. He strained her closer to him.

"Good-bye, dear, good-bye," she said again.

He stooped towards her, his lips trembling. There was a look in his eyes she could scarcely bear.

"Dave, go now, dear."

He roused himself and kissed her.

"Can't I go back also? I might be able to help you—I might."

She put him from her with gentle force.

"Can't you let me share?" she heard him plead again; and then she found that she had turned one way and he the other.

The man drew himself up to his full height, and stepped out bravely; the woman drooped, looked back, as women do, rallied, and felt for the path with stumbling feet.

"No more, dear," she murmured vaguely; "never any more."

Instinctively she drew her cloak about her, the flesh being conscious of chill and discomfort, while her soul yearned, and shrank from the loneliness that encompassed it. She had fought her way dumbly, she knew not how far, when she awoke to the fact that a gale of wind was raging, and that black darkness was upon her.

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When Tom Jefferies returned in the evening, he was under the impression that he was an ill-used man. He did not take kindly to being thwarted. It was an uncommon experience to him, and we are apt to take exemption from disappointment as our right. He had found his ride in the teeth of the wind any-

thing but pleasant, and his appearance with blown hair and straggled beard was unusually fierce; anger and disappointment flashed from his keen eyes. It had pleased him to make a student of his daughter; but it had also pleased him to plan for the safe transmission of his farm. After Joan, it was his delight, and the best man he knew, barring himself, capable of managing the old place, had thrown his intentions back into his face, and had gone off in an unreasonable hurry.

The light of lamps and fire gleamed ruddily through the trees, as the old man passed up the orchard path. Old? yes, he was growing old. "An' it must pass into the hands of strangers," he murmured, with a gulp.

Janet met him at the door. He stooped and kissed her with trembling lips, then drew her in from the chilly air, and banged the door behind him. He became aware that something was the matter with Janet. She was trembling in every limb as though with ague; the face beneath the snowy cap looked white as its frills, and her soft, dark eyes burned with restless fire. Tom sprang towards her with a half-inarticulate cry of fear.

"It's the child," she moaned. Not Joan—not Johnnie; she had bridged the intervening years, and

gone back to the word that had meant everything.

For a horrible moment Tom feared that she had lost her reason ; he stood with his back to the door, her cold fingers clutching his arm, his eyes fascinated by the awful expression of her face. Then a spasm convulsed his rugged features, his eyelids and lips twitched ; he dragged his coat collar away from his neck, as though he choked.

"Not dead?" he whispered hoarsely, "not dead?"

"No," she answered, scarce breathing ; "lost!"

Tom took both the trembling hands and held them in a grip. His first fear returned, Janet had gone mad, quite mad ; back to the time when their little maid had run away. David's going had been too much for her. He tried to laugh to reassure her, and gently led her to the old rocker on the hearth. It was his fault ; if he hadn't given way to temper and had stayed at home to comfort Janet, she'd have been quite well. Still, where was Joan?

"You sit you there, Mother, an' keep quiet, my dear ; I'll fetch the truant in a jiffy. Trapesing about in a sou'-wester like this ; never saw such a girl for out-o'-doors."

He spoke cheerfully. The next moment he was in the lobby taking down his riding-cap and whip.

Mercy opened the kitchen door noiselessly, and thrust Joan's note in his hand.

"Left it on her pillar; keep it out o' the missus' sight," she muttered.

Her eyes never left the man's face, but saw it turn rigid while he read; saw all the honest pride and hope forsake it; the cheerful smile freeze; the sparkling eyes grow dim; and every line deepen, harden, and fix. He leaned feebly against the wall, every burden of his past years, set at nought so long, weighted his broad shoulders and bowed them. He lifted his shaking hand and pushed back his thick grey hair, looking at the faithful servant in dazed piteousness.

Mercy asked no questions; she knew.

"There's time to catch her up," she gasped; "the train doesn't pass yet."

"The express has gone!"

He might have said heaven's doors were shut for ever.

"They couldn't have meant to catch the express; they walked. It'll be some later train."

"What's that about a train?" Mother stood in the doorway. Father tried to lift his bended back. His hand crunched over the little white note, but Mother had seen. Then he forced a smile to his

stiff lips, and, not daring to meet the eyes that his had never flinched from for five-and-forty years, he fumbled with the sheet, and read, in a loud, hoarse voice, that quivered and cracked at the end of every sentence :

“ ‘ I’m fancyin’ the Professor ’ull be over to-night. I’ll just take a little run to meet the train—part way, leastways. If the wind gets worse I’ll turn back.’ ”

“ Mad ! that’s what she is—mad ! ” supplemented the reader, hastily tearing the note into tiny bits, then turning defiant eyes upon his wife.

“ Father,” she said sternly, “ it’s not fitting of you to lie ! ”

“ I swear ! ” he thundered, with solemn affirmation, “ that she’s walkin’ on the plains ! I swear to you I’ll bring her safely home, so help me God.”

The women made way for him to pass. He was alive again, upright, eager, quick. The door slammed behind him, and a moment later they heard the thud of horse hoofs beating the turf.

“ For the love o’ God, old friend ! ” the man breathed, patting his horse as they tore wildly on through the shrieking wind.

The night was pitch dark, but horse and rider knew every inch of the way. Between the pauses in the gale, the thunder of swollen streams filled the

air; but wind and water bore the burden of the words that had been burnt into his brain:—"I have tried, but I can't let David go away alone. Forgive me if you can, Father, and tell Mother."

Tell Mother! He tell Mother? O God! O God! spare him that; only spare him that.

"For my pride an' pomp forgive me," he prayed, while yet he strained his gaze ahead and on each side of the track. "I've been ambitious over much. I've shut my eyes to all the world but my own desire; but Lord! Lord! I'm broken now! I can't do it, God Almighty; I can't go home an' tell the Mother of Joan John Jefferies, that she's brought our grey hairs with sorrow to the grave."

The cruelty of it; the bitter cruelty of it! But the fault was his. She had cried out to him that night of her engagement, and asked him whether love was not the chiefest thing. He had put aside Janet's fears, laughed her to scorn; he who had married her for love's own sake so many happy years ago. God forgive him, God forgive him! He couldn't go home alone; that he could not do. An hour ago he'd been fretting like a child over a pricked finger. He'd had the good of his possessions in one life, and that hadn't sufficed him; he couldn't leave them in peace to go to another world. People's

hearts had been breaking, his own little maid's heart, and he had been blind to everything but the sight of his own name made great; and yet he had said, "Tush! the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it." He had deserved it all; but he couldn't go and tell Mother.

Rain! It came down suddenly in a thick, smarting sheet, and with a shriek of wind like the cries of the lost. The mare stood dead still. They had come no distance; yet all the journey had to be done. With trembling hands Tom urged the horse, but it would not move; then there was a rumbling audible above the storm, a revibration of the earth, the red fiery eyes of the train flashed past over the distant plains, the engine yelled a diabolical defiance at the desperate man. Too late! All was over now. He sat quite still in the pelting rain, stunned. Then, after a time, he slowly and awkwardly dismounted, conscious of the trembling of the animal beneath him. His shaking hands fumbled for the beast's neck, and through his trembling lips came broken words of gratitude and encouragement.

"Poor beast . . . did your best. No fault of yours—not often scared; there! come, steady!"

His foot came into contact with something while he spoke. He dropped on one knee, felt with his

hand, let go the bridal hurriedly, felt with both hands, and then he heard the word that God hears when the prodigal is coming home.

“ Father ! ”

“ My girl, my maid ! O, my Lord ! ”

He strained the drenched figure to his breast. It was thus he had found her long before, that other time when she had run away. He peered down into the white face of Joan with anxious scrutiny ; then lifting her in his strong arms as though she were a child, placed her before him on the horse.

The rain beat upon them both, but neither felt it. She closed her eyes in weary faintness. How long she had been lying there in the dark and storm she did not know ; body and brain alike felt numbed. The warmth of Father's body, the strength of his love, brought her back to full remembrance. She was conscious that her Father was singing. It made a pleasant accompaniment to the wind and beating rain, and the rushing sound of water.

“ ‘ Come home, come home !
You are weary at heart,
For the way has been dark,
And so lonely and wild,
O prodigal child ! ’ ”

There was a note in the voice that she could hardly bear.

"If it will be of any comfort to you to know it, I was coming home," she said. "David was not to blame; I followed him; he went away to save this. At the last I could not go on. I was obliged to turn back."

He gave a smothered cry of gratitude and joy.

"It was like my girl's chivalry," he said. "You can't see now, the highway is so dark; but be sure that honour is the certain road. So sure as God's the God of right, He'll send you comfort if you go straight on. I know the love of lad an' lass, an' I'm not sayin' partin' is easy done; but dishonour leads into the wilderness. Disgrace an' pleasure, dear, are never one. 'Come home,'" he sang again, in quavering accents. "'For we watch an' we wait, and we stand at the gate, while the shadows are piled.' Ah, there's the light. Hallo, there, Mercy, my woman," he called out loudly. "Well, Janet, good-wife, here's your young gallivant." He felt Joan start. "Be quiet," he whispered. "She thinks the storm overtook you in a little walk; must always think so, please God." Then out loud again: "Bless me! you women folk

takes queer times an' seasons for your outin's. In you go."

He kissed her under cover of the darkness. "I thank the dear Lord," he murmured, then turned to pat the horse. When he had stabled it with his own hands, he bolted the door, and, putting both arms round the beast's neck, "You wouldn't tread on her, as the world would a done," he said, then wept aloud like a boy.

He gathered himself together presently, and dragged himself into the kitchen. Mercy was busy with grill. She turned her face, and looked at him sideways.

"I met her comin' home," he said.

Beside the glowing hearth, in a white wrap, Joan was sitting staring listlessly into the blaze, while Mother knelt beside her, gently chafing the weary feet, her eyes trying to read the averted face. But she asked no questions. The terror had passed from her countenance, though she looked quite feeble and old. She got up when Father entered the room, and turned gently to him.

"You're wet through; come, Father, and change your clothes."

"Dampish," answered Father, following her humbly. "A bit damp; but I don't complain of that."

She waited on him with wifely solicitude; but

after leaving him for a time, and finding that he did not come, she went back for him. He was on his knees by the bedside, his head bowed upon his hands.

"It's discipline, dearie," she heard him say ;
" discipline !

He got up when he felt Mother near him.

" Tom, my dear," she said, with loving emphasis,
" Tom, you are a good man."

Then they sat down on the side of the bed, hand in hand, and wept together. But they were the last tears they ever wept for Joan.

" That boy of ours would have been a plucky lad," Father remarked reflectively, as the old sweethearts went down to supper arm in arm.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE GARNERED SHEAVES.

DAVID pressed on, his face stern in its determination, his dark eyes feverishly alive ; he had stripped himself bare for Joan's sake ; for her sake had thrown off all pretence. Everything was to build up afresh. But his thoughts would not go forward ; like them, he stopped at last, and looked behind him. Far on the distant darkening horizon he saw Joan's lonely figure fighting through the wind, her dark cloak flapping like the sail of a small craft on a stormy sea. He gazed upwards at the wide expanse of black, and listened to the sound of thundering water. Every instinct within him urged him to hasten after that frail figure, struggling on so pathetically alone ; but his iron will trampled upon his desire. He turned round sharply, and pressed on towards the station, not trusting himself to look back again. His train was not yet due, and he walked restlessly up and down the platform. The corrugated iron roof of the

sheds and waiting-room rattled hideously ; the crazy lamps flared and sputtered, and were blown out ; the whole collection of buildings and officials seemed in a fair way of being swept pell-mell off the face of the earth.

"It'll be worse before it's better, you mark me," said one man to another. "The hot winds of the last week have melted the mountain snows, and this wind will end in such a sou'-wester as never was. Then look out for a flood. Every mountain rivulet will be a torrent, and pour itself into the gorge. I shouldn't care to be near the hills on the Otira to-night !"

David stood still, an awful, sudden terror checked his breath.

"My God !" he gasped at last.

This new tangible danger to Joan, and the old folk he had deserted, struck him like a blow from a heavy fist. He grew dizzy under it. He must go back. Beside the safety of the inmates of his past home all other considerations seemed frivolous and worthless. He was turning to go when a slender, stooping figure stood in front of him.

"Ah !" said a hesitating voice, "I was not mistaken. I have met you, sir, at Otira Farm. I am Professor Stanton." A smile of something that resembled pride lit up the pale features, as though

the name had a new significance to himself. He held out his slender hand; but David avoided the hypocrisy of taking it by a sudden grab at his cap.

"A wild evening! A very wild evening," proceeded the Professor mildly, at that moment almost lifted off his feet. "I have endeavoured to hire a vehicle to take me to the farm, but without success. No man will face the gale."

"Better stay where you are," broke in the speaker whose words had first arrested David's ears.

"Stay where I am?" reiterated the Professor, with haughty wonder.

"Safer!" said the other curtly.

"Safer?"

"Much; there'll be the deuce of a flood before morning."

"Where?"

"Why, on the plains, of course. The gorge is at the brink already."

"Then I most certainly must go," exclaimed Stanley Stanton, with excitement. "I'll walk."

Without further parley he turned abruptly and left the station.

To meet Joan's husband face to face in the flesh, in the moment when the thought of him was unbearable, sent David's blood back to his heart. Enough already had been crowded into the past twenty-four

hours. He ground his teeth with helpless misery and rage. Let him go ; let him be overtaken by the coming flood. He was at war with this man who had stolen his life's one treasure. The cries of longing, that he had forced back into his heart, broke out again ; this man was going to Joan—while he—? He would go, too ; there was a possibility of danger. He strode back to the open. A few swift strides, and he saw the Professor fighting his ineffectual way against the blast. The delicately-framed student was powerless here. David was soon beside him, drenched in a moment by the blinding rain-torrent that swept down upon them.

“A wild evening,” the Professor panted ; “a blustering wild evening.”

Again that note of happiness in his voice jarred on David's ear. He detected it through all the thunders of the storm. He made no answer, but, with almost a rough action, linked his supporting arm through Stanley Stanton's.

“We must get on,” he muttered.

Suppose that Joan had not yet reached shelter? This new fear gave him a giant's strength and fleetness of foot. The man struggling beside him dragged like a chain on the wheel. Again the impulse came to leave him behind, and again he choked it.

The deepest bass of Nature's notes thundered and roared and rolled. Again and again the men were caught up like leaves and hurried forward. They divested themselves of their sodden coats and left them lying on the track; hands and face were beaten and smarting. Sometimes they were flung against a tree; at others they lay upon their faces to escape the violence of the wind. Neither spoke after the first hour; their voices were inaudible, the sound blown from their lips. More and more David felt his companion faltering, watched instinctively for each rallying, and found himself glad at each new spurt. The man had conquered the brute again; the bravery of his brother in misfortune, battling with a third of his (David's) physical force, against a foe so formidable as that night was to both, roused the lad's enthusiasm for pluck. If he had been alone, he might have been with the old folk by now. Midnight! great heavens! and he could not tell how far they had still to go. For a moment the cloud curtain parted, and the moon peeped out into the night like a woman's frightened face fixed on the storm, then disappeared. In that moment of light, the steely sheen of water could be seen. The frantic barking of a dog startled both men at once, sent their chilled blood bounding with thought of shelter; but, the next instant, David knew where they were—at the ex-

treme boundary of the outlying sheep station. The dog was one of the boundary dogs, chained to its kennel. He called out encouragingly, and the frightened animal yelped its relief. David found the kennel, and let the poor brute loose. The dog whined and leaped to lick his deliverer's face, splashing about in the rising flood. The shepherd's hut was near; a dim light glowed from its tiny window. Half carrying his exhausted comrade, David made for the cheering light. The hut was empty; the shepherd was out with his sheep. But the fire on the hearth was not extinguished, and, with a sigh of relief, the young man got his burden to its warmth. Ah! thank God! here was a flask! He poured some of the spirit between Stanley Stanton's pallid lips, and watched their effect; then drank himself. The dog was crouching near, looking with dumb anguish into the strong human face. David noted that the Professor's stiff hand was clasped round a little volume. How had the fellow held on to it all these hours? These book-worms had queer ways. He drew the saturated book away, with a softening of eyes and mouth, that was almost a smile. It fell open at the title page:

"The Rejected.

Dedicated to My Wife,

My Inspiration."

The book fell from David's hands. He turned hastily to the hearth and threw an armful of dried gorse upon the smouldering embers. Instantly a merry blaze leaped up, and reddened the visage bending over it, and flushed the grey face on the hearth with youth and colour. The dog drew nearer, and licked David's hand, his shaggy coat steaming in the grateful warmth. Then he glanced at the prostrate form, whined beseechingly at the strong man, and wagged his tail.

"Right you are!" said David, and, kneeling, lifted his rival's head and poured more spirit between his lips.

"Joan!" murmured the half-unconscious man. Down went his head again with a bump; then David, with a contrite movement, slipped his hand between it and the floor. His haggard eyes rested upon the upturned face. How thin and worn it was! How noble the lofty brow! Had Joan and he had anything to do with the grey patches at his temples? Suppose that he also had suffered? "The Rejected!" God! the world was topsy-turvy.

Suddenly Stanley Stanton opened his eyes. For an instant the two men stared straight into each other's soul.

"How do you find yourself now, old man?" asked David chokingly.

The Professor smiled.

"A little tired, I thank you ; a little tired."

He was feeling with his hand for something. David pushed the book to him, and saw the slender hand close on it. Presently he struggled to his feet.

"Had we not better proceed?" he asked.

David threw open the door.

"It is a sheet of water between here and the farm," he said gruffly ; "the flood is on us."

He did not look in his companion's face.

"My wife!" he heard him breathe.

"The house will stand," he said, clearing his throat ; "it is high on the bank."

"Ah!"

He had expected that intonation. It was calm and strong. It meant, "Thank God! If Joan is safe, what matters all the rest?"

But was Joan in that house upon the rock? His secret dread made a coward of his heart. An almost irresistible impulse to tell this man all came over him ; but it was Joan's secret ; he could not betray Joan.

Presently the hissing water came swirling in at the door ; the dog howled, and the fire was extinguished.

"We're caught," said David, "like rats in a hole."

"Ah!" again ejaculated the Professor, with unruffled calmness.

David dragged him and the dog to the roof; and the moon, bursting through the clouds again, shone for a moment over a waste of water.

"Heaven pity the sheep," cried David; and there was a moan in his voice that had never been there for himself. The dog huddled closer to him, shivering, as though he understood.

An hour passed in silence; then the Professor spoke.

"David Aubrey," he said, "you are a young man, and life is precious to you . . . thought comes slowly to me . . . it has occurred to me that to-night you have jeopardised your life for mine. Once I . . . I imagined that you disliked me. I ask your pardon."

Their hands met in the darkness.

"You were right; I hated you," said David.

The storm still beat upon them; the hut swayed to the lashing water. After an instant's hesitation—

"I loved Joan!" he added.

"Loved Joan!" came an echo. But the Professor did not let go the hand he clasped. The merciful darkness hid their faces from each other.

"Joan," presently came the Professor's voice, quite quietly, "went home to test herself. . . . I beg to be excused for a seeming impertinence . . . but . . . it is probable . . . I shall not see Joan . . . to ask her personally. Would you . . . could you tell me her conclusion?"

"She had decided for—you!" said David.

Again the hut rocked, and the dog howled.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Professor, for the third time. "It was great of you both," he added presently. "I had not expected, or hoped, or deserved it. I was taking her my book. It has won for me distinction. For that I came to thank her, and to return."

It had been enough. Like Stevenson, he had lived "to contend for a word and the shade of a word." He had won his crown.

The straining timbers shivered and swayed beneath them. David clutched at the man beside him—strove desperately to hold him; there was a wrench, a violent rocking, a splash—and David was alone.

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Through the long, storm-beaten night the inhabitants of the farmhouse huddled together in the attic. Father and Mother and Joan strained their eyes from the east window, watching for the pale cold

dawn, that broke at last over a watery waste of death and devastation. The rifled barns had yielded their hoarded grain ; great bales of wool floated downward with the stream, a sullen frothing torrent that had been a gurgling rill ; uprooted trees, broken fences, the roofs of the byres and hen-coops whirled past in the swift eddies ; above the roar of the waters an occasional cry of terrified beast made itself audible ; and Father, whose face was set hard and white, glanced occasionally at Joan with her arm about her Mother's waist, and made no complaint. But when he saw the dead sheep and cattle floating past, great tears rolled down his rugged cheeks for the innocent lives he had been powerless to save.

Mother clung closer to her girl ; she also might have been out upon the plains.

"It is not possible ; no ! no ! it is not possible," cried Joan, in her fearful heart. "David could not have loitered."

And while she spoke, David was clinging to the broken roof, one arm about a shivering dog ; and Stanley Stanton, for whom she had not feared, was floating eastward, a smile upon his upturned, lifeless face.

With daylight, Father went out in the old boat, to see, perchance, what he might save. At noon, when

the sun was high, the boat came back through purple and silver, the oars dripping diamond spray, and the little waves gurgling softly about the keel. Two men lay under his old grey overcoat, and a dog kept watch. One man was to awake to meet Joan's eyes; from the dead hands of the other she received a benediction.

